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Messianic Perspectives®

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

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Seven Sayings of the Wicked

The Strategic Value of Knowing Your Enemy: A Study in the Psalms

by Dr. Gary Hedrick

One of the prominent themes of the Psalms—especially the ones written by King David—is that there’s an ongoing struggle between good and evil in this world. In many instances, the psalmists saw their personal conflicts as a reflection of this larger, cosmic struggle—a struggle involving both visible (physical) and unseen (spiritual) forces.

The New Testament (NT) further explains that there is a hierarchy of authority in the unseen world. In the realm of light, there is God, of course, who is served by seraphim, archangels, and angels (see Isaiah 6:2-6, Jude 9, Luke 1:26). There’s a similar hierarchy in the realm of darkness (see Ephesians 6:12), headed by a diabolical Superintelligence we often call “the devil.” In Judaism, he has long been known as “the adversary” (Heb., *haSatan*). In His face-to-face confrontation with the devil, the Lord Jesus addressed him as “Satan” (see Matthew 4:10). He and his minions actively oppose God’s work in this world with every means at their disposal. They are particularly interested in God’s *messianic* plans—that is, His provision for the salvation of the human race and the restoration of paradise on planet earth through the redemptive work of Jesus the Messiah.

Does this mean, though, that all of our trials are satanic in origin? No, it doesn’t; in fact, many of our problems have nothing to do with the devil or demons. Our own, internal fallen nature can be the source of many sins and deceptions (see Jeremiah 17:9, James 1:12-18). But we shouldn’t forget that we have external enemies, too—seen and unseen enemies that can cause us great pain and heartache.

Sometimes we hear preachers inviting people to come to the Lord because (they say) it’ll make their problems go away. But more often than not, the opposite is true! In fact, C.J.F. Ministries was founded in the late 1940s by a young Jewish man whose problems didn’t really start until *after* he became a believer in Jesus!

Where does the Bible say our lives will be easier if we become disciples of the Lord Jesus? The answer is, it doesn’t! On the contrary, the Apostle Paul told Timothy, “*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in [Messiah] Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2 Tim. 3:12). Now when was the last time you heard a sermon on *that*?

So if you are serious about living a godly life, you will have enemies. In fact, the Apostle Paul compared the Christian life to a war and Christians to soldiers (see 2 Timothy 2:3). C.S. Lewis carried the imagery a bit further, saying (in *Mere Christianity*) that this whole world is a battlefield and that we are like paratroopers who have been dropped behind enemy lines. So we are the resistance in an ongoing war—and the conflict is very real. The Psalms tell us a great deal about who our enemies are, what they are scheming to do, and even how they think.

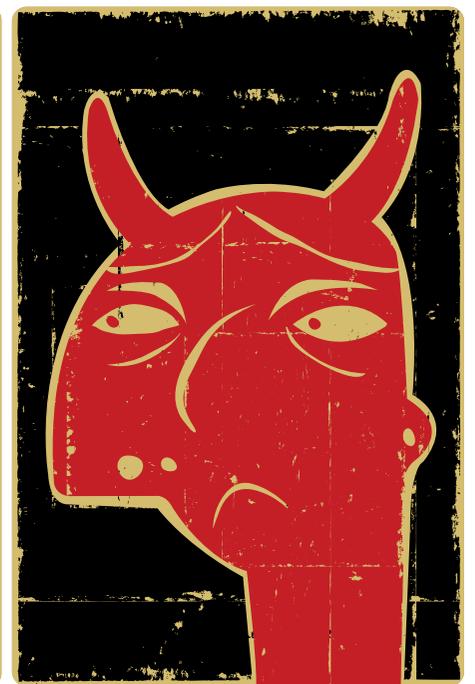
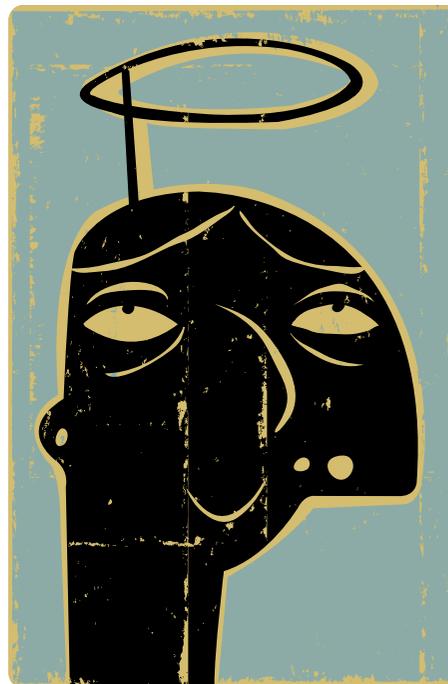
Why should this concern us? The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu admonished his students, “know your enemy” (*The Art of War*). Even today, in the war colleges of the United States Army, Navy, and Air Force, our military cadets receive extensive training on the strategies and techniques of the enemy. It’s really just a matter of common sense. The more we know about our enemy, the better prepared we are to defend ourselves.

Now I realize that there are idealists in this world, some of whom call themselves “Christian,” who reject the notion that there is any such thing as a truly evil person. These “Dr. Feel-Good,” New Age types are convinced that the devil is not a real being, but merely a symbol for the dark side of human nature. To them, everyone, including even the most hardened and incorrigible criminal, has at least a spark of goodness down deep inside of him.

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The Bible, however, presents a much different picture. It upholds a strongly dualistic view of the universe, where there is real good and real evil—and these two forces are locked in a life-or-death battle. In our post-9/11 world, all but the most naïve of people now agree with the Bible. They recognize the reality of evil—and of wicked people who hate God and prey on the weak and vulnerable.

In this study, we will analyze seven sayings of the wicked as they are recorded for us in the Psalms. Some of them overlap with each other and several are repeated more than once, so we have distilled the list down to the seven most basic, distinct sayings. Each of these utterances—which I have first paraphrased and then followed with the direct quote from the Psalms—shows us something specific about the forces in this world that are arrayed against us. Each of the seven sections will close with a counteracting principle that summarizes the biblical response to that specific utterance.



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1

“We will not submit ourselves to the LORD or to His Messiah.”

The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us”
(Psalm 2:2-3).

This first utterance is, in a way, the basis for all the others. The essence of evil is rebellion against God. In this Psalm, this world’s powers-that-be declare their independence from God and His King, the Messiah.

On a smaller—but no less significant—scale, each of us as individuals must choose between submission or autonomy. Will we live in obedience to God or in rebellion against Him?

Years ago, when I was a young pastor, I was introduced to an older man in our small town who had no time for God. But for some reason, he took a liking to me. So from time to time, I would drop by and visit with him, and he would always invite me to come back. His family was a mess (his wife had left him, and his only child was in prison); he despised his factory job; he had few friends; and he was in poor health due to his heavy drinking. It was as though he had deliberately done everything in his life to defy God—and he had paid a heavy price for it.

