

The Hermeneutics of the New Righteous Among the Nations

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Matthew 25:31-46 *“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’ 41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.’ 44 Then they themselves also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?’ 45 Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ 46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*

I. Introduction

In this paper, I will attempt to describe a group of people that I am calling the “New Righteous Among the Nations”. I will look at the past for the identity of the “Righteous Among the Nations” who started being recognized after the Holocaust. I will also look at the future and identify the righteous Gentiles that Yeshua describes at the end of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25:31-46. Finally, I will look at the present to understand the current challenge that Gentile Christians are faced with, considering the return of antisemitism we have witnessed in the last few decades, and even the recent global spike connected to the 2021 Gaza conflict. It is not my intention to discuss the eschatological order, but rather to identify the “New Righteous Among the Nations”, the role they play and the model they present for us today.

II. The Storm before the Calm

This paper is written from a premillennial, pre-tribulational viewpoint establishing the events of the last days in the following order: The Rapture of the Saints, the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming of Yeshua, the Millennial Kingdom and the Eternal Order.

The Jewish people who have not yet placed their trust in the finished work of Yeshua will experience a seven-year long time of great distress and persecution known as the Great Tribulation, and as “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.” It indicates to us that this will be a particularly difficult time for Israel and the Jewish people, although left behind Gentiles will not be spared either.

This will be an unparalleled time of trouble and intense suffering as predicted in at least three of the prophets and one Gospel account:

Joel 2:1-2 *1 Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, For the day of the LORD is coming; Surely it is near, 2 A day of darkness and gloom, A day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations.*

Jeremiah 30:7 *Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it.*

Daniel 12:1 *“Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.*

Matthew 24:21 *For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.*

This will have three possible outcomes for the Jewish people left behind; death without Messiah with the lake and fire and brimstone as an eternal destination of torment (Revelation 19:20; 20:15), death as Tribulation martyrs after they have put their faith in Messiah (Revelation 7:9-17), or survival through the Tribulation to enter the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 25:31-40).

For this paper, I will concentrate on the third group of Jewish people who will survive the Great Tribulation by the grace of God and through the work of the New Righteous Gentiles. To understand how these people will interact with and affect the fate of the Jews, we must understand who the original “Righteous Gentiles” or “Righteous Among the Nations” were.

III. Defining the Righteous Among the Nations

During the years of the Holocaust, between 1938 and 1945, six million innocent Jewish victims died at the hands of the Nazi regime.

Amid the deadliest organized genocide of mankind, there were people who went against the flow at the risk of losing their lives to help Jewish people. These people were heroes and needed to be recognized by the Israeli government.

In 1953, the Israeli Knesset passed a law giving birth to the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum. It had several goals, all focusing on remembering the victims, the perpetrators, co-perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers of the Holocaust era.

The Gentile rescuers became known as “Righteous Among the Nations”. The name is derived from the concept known as *ger toshav* or “resident alien” describing Gentiles who place themselves under the authority of the seven moral Noahide Laws. In Judaism, a *ger toshav* is commonly known as a Righteous Gentile or *Hasid Umot Ha-Olam*, “Pious people of the world”, and according to the Talmud, guaranteed a place in the world to come.

The Talmud speaks on the topic of saving lives in Sanhedrin 37a, *“Whoever destroys a soul from Israel, the Scripture considers it as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life from Israel, the Scripture considers it as if he saved an entire world.”*¹

Additionally, Luke reminds us that treating others well is part of Yeshua’s ultimate advice to His disciples (Luke 10:25-37)

Luke 10:33-34 ³³ *But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him.*

¹ Sanhedrin37a. The William Davidson digital edition of the Talmud.
<https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.37a.14?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>. See also Sanhedrin 4:1 (22a)

In 1963, Yad Vashem started to award the honorary title of “Righteous Among the Nations” to Gentiles who had demonstrated kindness and compassion towards Jewish people during the Holocaust era. Originally, a tree was planted on the grounds at Yad Vashem, but eventually, for lack of space, their names were added to the “Wall of Honor” in the Garden of the Righteous.

