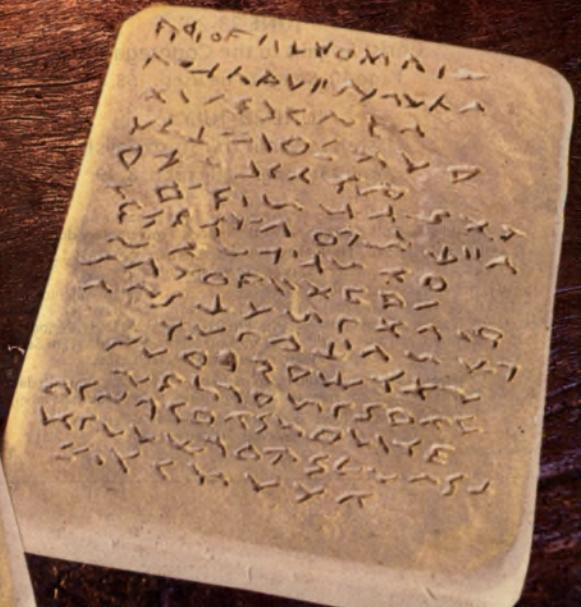
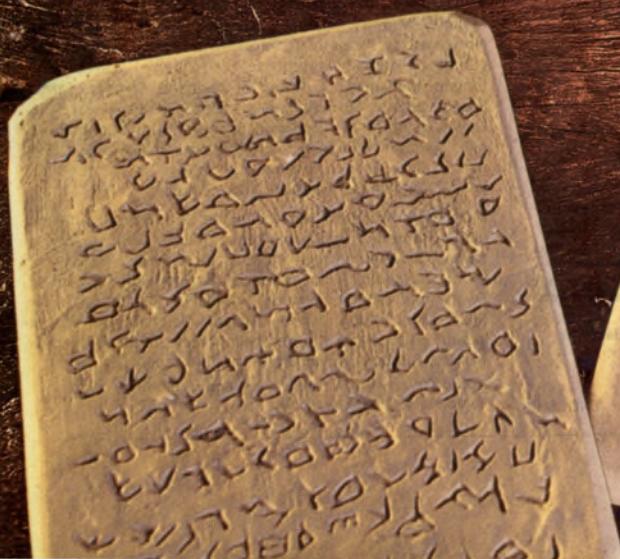


MAY 15, 2003

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

## NOAH'S "LOG" DOES IT HAVE MEANING FOR US?





# THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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# An Absorbing Log

**E**XPLORER Richard E. Byrd made five Antarctic expeditions from 1928 through 1956. By keeping a diary and accurate logbooks, he and his teams were able to determine wind drifts, prepare maps, and obtain considerable information about the continent of Antarctica.

Byrd's expeditions illustrate the value of keeping a log. In a log, or logbook, a record is compiled of the details of a voyage or a flight. This information can later be used to review what took place or to analyze information that can be useful for future trips.

The Scriptures provide an absorbing ac-

count of the Deluge in the days of Noah. That global Flood lasted more than a year. In preparation for the Deluge, Noah, his wife, and their three sons and their wives spent 50 or 60 years building an ark—a huge vessel with a volume of about 1,400,000 cubic feet. Its purpose? To preserve some humans and animals through the Flood.—Genesis 7:1-3.

In effect, the Bible book of Genesis contains what might be called Noah's log of what took place from the beginning of the Flood until he and his family left the ark. Does it contain anything of significance for us today?



# Noah's Log

## DOES IT HAVE MEANING FOR US?

WHILE giving the prophecy about the sign of his presence and of the conclusion of the system of things, Jesus said: "Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be." (Matthew 24:3, 37) Clearly, Jesus foretold that what is happening in our day has a parallel in Noah's time. A reliable and accurate account of the events of Noah's day can prove to be an invaluable treasure.

Is Noah's log such a treasure? Does it have the marks of a true historical document? Can we really determine when the Flood occurred?

### When Did the Flood Occur?

The Bible provides chronological information that allows for a careful count back to the beginning of human history. At Genesis 5:1-29, we find the genealogical line from the creation of the first man, Adam, to the birth of Noah. The Deluge began "in the six hundredth year of Noah's life."—Genesis 7:11.

To determine the time of the Flood, we need to start with a pivotal date. That is, we must begin with a date that is accepted in secular history and that corresponds to a particular event recorded in the Bible. From such a fixed point, we can make calculations and assign to the Flood a date based on the Gregorian calendar now in common use.