Now you’d think someone like this would look up and say, “God, I have made a mess out of my life. Please show me what to do.” But not this guy! To him, the fact that he had failed miserably in virtually every aspect of his personal life wasn’t important. What mattered to him was that he had lived his life in his own way without anyone—even God—telling him what to do. He told me that at his funeral, he wanted the music to be Elvis Presley’s rendition of “My Way.”

This is the mindset of the wicked, whether it’s individuals or nations. To them, autonomy is the most important thing. As far as they are concerned, the

suffering and failure that ensue from it are irrelevant.

There’s a bit of irony here because the truth is that God values individuality. He really does! Just look at the endless variety of creation, where not even any two snowflakes are identical, and you’ll see that this is indeed the case. Nonetheless, the devil wants us to think that God’s plan is to mass-produce Christians who fall into line like lemmings and do whatever we’re told to do. But this is just another one of his deceptions. In reality, uniqueness and rugged nonconformity are at the very heart of who we are as believers (see Romans 12:1-2).

At the same time, however, God has established an orderliness in this world that must be respected. It’s the way everything is designed to work. Disregarding it is like throwing away the owner’s manual for your car, or trying to play a basketball game without rules. The ancient Greeks called this divine orderliness the *Logos*—the universal, unifying principle that holds everything together (see John 1:1-3).

Think of it like this; let’s say you lived two or three centuries ago and wanted to build a flying machine (like many people did at the time). You would have had to design it in a way that took into consideration the God-ordained laws of gravity and aerodynamics (i.e., thrust, lift, and drag). If you didn’t obey (and actually employ) these laws, your machine would never get off the ground. And that is precisely why no one succeeded back in those days.

Today, we understand that if you design a machine that conforms to these scientific principles, flight is not only

possible, *it is inevitable*. Any pilot will tell you that it is very difficult to keep an airplane on the runway once it reaches a certain speed. There’s a point where divinely ordained principles take over and the aircraft just naturally starts rising into the air.

So our individuality functions best within the boundaries of God’s established order. That’s why the Bible tells us that the way to achieve true happiness, fulfillment, and success in our lives is to follow God’s commands: “*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success*” (Josh. 1:8).

However, evildoers are an odd lot. They don’t think in terms of success, achievement, or fulfillment—at least, not in the same way the rest of us do. All they really care about is showing God (and everyone else) who’s boss. Yes, it defies reason; but logic and reason don’t matter to them. Rebellion is what they are about—and more often than not, they don’t even care if they destroy themselves in the process. In fact, self-destruction is quite common in the kingdom of darkness.

The Bible shows us a better way. It explains that the pathway to greatness begins with humility and submission (see Mark 9:35). For example, how did Van Cliburn become one of the world’s greatest piano virtuosos? He did it by submitting himself to the laws of the keyboard through many, many years of practice. This is the secret to greatness that many people miss.



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

HUMILITY AND SUBMISSION—NOT REBELLION—LEAD TO TRUE AND LASTING GREATNESS.

Psalm 3 hits close to home for many of us because we've had this same experience of being betrayed by a trusted associate or loved one. King David wrote these words during the rebellion of his son Absalom (see 2 Samuel 15:13—17:22). David was forced to flee from the royal palace in Jerusalem as Absalom and his forces advanced toward the city. So as he was writing these words, David was overcome by a sense of futility. He felt overwhelmed by his circumstances. He cried out,

like—and why he would later be said to have been “a man after God’s own heart” (see Acts 13:22). This material later became the basis for many of the Psalms, including this one.

Clearly, this was a man who trusted God. Like Abraham, David’s vision transcended his immediate surroundings (see Romans 4:9-10). He “saw” things with his spiritual eyes that others could not see.

2



“God will not deliver His people from us.”

Many are they who say of me, “There is no help for him in God” (Psalm 3:2).

“LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me” (Psalm 3:1).

Here he was, Saul’s anointed successor, being driven out of Jerusalem in defeat and disgrace. The fact that the leader of the rebellion was his own son only multiplied the heartache he felt. Judging from outward circumstances, his life was falling apart. He was overwhelmed and outnumbered. But David was resolute. His trust was in the Lord, not in military power, statistics, or logistics. He said, *“But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head”* (Psalm 3:3).

David knew that God was at work in his life, even when the circumstantial evidence indicated otherwise. He evidently kept a journal during these difficult times, and it’s there, in those desperate and unguarded meditations, probably scribbled hastily on scrolls while he was hiding in caves, that we get a sense of what David was really



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

FAITH LOOKS BEYOND OUR IMMEDIATE CIRCUMSTANCES TO SEE THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME OF GOD’S PLAN.

"God isn't paying attention when we attack the innocent and helpless."

*He [i.e., the wicked man] sits in the lurking places of the villages;
In the secret places he murders the innocent; His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless.*

*He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor;
He catches the poor when he draws him into his net.*

So he crouches, he lies low, That the helpless may fall by his strength.

*He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see"
(Psalm 10:8-11).*



Psalm 10 addresses the age-old question, "Why do the wicked prosper?" (see Verse 5). We have all asked this question at one time or another. For example, we see a godly person who becomes ill and dies—and we ask God why He didn't take some evildoer instead.

Our problem is that we don't see the big picture. Our perspective is too limited and our God is too small. I'm reminded here about one of our own staff members—Rabbi Joseph Azriel. Joseph was a Sephardic rabbi in Israel for years and became a believer in Yeshua in 1986 through the faithful witness of one of our staff families in Northern Israel. Almost immediately, he began to experience bitter opposition from "anti-missionary" groups. He eventually had to move to America because of threats on his family. Since he has been here, he has had serious medical problems of his own, including two knee replacements. Then his grown daughter contracted scleroderma, a very serious and incurable disease—and to make matters worse, her husband left her shortly thereafter. So she moved in with Joseph and Esther so they could take care of her. And more recently, Esther was diagnosed with leukemia. She is very ill even as I write these words. Talk about being overwhelmed!

In addition to all of that, poor Joseph has always had trouble raising financial

support because he doesn't speak English very well (his first language is Hebrew and his second language is French). We used to send him into churches to speak, and the pastors would call afterward and say, "Our people loved Joseph, but it's just hard to understand him." So family finances have presented a constant challenge for the Azriels.

But none of this gets Joseph down. Whenever we talk to him, he's always upbeat. One of his favorite sayings is, "God is big!" That's his secret! He knows that God is bigger than our problems. He's bigger than our illnesses. He's bigger than our financial struggles. He's bigger than our family difficulties.

King David was like that. His God was bigger than his circumstances. In one of his darkest times, David declared, "*The LORD is King forever and ever; The nations have perished out of His land*" (v. 16). He rested in God's sovereignty and justice: the rebellious nations will ultimately perish from the earth. Good will triumph and evildoers will stand before God in judgment (see Psalm 9:8). This is the great equalizer.

The NT gives us more information about the judgment of the wicked in Revelation 20, where it describes the future Great White Throne Judgment:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

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 (vv. 11-12).

The Psalms include specific warnings to evildoers who prey on innocent, weak, and helpless people: God is the defender of those who cannot defend themselves. King David said, "*A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, Is God in His holy habitation*" (Psalm 68:5).