Outside of being a Gentile, three criteria must be met to qualify as a “Righteous among the Nations”:

- The individual(s) must have been involved in actively helping Jewish people to avoid deportation to concentration camps or death camps.
- The individual(s) must have risked their freedom or their life to help Jewish people.
- The individual’s original motive must have been to save Jews from the Holocaust, with no ulterior motives such as financial gain, conversion or adoption.

There have never been any social status requirements for qualification by Yad Vashem. Famous people such as Raoul Wallenberg, Corrie Ten Boom and Oskar Schindler are joined by French Pastor Henri Trocmé and his wife Magda from the small village of Le Chambon Sur Lignon who saved over 3,000 Jews. Even simple farmers like Pierre and Ida Darricau were added to the Wall of Honor in 2011.² They were the couple who rescued and hid my mother on their farm in the “Zone Libre” near the Southwest Pyrénées French mountain range for the last two years of the war after her father was taken by the Gestapo in front of her eyes and sent to his death in Auschwitz.

Yad Vashem established that there were various ways that these rescuers were able to make a difference:

- Providing shelter and food.
- Making or providing false papers.

² <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/france.pdf>

- Moving Jewish people away from dangerous Nazi-controlled areas.
- Saving Jewish children who had lost their parents in the camps.

Additionally, Yad Vashem is allowed to confer honorary Israeli citizenship to deceased Righteous Gentiles.

As of January 1, 2020, Yad Vashem had recognized 27,712 Righteous Gentiles around the world accounting for about 10,000 rescuing stories. Over 20,000 of these individuals come from five countries: Poland, The Netherlands, France, Ukraine and Belgium.

IV. Defining the “New” Righteous Among the Nations

While most Righteous Among the Nations have been identified and few are still alive today, an occasional rescuer still makes the list. Yad Vashem is committed to continuing their program for as long as they keep identifying rescuers, and yet there is a future group of people who will play a critical role in the life of some Jewish people at a specific time in history.

They are what I like to call the “New Righteous Among the Nations” and will be identified by Messiah Yeshua Himself upon His Second Coming. The main Scripture to validate this group of Gentiles is found in Matthew 25:31-46 in the Olivet Discourse passage about the sheep and the goats.

To be sure, these individuals are never called “New Righteous Among the Nations” in the Bible. This title was created by Yad Vashem, but it describes very well the spirit of the people who helped the Jewish community, and I find it appropriate to describe the generation of Gentile Christians who will come to the rescue of the Jews during the Great Tribulation.

V. The Role of the New Righteous Gentiles – Matthew 25:31-46

A. The Timeframe – Matthew 25:31

“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

The reference to the Son of Man (Yeshua) coming in His glory is a reference to the Second Coming of Yeshua at which time He will judge a certain group of people. This is different from the great white throne judgment that will take place at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:13-15) and also from the *bema seat* judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10.) So, which judgment is this speaking of?

This appears to be a judgment of Gentiles as verse 32 speaks of *All the nations*, that will take place 1,000 years earlier, at the end of the Great Tribulation. It describes two subgroups within the nations: the goats and the sheep.

B. The Separation – Matthew 25:32-33

32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

The next thing we find out is that Yeshua will separate these Gentiles into two groups that He names the goats and the sheep. The goats will be placed on his left and the sheep on His right. What happens next is purely based on the actions of each group.

C. The Rewards – Matthew 25:34

34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

The sheep are promised to be blessed by God and inherit the kingdom. This is their guarantee that they will enter the 1,000-year messianic kingdom prepared for the believers (Revelation 20:4.)

4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Yeshua and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Messiah for a thousand years.