One pivotal date is 539 B.C.E., the year when Persian King Cyrus overthrew Babylon. Secular sources for the time of his reign include Babylonian tablets and documents

of Diodorus, Africanus, Eusebius, and Ptolemy. Because of a decree issued by Cyrus, a Jewish remnant left Babylon and arrived in their homeland in 537 B.C.E. That marked the end of Judah's 70-year desolation, which according to the Biblical record had begun in 607 B.C.E. By taking into account the period of the judges and the reigns of Israel's kings, we can determine that the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt occurred in 1513 B.C.E. Bible-based chronology takes us back another 430 years to the making of the covenant with Abraham in 1943 B.C.E. Next we must take into account the births and life spans of Terah, Nahor, Serug, Reu, Peleg, Eber, and Shelah, as well as Arpachshad, who was born "two years after the deluge." (Genesis 11:10-32) We can thus place the beginning of the Flood in the year 2370 B.C.E.\*

### The Floodwaters Fall

Before we review the events of Noah's day, you may wish to read Genesis chapter 7 verse 11 to chapter 8 verse 4. Regarding the downpour, we are told: "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life [2370 B.C.E.], in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the springs of the vast watery deep were broken open and the flood-gates of the heavens were opened."—Genesis 7:11.

Noah divided the year into 12 months of 30 days each. In ancient times, the first month started about the middle of our calen-

\* For details on the dating of the Flood, see Volume 1, pages 458-60, of *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

dar month of September. The floodwaters began to fall in "the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month" and continued falling for 40 days and 40 nights during the months of November and December 2370 B.C.E.

Regarding the Deluge, we are also informed: "The waters continued overwhelming the earth a hundred and fifty days. . . . And the waters began receding from off the earth, progressively receding; and at the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters were lacking. And in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat." (Genesis 7:24–8:4) So the period from when the waters overwhelmed the earth to the time they receded was 150 days, or five months. The ark thus came to rest on the mountains of Ararat in April of 2369 B.C.E.

Now you may wish to read Genesis 8:5–17. The tops of the mountains appeared nearly two and a half months (73 days) later,

"in the tenth month [June], on the first of the month." (Genesis 8:5)\* Three months (90 days) later—in Noah's "six hundred and first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month," or in mid-September, 2369 B.C.E.—Noah removed the covering of the ark. He could then see that "the surface of the ground had drained dry." (Genesis 8:13) One month and 27 days (57 days) later, "in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month [mid-November, 2369 B.C.E.], the earth had dried off." Noah and his family then came out of the ark onto dry ground. Hence, Noah and the others spent one lunar year and ten days (370 days) in the ark.—Genesis 8:14.

What do these precise records involving events, details, and time factors prove? Simply this: The Hebrew prophet Moses, who

\* Keil-Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 148, states: "Probably 73 days after the resting of the ark, the tops of the mountains were seen, viz. the tops of the Armenian highlands, by which the ark was surrounded."

## Did They Live That Long?

"**A**LL the days of Noah amounted to nine hundred and fifty years and he died," says the Bible. (Genesis 9:29) Noah's grandfather Methuselah lived for 969 years—the longest human lifetime on record. The average life span of the ten generations from Adam to Noah was above 850 years. (Genesis 5:5–31) Did people back then live that long?

God's original purpose was that man should live forever. The first man, Adam, was created with the opportunity to enjoy a span of life that would never end if he was obedient to God. (Genesis 2:15–17) But Adam disobeyed and forfeited that opportunity. After 930 years of existence, spent in the slow process of dying, Adam returned to the ground from which he was taken. (Genesis 3:19; 5:5) The first man passed on the

inheritance of sin and death to all his offspring.  
—Romans 5:12.

Still, the people who lived in that time period were closer to Adam's original perfection and apparently for this reason enjoyed greater longevity than those further removed from it. Hence, the human life span approached a thousand years during the pre-Flood period, dropping rapidly after the Deluge. Abraham, for example, lived only 175 years. (Genesis 25:7) And some 400 years after that faithful patriarch's death, the prophet Moses wrote: "In themselves the days of our years are seventy years; and if because of special mightiness they are eighty years, yet their insistence is on trouble and hurtful things." (Psalm 90:10) The situation today is much the same.

evidently based Genesis on records he had received, was presenting facts, not a mythical allegory. The Deluge therefore has great significance for us today.

### How Did Other Bible Writers View the Flood?

In addition to the Genesis account, there are many references to Noah or the Deluge in the Bible. For example:

(1) The researcher Ezra included Noah and his sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) in the genealogy of the nation of Israel.—1 Chronicles 1:4-17.

(2) The physician and Gospel writer Luke includes Noah when listing the ancestors of Jesus Christ.—Luke 3:36.

(3) The apostle Peter draws heavily on the Flood account in writing to fellow Christians.—2 Peter 2:5; 3:5, 6.