In one of Solomon's psalms, he said, "*For He [that is, God] will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper*" (Psalm 72:12).

Beware, evildoers! When you injure the weak and the helpless, God will come after you. You might think you got away with it, but you didn't. The Almighty will trail you relentlessly to the ends of the earth—and when you come to the end of the road, you will wish you had never been born (see Jeremiah 20:11).



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

GOD FORGETS THE SINS OF THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM (SEE PSALM 103:12, JEREMIAH 31:34); HOWEVER, HIS MEMORY IS ABSOLUTELY INDELIBLE WHEN IT COMES TO THE DEEDS OF THE WICKED (SEE REVELATION 20:12).

Here we are introduced to the evildoer's worldview: atheism. Charles Darwin's name has become synonymous with this worldview, even though he himself claimed that he was more of an agnostic than he was an atheist. Nonetheless, many atheists took comfort in his theory of evolution (and still do) because they thought it provided a comprehensive, non-supernatural answer to the question of where we came from.

What Darwin did, in essence, was invent his own religion. He replaced Deity with a process—natural selection. Curiously, this process possesses

of “heresies” like biblical creationism. So the more you study Darwinism, the more it looks like a religion!

The psalmist says anyone who adheres to this godless worldview is a “fool.” Why? Because materialism fails at the most critical point of all—the one philosophers call the “first cause.” Darwin, for instance, wrote, “Probably all organic beings which have ever lived on the earth have descended from some one primordial life form . . .” (*On the Origin of Species*). But where did that primordial life form come from? And where did the first atoms, molecules,



“For all practical purposes, God does not exist.”

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good (Psalm 14:1).

many of the same attributes as God, including virtual omnipotence (it can overcome any obstacle), omniscience (it knows what an organism needs for survival even when the organism itself has no consciousness of it), and omnipresence (it works anywhere and everywhere, given enough time).

Furthermore, Darwin's religion requires faith (that is, adherents must accept many of its premises purely on faith because they are unprovable and not falsifiable), it has its own authoritative “scripture” (*On the Origin of Species*), “seminaries” (the science and philosophy departments of Cornell, Harvard, and much of the rest of the secular Darwinist establishment), a “clergy” (Dawkins and other anti-God crusaders who preach Darwin's gospel), and even an eschatology of sorts that says this world will come to an ignominious end a few billion years from now when our sun goes supernova. Darwinism also imposes stringent sentences on nonconformists who are declared guilty

and elements come from? You see, “first cause” is the rub for the Darwinist.

So the word “fool” here is not so much an insult as it is a simple statement of fact. The atheist is betting his eternal soul on a theory that cannot explain even the most fundamental of life's questions—that is, where and how did life begin? This is foolish, indeed.



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

CHRISTIANITY AND DARWINISM ARE TWO DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS, NEITHER OF WHICH CAN BE TRULY UNDERSTOOD APART FROM THAT RECOGNITION.

Evildoers generally have a vaunted opinion of themselves. They are self-deceived, thinking they're smarter than everyone else, so they have nothing to fear. If worst comes to worst, and they get caught, they'll just talk their way out of it! This is how their thought process works.

It's all part of the atheistic worldview that we were talking about earlier. When men reject God, they become a "god" unto themselves. They are their own authority. They're not accountable to anyone. And when man, who was created to live in communion with God,

back and forth about the relative merits of atheism and nominal Christianity. In any case, we're not suggesting that all atheists are depraved, amoral killers.

Some people are atheists simply because they are mad at God for something they think He did (or allowed to happen) to them. Darwin himself, for instance, blamed God for allowing his beloved daughter, Annie, to die at only 10 years of age. He had prayed for her recovery, but those prayers were not answered. So he decided that he could not believe in a God who would allow

the round hole, and so on. The key is matching the shapes of the pegs and holes.

Likewise, if we try to fill that God-shaped emptiness in our hearts with other-shaped things like wealth, fame, achievement, alcohol, illicit sex, drugs, or anything else, our quest is doomed to fail because that void is meant to be filled *only by God himself*. That is why, when a man rejects his Creator, sad and



"We can talk our way out of anything; no one is lord over us."

Who have said, "With our tongue we will prevail; Our lips are our own; Who is lord over us?"
(Psalm 12:4).

cuts himself loose from that divine destiny, frightening things can happen. Just look at the worst tyrants in history and you'll find that many of them were atheists. In fact, communist governments (which are officially atheistic) are estimated to have murdered as many as 110 million people from 1900 to 1987 in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, the Soviet Union, and Communist China (see "How Many Did Communist Regimes Murder?" by R.J. Rummel at www.hawaii.edu).

Does this mean that all atheists are murderers and tyrants? No, it doesn't. Actually, a clever atheist could fire back and say, "Just look at the millions of people throughout history who have died in wars that were fought over religion." And he would have a point—many people have also died in religious wars and crusades. So with that concession, we could continue arguing

Annie to die. What mother or father cannot empathize with a brokenhearted man who has watched his little girl suffer and die?

What we are saying is simply this: When God is removed from the equation, man has the potential—under some circumstances—to become a very evil being capable of horrific crimes. At the very least, a man (or woman) who casts God out of his (or her) life becomes a pitiful shell of what he (or she) was created to be.

And again, this is because God created us to have fellowship with Himself. As Pascal pointed out, there is a God-shaped vacuum in every human heart. It's like that preschool game children play with a wooden board that has different shaped holes in it. The object of the game is to figure out that the square peg goes into the square hole, the round peg goes into

tragic things can happen—like when a mighty, high-speed train jumps the track. As long as the train stays on the rails, it's a powerful and useful force for good; but when it somehow becomes derailed, it suddenly becomes an equally powerful force for destruction and even death.

When evildoers say there is no lord over them, it's like a man jumping off the Empire State Building and saying to himself, on the way down, that there is no such thing as gravity. The Lordship of Jesus the Messiah is absolute, whether we acknowledge it or not. Someday every knee will bow to Him (see Philippians 2:10-11), and that includes unbelievers. The righteous will bow to Him voluntarily (and gladly) because they love Him. Evildoers, on the other hand, will bow like a vanquished army grovels pathetically before a victorious king before he pronounces sentence on them.



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS THE MESSIAH IS LIKE GRAVITY IN THE SENSE THAT IT APPLIES TO US WHETHER WE BELIEVE IT OR NOT.

As we said earlier, evildoers typically have an exaggerated sense of their own cleverness. They plan carefully—and they’re good at recruiting weaker people around them who can be manipulated into serving their purposes.

Psalm 28:3 says that evildoers speak peace while evil is in their hearts. That is, their tactics include lies and deception. Do you remember when we used to say that a man’s word was his bond? If you came to an agreement with someone, the two of you shook on it, and the deal was done. But sadly, we can’t do that anymore.



“Our schemes are foolproof.”

They devise iniquities: “We have perfected a shrewd scheme.” Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep (Psalm 64:6).

Even in the professing church, people will sometimes look you straight in the eye and lie to you. It has happened to me many times over the years. What a shame! It’s hard not to become cynical. The Book of Proverbs enumerates seven specific sins that God hates and despises—and one of them is “. . . a lying tongue . . .” (Proverbs 6:17).