D. The Reason – Matthew 25:35-36

35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

Yeshua gives them the reason for their reward being that when He was hungry, thirsty, ignored, naked, sick and imprisoned, they reached out to Him with compassion.

E. The Reaction – Matthew 25:37-39

37 Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

These Gentiles who are now called “righteous”, appear to be puzzled by Yeshua’s statement as they don’t seem to recall having reached out to Him specifically, so they ask him to specify when such a thing might have occurred. The virtue of their good deeds doesn’t even cross their mind. It is as if they were thinking what the old peasant woman in the French village of Le Chambon sur Lignon thought. When asked why she got involved saving so many Jews during the Holocaust, she simply answered, “It was the most natural thing to do!”

F. The Response – Matthew 25:40

40 The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

The answer given by Yeshua must be a surprise to these Righteous Gentiles. They are being told that whenever they performed these compassionate acts to *these brothers of Mine*, it was akin to reaching out in compassion to Yeshua.

A third group is now introduced and added to the sheep and the goats that appears to be related to Yeshua who calls them *these brothers of Mine*. Paul speaks of his brethren according to the flesh in Romans 9:3, 11:14), meaning the Jewish people.

Romans 9:3 *For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Messiah for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,*

In that context, we are to understand Yeshua’s statement as referring to the same group of people in Matthew 25:31-46. Being Jewish in His humanity,

Yeshua's brothers of His are the Jewish people. Specifically, the Jewish people that Gentiles would have encountered during the Great Tribulation.

Yeshua means that whatever act of compassion that these Gentile Christians performed on behalf of the Jewish people they encounter during the tragic time of the Great Tribulation, was akin to an act of compassion towards Him, and as a result, they are guaranteed entry into the Messianic kingdom.

VI. The Fate of the Accursed Gentiles

A. A Different Reward – Matthew 25:41-46

41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

To an extent, the rest of the passage is similar the first part. It describes the fate of the goats whom Yeshua calls *accursed ones*. They are the ones who will ignore the turmoil the Jewish people will undergo during the Tribulation, and as a result, Yeshua promises them to be cast *into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels*. They might even be involved in helping to persecute the Jews.

Their destination is eternal punishment away from the Messianic kingdom and from the presence of God in an opposite direction from the fate of the righteous Gentiles.

B. Not Salvation by Works

Some see this passage of the reward of entry into the Messianic kingdom as a result of performance in relation to the Jewish people during the Tribulation; but this is not to be misunderstood as salvation by works. This would go against the scriptural evidence that salvation is by the grace of God through faith alone in Yeshua alone. (Genesis 17:5; Ephesians 2:8-9.)

Genesis 5:6 Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Rather, it is because these Gentiles will get saved during the Tribulation, that they will become *righteous* and be led to bless the Jewish people as they understand God's promise in Genesis 12:3. They will act in various capacities, probably risking their own safety and that of their immediate families in the process.

During the most difficult days of the Great Tribulation, namely the second half of the seven-year period, all those left behind will suffer great persecution to the point of death. The Jewish people will possibly suffer even more as Israel will be getting chastised.

The Gentiles who will get saved throughout that time will understand the necessity to reach out and help the persecuted Jews around them. Based on Yeshua's description, it looks like the "Righteous Gentiles" of the Tribulation

will have similar opportunities to the “Righteous Among the Nations” during the Holocaust era.

Shelter, food, papers and transportation will once again become the necessities that the Jewish people might quickly become deprived of. Opportunities will abound for helping Jewish people in need.

VII. The need for the New Righteous Gentiles Prior to the Rapture

A. The Timing of the Rapture

As a pre-millennial, pre-tribulation follower of Messiah, I believe that if I am still alive at that time, I will be raptured before the start of the Great Tribulation. As far as the timing of the event, while no one knows the day or the hour, (Matthew 24:36), we understand the imminency of it. By this, we mean that nothing needs to happen on the biblical/prophetic timetable of end-times events prior to the Rapture. The Rapture is the next event on God’s prophetic timetable for mankind, and it could occur at any moment.