Notice in Psalm 64 that the evildoer thinks his scheme has been “perfected”—that is, it’s flawless. But it’s not. In fact, that same scheme eventually will be his undoing. Psalm 10 says, “*The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor; Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised*” (v. 2).

There is no such thing as a perfect plot, especially when it’s hatched for evil purposes. Ultimately, the evildoer gets caught up in his own, sticky web of deception—like Absalom, who thought he had succeeded in usurping his father’s throne, but ended up dangling helplessly from a tree, where he was summarily executed by Joab (see 2 Samuel 18:14).



Even in the professing church, people will sometimes look you straight in the eye and lie to you.



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:

VERY OFTEN, SIN COMES IN A PACKAGE THAT INCLUDES ITS OWN, BUILT-IN PUNISHMENT.

No other nation in history has endured such extreme and sustained hatred as the people of Israel. Whenever and wherever evildoers are at work, there is almost invariably an anti-Semitic agenda or sub-plot.

We should acknowledge the brokenness of our world. Through the shedding of the sacrificial blood of His son, Yeshua the Messiah, God has implemented a comprehensive plan of redemption that not only makes spiritual salvation

this is precisely what they demand of the Israelis. This shows us that anti-Semitism is fundamentally a function of the spirit and the emotions rather than a function of the mind and logic. A spiritual dynamic is at work here.

“Israel must be destroyed.”

*They have taken crafty counsel against Your people,
And consulted together against Your sheltered ones.*

*They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation,
That the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”*

*For they have consulted together with one consent;
They form a confederacy against You;
(Psalm 83:3-5).*

The devil despises the Jewish people because of what they represent—namely, God’s power to keep the promises He made to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3, 15:5-21, 17:4-8, 18:18-19, 22:17-18), Isaac (see Genesis 26:2-4), and Jacob (see Genesis 28:13-15, 35:11-12, 46:3) nearly 4,000 years ago.

In the Hebrew text, the word “bless” in the Abrahamic promise (see Genesis 12:2) points us back to Genesis 1:28, where God “blessed” Adam and Eve as He sent them forth to rule over the original Edenic Paradise. That blessing was lost through the Fall, and everything went into a downward spiral after that. But later, God chose Abraham as His vessel to restore the original blessing to this world. Abraham, through His ultimate Seed (Messiah Jesus), would regain what Adam had lost in the Garden of Eden.

The traditional Jewish worldview has long included the idea that something has gone dreadfully wrong with this world and needs to be fixed. The *Mishnah* (*Gittin* 4:2), for example, refers to *tikkun olam* (lit., “repairing [the] world”). Yet for some odd reason, many Christians seem to be perfectly content with the way things are now!

available to anyone who will place his faith in Him, but will also result in the eventual transformation of the entire Creation back into the Paradise it once was.

God’s plan of redemption for all of humanity hinges on Israel and His plan for her ultimate restoration. The restoration (or restitution) of all Creation is fundamentally and vitally linked to the physical and spiritual restoration of the Jewish nation. Do you think it is merely coincidental that Paul’s discussion of the restoration of the physical world in Romans 8:18-25 leads directly into his treatise on the restoration of national Israel in Chapters 9, 10, and 11?

Evildoers have always yearned for the destruction of Israel as a nation. We see it today in the Middle East, where the Israelis are trying to defend themselves against militant Islamic aggression—and the United Nations sides consistently with her enemies!

Listen to me. There’s not one member nation in the UN that would allow neighboring terrorists to fire missiles into its sovereign territory, killing its citizens, without retaliation. Not one! Yet

Anti-Semitism has the foul stench of sulfur on it. It’s fueled by demonic, irrational hatred rather than by measured reason and logic.

The Apostle John prophesied that during the future Tribulation Period, the Dragon (that is, Satan) will “persecute” Israel (the “woman” who gave birth to the Messiah; see Revelation 12:13). At that time, he will make one more, concerted effort to destroy the Jewish people.

But God says that this final effort will be unsuccessful. The devil’s plans and schemes to wipe out Israel will fail. Psalm 121:4 says, “Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.”

The Prophet Zechariah declared, “For thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye’” (v. 2:8). Anyone who forgets this important fact does so to his own detriment!



COUNTERACTING PRINCIPLE:
WHEN GOD MAKES A PROMISE, HE KEEPS IT.

Dr. Gary Hedrick
is President of
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Great Escape or Biblical Truth?

Why we believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture

Not long ago, a man approached CJFM President Gary Hedrick after a church service and told him how much he appreciated CJFM's pre-Tribulation Rapture position. The two spoke for just a few moments and then the man said, "Yep, I sure don't want to go through any Tribulation!" And then he disappeared into the crowd.

Gary reflected later on that brief conversation and thought, "What do our 'wants' have to do with it?" Is the pre-Trib Rapture teaching just a form of escapism, like our critics sometimes claim? We couldn't deal with the prospect of having to endure the horrors of the coming Tribulation, so we somehow concocted this alternative scenario to avoid it? Is that what happened?

In the final analysis, what we want or don't want isn't important. All that matters is what the Bible teaches. Does it teach a pre- or post-Tribulation Rapture? That's the question.

Second in a Three-Part Series

In part one of this series, we examined the Lord's imminent return (at the Rapture) and the impact it should have on a believer's life. The Messiah *will* return, and we need to be ready. Our hearts and our lives should be such that we will rejoice at His coming and not feel shame.

Now, we're ready to examine what the Bible says about the *timing* of the Rapture. Many students of prophecy believe that the Rapture will take place at the time of the Second Coming. This is the perspective of post-Tribulationists, who believe that the Rapture and the Second Coming are basically one event, occurring at the end of the Tribulation. But is that what the Bible says? Does it treat the Rapture and the Second Coming as basically one event? Place the Bible's descriptions of the Rapture and the Second Coming side-by-side and compare if they are, in fact, describing the same event (see chart on page 11).

Clearly, two different events are being described. But how do we know that these two distinct events do not occur at approximately the same time (as post-Tribulationists maintain)? How do we know that there must be an interval of time separating the Rapture and the Second Coming? And more importantly, how do we know that the Rapture occurs *before* the Tribulation? Let's look again at arguments derived from Scripture.

Imminency

Imminency offers a very persuasive argument on behalf of the pre-Trib view. What do we mean by imminency? The dictionary defines imminent as "likely to happen without delay; impending." As we discussed in part one of this series, knowing that the Lord's return is *imminent*—that He could return *at any time*—should keep us on our toes, and cause us to hold onto this life more loosely.

Scripture is replete with references to the Lord's coming *at any time*. We are told to watch and wait, and to be ready, exactly *because* we do not know the time of His coming. This type of admonition really makes sense only if the Rapture occurs *before* the Tribulation.

During the seven-year Tribulation, events will unfold in a clearly defined sequence, after which the Messiah will return to establish His Kingdom on earth. Once that seven-year period begins, there is no longer any real surprise or immediacy attached to His return. Scripturally, it will no longer be possible for Him to come *at any time*. Therefore, the *pre*-Tribulation Rapture is the only view you can hold and still accept that the Messiah's return could be at any time. Consider a few verses that speak to this teaching:

"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:42-44).

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. . . . Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:32-37).

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). Written to the Corinthians, this implied that the Lord might come in their lifetime.

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for



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the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!" (James 5:7-9).

"For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry" (Heb. 10:37).

Promise That the Church Will Be Delivered From The Wrath to Come

In Romans 5:9, Paul says, ". . . we shall be saved from wrath through Him." 1 Thessalonians 1:10 describes Jesus as our Deliverer from the wrath to come. And in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, we learn that God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus. The word "wrath" may refer to God's eternal judgment on unbelievers, or it may refer

to the wrath of the Tribulation Period. In the Thessalonian Epistles, the context favors the wrath of the Tribulation (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-17).

In Revelation 3:10, the Messiah promises to keep His people *from* (Greek "ek," meaning "out of") the hour of trial, which shall come on all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Structure of the Book of Revelation Supports a Pre-Tribulation Rapture

In Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, the Church is seen on earth, but after Chapter 3, it is never mentioned again as being on earth. In Chapters 4 and 5, the saints are seen in Heaven, wearing victors' crowns. Then follows the Tribulation on earth

outlined in Chapters 6 through 19. The Church saints are not on earth during the Tribulation; they are already in Heaven.

Tribulation Period Will Not Begin Until the Man Of Sin Has Been Revealed

The man of sin will not be revealed until first the restrainer is removed (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). The Holy Spirit certainly answers to the name of restrainer; He hinders or restrains the full development of evil through the lives of God's people on earth.

In one sense, the Holy Spirit has always been in the world and always will be. But there was a special sense in which He came at Pentecost, i.e., as the permanent Indweller of believers and of the Church (see John 14:16-17). It is in that sense

ONE EVENT OR TWO?

THE RAPTURE

THE SECOND COMING

Messiah comes *to the air* (1 Thess. 4:17).

He comes *to the earth* (Zech. 14:4).

He comes *for* His saints (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

He comes *with* His saints (Jude 14).

The Rapture is a mystery, i.e., a truth unknown in OT times (1 Cor. 15:51).

The Revelation events are not a mystery; they are the subject of many OT prophecies (Psalm 72, Isa.11, Zech. 14).

Messiah's coming for His saints is never said to be preceded by celestial portents.

His coming with His saints will be heralded by signs in the heavens (Matt. 24:29-30).

The Rapture is presented as a time of blessing and comfort (1 Thess. 4:18).

The main emphasis of the Revelation is on Judgment (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

The Rapture takes place in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Cor. 15:52). This strongly implies that it will not be witnessed by the world.

Revelation events will be visible worldwide (Matt. 24:27; Rev.1:7).

The Rapture seems to involve the Church primarily (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The Revelation involves Israel primarily, then also the Gentile nations (Matt. 24:1—25:46).

Those taken are taken for blessing (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Those left are left for judgment (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

Those taken are taken for judgment. Those left are left for blessing (Matt. 24:37-41).

The title "Son of Man" is never used in any of the passages dealing with the Rapture.

The Revelation is spoken of as the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 16:28, 24:27, 30, 39, 26:64; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27).

No dating system is given for events preceding the Rapture.

An elaborate dating system is given for the events of Revelation, such as 1,260 days, 42 months, 3½ years (see Dan. 7:25, 12:7, 11-12; Rev. 11:2, 12:14, 13:5).

He will be removed at the Rapture. This does not mean that the Spirit of God will not carry on a ministry during the Tribulation. He will still convict and convert sinners. But He will not permanently indwell them, and He will not incorporate them into the Church. His ministry will be more comparable to what it was in the OT period.

The Rapture Is Spoken of As a Comforting Prospect

In 1 Thessalonians 4:18 we are encouraged to find comfort in the Messiah's coming for His church. However, the Day of the Lord does NOT come as a comforter, but as a thief in the night (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2). It is a time of sudden destruction and wrath from which there will be no escape (see Verses 3, 9). In contrast, the Rapture is an ever-brightening hope. "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

The only way the Day of the Lord will overtake anyone is as a thief in the night (see 1 Thessalonians 5:2). Yet in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 5, Paul distinctly states that it will not overtake believers as a thief in the night (see Verse 4). Therefore, it will not overtake believers at all. Why not? Two reasons are given: 1.) Believers are not children of the night but of the day (see Verses 4 and 5). 2.) God has not appointed believers to wrath (see Verse 9).

Interval of Time Must Occur Between Messiah's Coming for His Saints, and Messiah's Coming with His Saints

A post-Tribulation view requires the Messiah to come for His saints and *immediately* turn around and return to earth with His saints. But this scenario doesn't allow for some essential "business" that Scripture requires. The Judgment Seat of Messiah must take place in Heaven following the Rapture, when the Lord will judge the faithfulness of His saints and reward them accordingly (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). The rewards given at this time will determine the extent of rule given to individual saints during the Millennium (see Luke 19:17, 19). If the Rapture and the coming to reign occurred simultaneously, there would be no time for the Judgment Seat of Messiah to take place.

At the time of the Rapture, believers go to the Father's house (see John 14:2-3), not straight back to the earth, as post-Tribulationists affirm.

Tribulation Is Distinctly Jewish In Character

It is called the time of *Jacob's* trouble (see Jeremiah 30:7). Note also the Jewish references in Matthew 24: *the holy place,*



Rick Higbee

Judea, and the Sabbath (see Verses 15-20). These terms refer to Israel, and have nothing to do with the Church.

Old Testament Examples Point to A Pre-Tribulation Rapture

While these are not definitive, they do demonstrate God's pattern of delivering His saints before severe widespread judgment falls:

- Noah and his family were delivered before God destroyed the earth and everything that breathed (see Genesis 6).
- Lot was delivered from Sodom before the fires of judgment fell (see Genesis 19).
- The children of Israel were spared when God sent plagues upon Egypt (see Exodus 9:4, 22-26; 10:21-23; 11:4-7).

Daniel's 70 Weeks

The first 69 weeks of Daniel's prophecy (see Daniel 9:24-27)

extend from the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC to the crucifixion of Messiah. They have nothing to do with the Church. Why then should the Church be found in the 70th week, which is the Tribulation Period? (Actually, the Church Age occurs in an unmentioned parenthetical period between the 69th and 70th weeks.)

HANDLING OBJECTIONS

Despite the overall Scriptural support for a pre-Tribulation Rapture, questions are often raised on specific points. Let's take a look at how pre-Tribulationism addresses some of the more common challenges voiced against this view.

Post-Trib Challenge—A New View: According to post-Tribulationists, the traditional hope of the Church has not been the pre-Tribulation Rapture. This only began in the last

The Judgment Seat of Messiah must take place in Heaven following the Rapture, when the Lord will judge the faithfulness of His saints and reward them accordingly . . .

160 years or so through the teaching of J.N. Darby. (This is perhaps one of the most frequent objections voiced.)