Nowhere in the Bible are we told that life will not get worse before the Great Tribulation. As a matter of fact, life could become a lot more complicated before the Rapture for believers (Jews and Gentiles) as well as unbelievers as the whole world gets closer to being as in “the days of Noah” (Matthew 24:37-38).

B. The Urgency

The last two decades have seen a resurgence in global antisemitism. The “longest hatred” continues to affect Jewish communities. It is also guaranteed from Scriptures that in the last days, much of the world will be turning against Israel and the Jewish people.

Zechariah 12:3 It will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

The phrase “that day” is mentioned fifteen times between chapters 12 and 14 of Zechariah and is a clear reference to the Campaign of Armageddon. We know from God’s counsel that the whole world will eventually turn on Israel and the Jewish people, but the “whole world” never means all individuals. Let us become anomalies today in hope to leave a legacy for those left behind.

Antisemitism doesn’t have its origins in the second half of the Great Tribulation. As a matter of fact, the Jewish people have been the most persecuted people in human history. We are now seeing Jewish people being killed again. The archenemy of God is also the archenemy of the Jewish people because he hates all that God loves and loves all that God hates.

Satan is obsessively going after the Jews today just as he was going after them in the 1930s and 40s and throughout the two millennia before. There is no reason to believe that he will lessen his efforts during the second part of the Tribulation.

His reason is simple, he knows that at the end of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, the Jewish people will call upon Yeshua and cry out *Baruch haba b’shem Adonai.*

Zechariah 12:10 “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

This will trigger the Second Coming of Yeshua and will force Satan into retirement into a location that he is in no hurry to reach. Revelation 20:10 *And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

C. Learning from the Past and Gleaning from the Future

We admire the bravery and compassion of the Yad Vashem “Righteous Among the Nations” and we rejoice over the future courage and love that Tribulation Saints will have for the Jewish people, but the question arises: “why not start today?”

What keeps believers today from helping Jewish people in need? With the recent increase in global antisemitism, Gentile Christians have ample opportunities to put their faith in action. The time is now for reaching out to our Jewish friends, co-workers, schoolmates, neighbors, and family members.

There is a substantial number of evangelicals who love Israel and the Jewish people, and they have been praying for the peace of Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6) and for their Jewish friends. That is biblical and very helpful, but I am convinced that now is the time to build on this foundation of prayer.

Now is the time to let our respective Jewish community leaders, Synagogues and Jewish community centers know that we have their back. It is time to visit, call or email these people and let them know that Christians today will not repeat the actions of many during the

Holocaust era. Tell your Jewish friends that you have their back. Tell them that you will not be a bystander. It is time for faith in action.

VIII. Conclusion

Elie Wiesel once said, *“We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”*³

A bystander who does nothing only facilitates the work of a perpetrator. The Jewish people need to know that we will not be bystanders. They need to know it by our actions, beyond our prayers and our words. It was once said that “nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” Let us follow the advice found in James 2:17 *“Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”*

The day is nearing when Jewish people might need rescuing, feeding, hiding, transportation. Do we care? Then, let us show them. Yeshua is showing us how the “New Righteous Among the Nations” will rise for the occasion during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. This should serve as a model for us ahead of time on how to respond to the need of the Jewish people and how to put Genesis 12:3 into action today! Our actions will undoubtedly demonstrate the love of Messiah to our Jewish friends. They are never to replace the message of the Gospel, but rather to illustrate the power of the Gospel to change lives...ours and theirs

Where will the Christians be when the Jews in need knock on their door in the middle of the night? The bridge between Christians and Jews that started to slowly rot in the first century and was finally burned during the Holocaust

³ Wiesel, Elie *Night* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1958), 118

needs to be rebuilt now, because regardless of our view on eschatology, the Jewish people need their Christian friends more than ever.

I will not be a bystander, how about you?