Pre-Trib Response: The NT Church was waiting for God's son from Heaven. The saints did not know when He would come, so they watched for Him at any time. Arguments directed at what any person did, or did not teach are called *ad hominem* (to the person), and are regarded as irrelevant to an issue. The question is "What does Scripture teach?" and not "What did so-and-so teach?"

Post-Trib Challenge—The Last Trumpet: Post-Tribulationists maintain that the last trumpet of 1 Corinthians 15:52, and the trumpet of God (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16) are connected with the Rapture, and are the same as the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15. Since the seventh trumpet sounds at the end of the Tribulation when "the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His [Messiah]," the Rapture must be post-Tribulational.

Pre-Trib Response: We maintain that these trumpets are *not* all the same. The "last trumpet" is the same as the "trumpet of God." It announces the Rapture, and signals the resurrection of believers and their translation to the Father's house. It is the "last trumpet" for the Church. The seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is the last in a series of judgments during the Tribulation. It is the last trumpet for unbelieving Israel and unbelieving Gentiles. The "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15:52, also called the "trumpet of God" in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, takes place *before* the Tribulation. The seventh trumpet takes place at the *end* of the Tribulation.

Jewish tradition adds additional insight into our understanding of the term "last trumpet." While we base doctrine on Scripture and not on tradition (whether Jewish, Christian, or otherwise), traditional usage may help shed light on how the concepts of the trumpet blasts would have been understood by Jewish believers in New Testament times.

According to the ancient sages, Israel's first two *shofarot* (horns) came from the ram that was sacrificed in Isaac's place in Genesis 22:13. They said the ram's left horn became the "first" trump, and

The question is "What does Scripture teach?" and not "What did so-and-so teach?"

was the one God himself used at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:18-19). Today, the Jewish people commemorate the events at Mount Sinai during *Shavu'ot*, or the Feast of Weeks. The right horn, on the other hand, became known as the "last" trump, and was associated with *Rosh HaShanah* (known biblically as *Yom Teruah*, or literally, "the day of the trumpet blast"), which is the Jewish New Year (see Leviticus 23:23-25).¹

Orthodox rabbinic scholar Aryeh Kaplan commented on the "first" and "last" trumpets in Jewish tradition: "In the *Midrash*, we find a reference to the two times that God himself will blow the *shofar*. The first occurred at Mount Sinai, just preceding the awesome revelation of His holy *Torah* to the Jewish nation. . . . The *Midrash* declares that the second time God will sound the *shofar* will occur in the future, just before the coming of *Mashiach* (Messiah)."²



On each of these occasions (i.e., *Shavu'ot* and *Rosh HaShanah*), the *shofar* was (and still is) blown more than once. Therefore, as we examine the prophetic timeline, it is not necessary to conclude (as post-Tribbers do) that the "last trump" will be heard only once. In reality, it is entirely possible—and consistent with a Jewish understanding of the term—that the "last trump" will be heard at the

Rapture, and then *again* at the Second Coming of the Messiah.

Post-Trib Challenge—First Resurrection: The next objection deals with the resurrection.

Those adhering to a post-Tribulation view assert that the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4-5 takes place at the end of the Tribulation, and not seven years earlier.

Pre-Trib Response: The first resurrection is not an isolated event, but a series. It began with the resurrection of Messiah (see 1 Corinthians 15:22-23). The next stage will be the resurrection of believers at the Rapture.

The third stage will be the resurrection of Tribulation saints at the time of Messiah's return to earth (see Revelation 20:4-5). In other words, the first resurrection includes the resurrection of Messiah and of all true believers, no matter when they are raised. All unbelievers will be raised at the end of the Millennium to stand before the Great White Throne (see Revelation 20:11-15).

Post-Trib Challenge—Blessed Hope and Glorious Appearing: In Titus 2:13, the "blessed hope" is the same as the "glorious appearing." Therefore, the Rapture takes place at the same time as the Revelation. Therefore, we do not look for a pre-Tribulation Rapture, but for Messiah's coming to reign.

Pre-Trib Response: This argument is based on a rule of Greek syntax called Granville Sharp's rule, which says: When two nouns connected by "and" (Greek "kai") are in the same case, and a definite article precedes the first noun but not the second, the second noun refers to the same person or thing the first noun

going out to "all the nations" and to "the end of the earth." This being so, it was not possible for the Lord to come during the lifetime of the Apostles.

Pre-Trib Response: In Colossians 1:6 and 23, Paul states that "all the world" and "every creature under heaven" had

SUMMARY

Volumes have been written about the timing of the Rapture, and its importance to end times' events. But, for many reasons—including those discussed above—we are persuaded that the Rapture occurs *before* the Tribulation. For those who would like to explore the finer points of this position, we invite you to consult the *Believer's Bible Commentary*, particularly its treatment of 2 Thessalonians. There, the debate between pre- and post-Tribulation views of the Rapture is also discussed in more detail.

We can debate Granville Sharp's rules of Greek grammar, and argue whether certain scholars did—or did not—embrace a pre-Tribulation view of the Rapture. The fact is, there are good theologians on both sides of the issue. Ultimately, however, the validity of any doctrine is not determined by whether the teaching is old or new, or whether it is held by certain scholars, and not by others—but by whether it is biblical.

All doctrine must be tested against the rule of Scripture. We don't cling to a teaching because it is appealing, or because it permits us to "escape" something difficult or unpleasant. We test doctrines according to Scripture, embrace those that are true, and forsake all others (see 1 Thessalonians 5:21).

The timing of the Rapture aside, two things are abundantly clear from Scripture: 1.) Our Lord *is* coming again, and, at a time when He is not expected; and, 2.) While He tarries, we are to be faithful stewards. We are commanded to watch eagerly for His return. But that doesn't mean we are to follow the example of those who foolishly sold all they had, and stood atop a mountain, waiting for the Rapture. Scripture clearly tells us:

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the

crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:32-37) (see also Matthew 24:36-44; Luke 21:34-36).



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does, and is a further description of it. According to that rule, "blessed hope" and "glorious appearing" would be describing the same event.

However, all rules have exceptions. In Luke 14:23, for example, the Greek reads: "Go out into the highways and hedges." If the rule holds, then we must believe that highways are the same as hedges.

A second exception is in Ephesians 2:20, which refers to "the foundation of the apostles and prophets." No careful student would say that apostles and prophets are the same thing. But, even if we were to view "blessed hope" and "glorious appearing" as describing the same event, there is nothing preventing us from viewing the "glorious appearing" as referring to Messiah's appearing to the Church at the Rapture.

The words *apokalupsis* (revelation) and *epiphaneia* (shining forth or appearing) could refer to the Rapture as well as to Messiah's coming to reign.

Post-Trib Challenge—Need Time for the Gospel: Passages like Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 speak of the Gospel

heard the Gospel. In Romans 10:18, the Gospel is said to have gone to the ends of the world. Of course, we understand that these passages refer to the known world at that time—the countries adjacent to the Mediterranean.

Post-Trib Challenge—What About Paul?: Paul's long-term missionary plans, as given in Acts 18:21, 23:11, and Romans 15:22-25, 30-31, show that he did not expect the Lord to come in the immediate future.

Pre-Trib Response: Paul's plans were made, subject to the will of God (see Acts

Ultimately, however, the validity of any doctrine is not determined by whether teaching is old or new, or whether it is held by certain scholars—but by whether it is biblical.

18:21; Romans 1:10; 1 Corinthians 4:19). He worked as if the Lord would not come back in his lifetime, but waited and watched as if He would return at any time.

No, we shouldn't just stand around, waiting for the Rapture. The Lord has not returned yet for a reason. The Apostle Peter states it very clearly: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

We must not become impatient or disheartened waiting for the Lord's return. Each day's delay means that many more can be saved. Oh, friends, may God's heart be ours! May He give us a renewed burden for the lost. And may we labor diligently to proclaim the Gospel, and rescue the perishing until that moment

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our Lord calls us home. And, as we wait for His coming, may we all live in such a way, that on that day, we will be blessed to hear our Master's commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . Enter into the joy of your lord" (Matt. 25:23).

Next time, in the third and final part of our series, we will explore another undeniable truth of Scripture: believers will not escape tribulation!

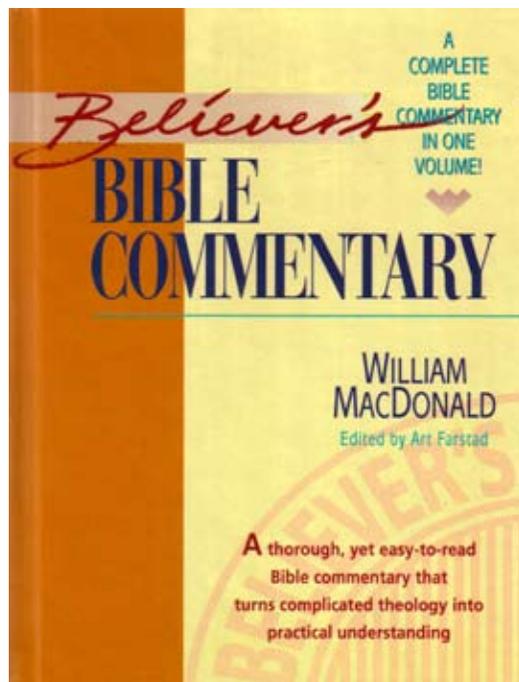
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¹*Festivals of the Jewish Year* by Theodor H. Gastor [New York, NY: William Sloane Associates Publishers, 1953], pp. 42-44).

²*The Aryeh Kaplan Reader* by Aryeh Kaplan [Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1983], p. 96).

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Church (928) 754-1111



**John
Kanter**

Austin, TX 3/22/09
Millwood Baptist Church
(512) 834-1100

Live Oak, TX 3/29/09
Live Oak First Baptist
Church (210) 656-8200

Aubrey, TX 4/5/09
Harvest Point Bible
Church (214) 387-9890

Hurst, TX 4/5/09
First Baptist Church
(817) 282-3628

Mansfield, TX 4/9/09
Mansfield Bible Church
(817) 473-8980

Aubrey, TX 4/10/09
Rock Hill Baptist Church
(940) 365-1065



**Richard
Toviah**

Kingman, AZ 3/7/09
Kingman Christian Church
(928) 757-8783

Kingman, AZ 3/8/09
Hilltop Foursquare Church
(928) 753-5500

Kingman, AZ 3/9/09
Emmanuel Christian
Academy (928) 681-4220

Goodyear, AZ 3/13/09
Estrella Mountain Church
(623) 386-0300

Sunsites, AZ 3/15/09
Community Church of
Sunsites (520) 826-3397

Hereford, AZ 3/15/09
Country Estates Southern
Baptist Church
(520) 378-2836

Glendale, AZ 3/21/09
CrossPoint Christian
Church (623) 937-2741

Globe, AZ 3/22/09
Calvary Shadow Assembly
of God (928) 425-9066

Globe, AZ 3/22/09
Central Heights Baptist
Church (928) 425-5303

Phoenix, AZ 3/29/09
Cactus Christian
Fellowship (602) 971-3151

Mesa, AZ 3/29/09
Family Bible Church
(480) 671-7600

Mesa, AZ 4/4/09
Mountain Vista Bible
Church (480) 358-9851

Amado, AZ 4/5/09
Amado Baptist Church
(520) 398-8017

Tucson, AZ 4/5/09
New Life Community
Church of the Nazarene
(520) 887-8859

Tempe, AZ 4/8/09
Bethany Christian School
(480) 752-8993

Payson, AZ 4/8/09
Calvary Chapel
(928) 468-0801

Phoenix, AZ 4/10/09
Crossroads Christian
Fellowship (602) 462-1987

Tempe, AZ 4/11/09
The Journey Community
Life Center
(480) 704-3694

Arlington, AZ 4/12/09
First Southern Baptist
Church of Arlington
(623) 386-1447

Show Low, AZ 4/19/09
White Mountain Christian
Church (928) 537-7926

Winslow, AZ 4/19/09
Church of the Nazarene
(928) 613-8777



**Brian
Zuckerman**

Victorville, CA 2/15/09
God's Garden Church
(760) 245-8640

El Centro, CA 3/15/09
First Christian Church of
El Centro (760) 352-8300

El Centro, CA 3/22/09
Iglesia FeBautista
(760) 353-7181

Lincoln, CA 4/5/09
Foothill Bible Church
(916) 645-1399

Wayland, IA 6/14/09
Bethel Mennonite Church
(319) 256-8531

*If you have
questions, or need
more information
about scheduling
a Passover
presentation in
your area, please
call CJFM at
(800) 497-8766.*





By Violette Berger

Fruit from the Harvest



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From Deathbed to Heaven

Over the years, **Richard Hill, CJFM missionary (Las Vegas)**, and his family have visited and faithfully shared the Good News of Jesus with “Andy,” the 93-year-old father of Richard’s good friend. Andy’s entire family also prayed for him and lovingly shared the Gospel (his wife, children, and grandchildren are all born-again believers).

Richard writes, “Finally, on his deathbed—three days before he died—Andy received Jesus as his Lord and Savior. I can’t tell you how happy we are that we are going to see Andy some day in Heaven! We are rejoicing with the angels because of Andy’s salvation!”

“Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

Good News on UNLV Campus

Richard and his team’s ministry on the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) campus is always exciting—resulting in many interesting responses and conversations. Rich recently had the opportunity to explain the Good News to “Chris,” who asked a lot of questions. Although Rich answered all of them from the Word, Chris still seemed to be indecisive.

When Rich asked him to name the obstacle that was preventing him from receiving Jesus as his Lord and Savior, Chris said, “I don’t know.” Ultimately, Chris admitted and recognized that it was his decision alone to receive or reject Jesus—and he chose to pray with Rich to receive Him. Afterwards, he thanked Rich for helping him come to Jesus.

While distributing tracts at UNLV, **Brian Zuckerman, CJFM missionary (Las Vegas)**, heard a student who passed by him say that he had received the literature last week. As he continued walking by, Brian asked him if he had read it. Much to Brian’s surprise, “Scott” stopped and engaged in an in-depth conversation as Brian shared the Gospel message with him.

Scott was very open, telling Brian that he came from a Buddhist background, but was raised in a fairly secular home. He had some exposure to the Gospel through friends who had taken him to church back home. This, however, was the day of Scott’s salvation, as he made a confession of faith on the UNLV campus.

From Survey to Salvation

CJFM missionary Eric Chabot (Columbus) was on the Ohio State University (OSU) campus conducting his three-minute survey—where students receive \$5 for naming the Ten Commandments in three minutes. Eric rarely gets a winner, but “Jon” approached him and said that he knew some of the commandments because his girlfriend was from a Christian background. When Eric asked Jon where *he* was in *his* relationship with the Lord, he admitted that he wasn’t sure. However, his military experience inspired him to think about the important issues of life when confronted with his own mortality. When Eric finished sharing the Gospel message with him, Jon said that he could no longer put it off, bowed his head to pray with Eric, and received Jesus into his life.

Similarly, on another day, while conducting his survey in downtown Columbus, Eric met “Steve” and “Julie.” During their discussion with Eric, they expressed that they were “good people.” Eric used the Ten Commandments as a tutor to lead Steve and Julie through an explanation of Jesus. They subsequently confessed their sin to Jesus and prayed to receive Him as Lord and Savior of their lives.

Biblical Stories and Sermons

During the past 14 years, **Rob Styler, CJFM director of missions (Phoenix)**, continues to touch the hearts of believers and unbelievers as he shares the Bible through stories. Upon presenting his drama, “Rags to Riches” (a leper meets his Messiah), at a church service recently, Rob writes, “Five people raised their hands to place their faith in the Messiah of Israel—the power of Scripture released through stories!”

At a recent church meeting, **Michael Campo, CJFM missionary (Chicago)**, was preaching a sermon on Isaiah 55 entitled, “The Coronation of the King.” Three people “recognized the need to make Jesus the king over *them*,” and prayed with Michael to receive Jesus as Messiah, King, and Savior of their lives.

Praise the Lord for all of these divine appointments with our missionaries!

“. . . The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach):” (Rom. 10:8).

Bible Questions AND Answers

By DR. GARY HEDRICK



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QUESTION: *I recently attended the memorial service for a local pastor who was killed in a tragic motorcycle accident. I was surprised that he had been cremated. I maintain that burning the dead is a pagan practice. In the Bible, it was the enemies of Israel who burned people with fire (as in 2 Chronicles 28:3). Didn't God's people always bury their dead rather than burning them (see Genesis 47:29-30)?*

ANSWER: No, not always. The men of Jabesh Gilead cremated the bodies of Saul and his sons after they were killed in a battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Afterward, they buried the bones under a tamarisk tree (see 1 Samuel 31:12-13). However, it's true that cremation was rare in ancient Israel.

Some people say the body should be preserved in a grave so it can be resurrected when the Lord returns (see 1 Corinthians 15:35-52). This has historically been the practice of most Christians, and there is certainly nothing wrong with it. However, cremating a believer's body in no way impairs the Lord's ability to resurrect that body when He returns. All cremation

does is accelerate its return to "dust" (that is, the composite elements from which it came—oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, and six or seven others in smaller amounts), which is a perfectly natural process in this fallen world (see Genesis 3:19).

A theory (proposed by people who oppose cremation) suggests that every physical body contains a tiny, indefinable "seed" that must be preserved in order for the body to be resurrected. They warn us that if the body is burned, the seed may be destroyed. However, the proof-texts for this theory (primarily 1 Corinthians 15:37-44) say nothing about any such seed. Paul's language in that passage about "sowing" is a metaphor. It doesn't mean there's a literal seed that sprouts so our bodies can be resurrected.

Opponents of cremation also point to passages like John 5:28-29, where the Lord Jesus said, ". . . *the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth . . .*" So then, according to them, if the bodies are not in graves, they won't hear the Lord and be resurrected!

The problem with this interpretation is that the graves He was talking about 2,000 years ago are empty today. Everyone who lived in the ancient world (with the exception of a few privileged and well-preserved Pharaohs) is gone. Their bodies have long since crumbled into dust and been blown away by the winds of time. So does this mean that these people who died millennia ago won't be resurrected because their physical bodies no longer exist? Or what about people who have been buried at sea, and whose bodies have become food for fish which, in turn, have been caught by fishermen and become food for other people? Can these folks be resurrected, or not? And this is to say nothing about people like the many 9/11 victims whose bodies were vaporized in a millisecond when those jetliners crashed into their targets on that fateful day in 2001.

You see, it is ludicrous to suggest that God needs a deceased person's physical body in order to raise him or her from the dead. Whether the "grave" is a rural Pennsylvania farm field scorched with

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jet fuel, a deep, dark ocean, Ground Zero in Manhattan, or a long-empty ossuary (burial jar) in a cave somewhere in the Middle East—the dead will indeed hear His voice and be resurrected, even if the physical body no longer exists.

Modern science has advanced to the point where we can begin to see how this might work. All God needs in order to reconstitute and resurrect a body is its genetic code. DNA holds the remarkable blueprint that reflects the composition of all living things, including every minute detail all the way down to the sub-molecular level. Isn't it remarkable how science eventually catches up with the Bible if we're just patient? We now know that the fact that a person's body no longer exists is actually irrelevant. God will have no difficulty accessing the blueprint when it's resurrection time!

By the way, this same principle applies to unbelievers. If anyone thinks he can escape God's judgment by being cremated, he has another thing coming!

Also, when you refer to the wicked and ungodly practice of burning people as human sacrifices (and that's what was happening in 2 Chronicles 28:3), that's an entirely different matter. I'm sure you understand that disposing of a dead body by cremation is not the same thing as burning someone alive.

In your letter, you enclosed a brochure from another ministry that argues against cremation by saying that the body is supposed to "return to dust, not ashes." However, the Bible equates the two, does it not? Abraham and Job both referred to themselves as consisting of "dust and ashes" (see Genesis 18:27, Job 30:19). The Hebrew word *epher* (translated "ashes" in our English Bible) doesn't necessarily mean something that has been burned. It is actually related to the word *aphar* "dust" and has more to do with the fact that we were created from the ground (see Genesis 2:7).

Orthodox Jews generally shun cremation, like many Christians do. Their custom is to bury the dead within 24 hours. The reason they do not practice embalming is that they want the body to decompose naturally. Cremation is permitted in Reform Judaism, however.



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In summary, if you have prayed about this and have come to the conclusion that cremation isn't for you, then follow the dictates of your conscience. (And make sure you leave a written will where your wishes are clearly spelled out.) No one in my family has ever been cremated—at least, not in the past few generations—and when that time comes, I probably won't be, either. However, all believers should be respectful of other people's views in matters like this, including your preacher friend who left instructions that his body should be cremated. It's okay to be dogmatic about the fundamentals of our faith; however, on non-essential matters like this one, let's not judge or condemn people simply because their views differ from our own.

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