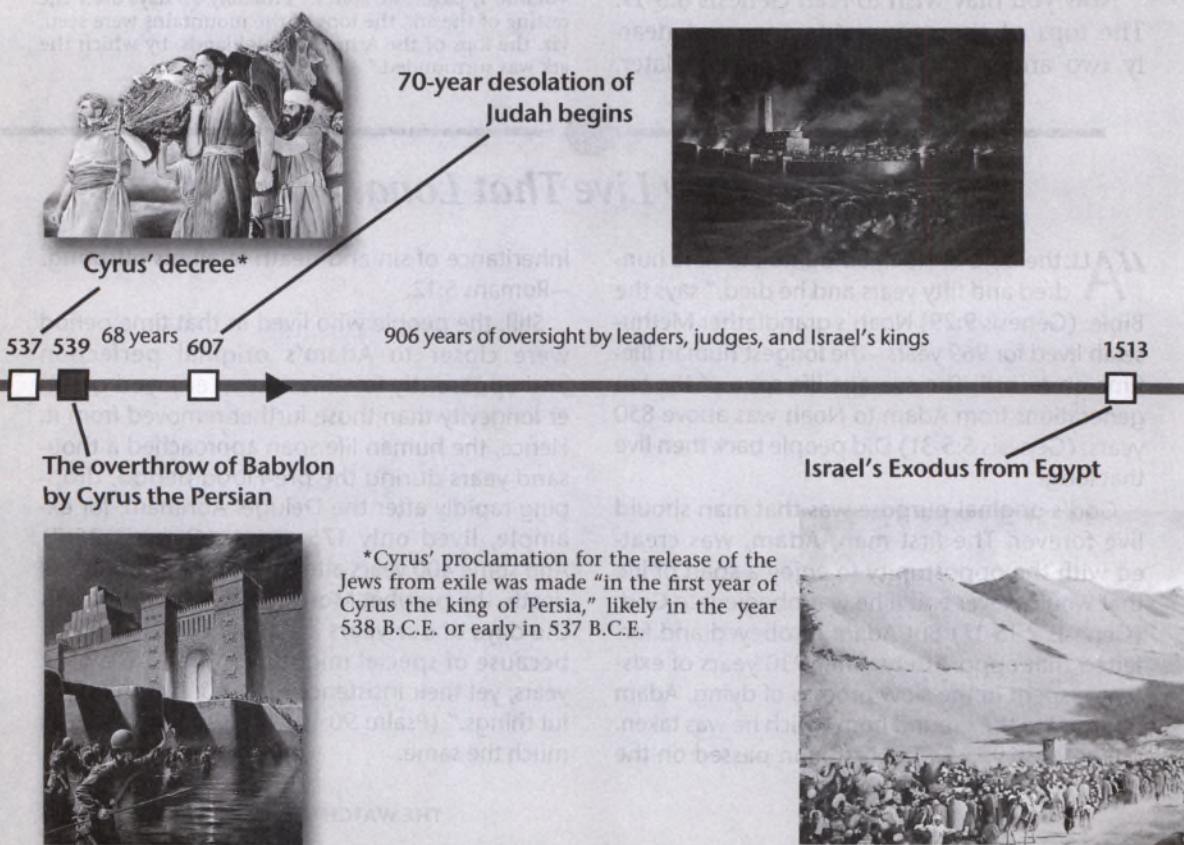
(4) The apostle Paul speaks of the great faith that Noah displayed in constructing the ark for the survival of his household.—Hebrews 11:7.

Can there be any doubt that these inspired Bible writers accepted the Genesis account of the Flood? They unquestionably considered it to be a true event.

### Jesus and the Flood

Jesus Christ had a prehuman existence. (Proverbs 8:30, 31) He was a spirit creature in heaven during the Flood. As an eyewitness, Jesus therefore gives us the greatest Scriptural

## Counting Backward From Cyrus' Decree Allowing the Jews



confirmation of Noah and the Deluge. Said Jesus: "Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be."—Matthew 24:37-39.

Would Jesus use folklore to warn us about the coming end of this system of things? Hardly! We are confident that he used a genuine example of the execution of divine judgment upon the wicked. Yes, lives were lost, but we can draw comfort from knowing that Noah and his family were saved through the Flood.

"The days of Noah" are highly significant for those living today, during "the presence of the Son of man," Jesus Christ. As we read the detailed account of the global Flood preserved in a record kept by Noah, we can be certain that it is a genuine historical document. And the divinely inspired Genesis account of the Deluge has great meaning for us. Just as Noah, his sons, and their wives put faith in God's means of survival, we today can come under Jehovah's protection on the basis of our faith in Jesus' ransom sacrifice. (Matthew 20:28) Moreover, we can have the hope of being among the survivors of the end of this wicked system of things just as Noah's log shows that he and his family survived the Flood that brought an end to the godless world of that time.

## to Return From Exile to the Flood of Noah's Day

**430-year period when the sons of Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt and in Canaan (Exodus 12:40, 41)**

430 years

1943

205 years

2148

222 years

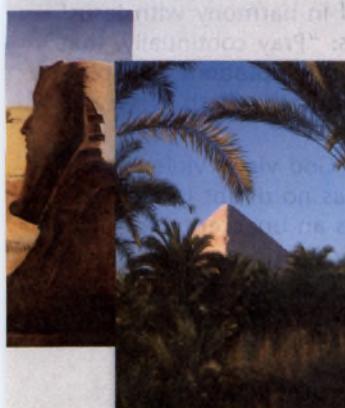
2370

**Validating of the Abrahamic covenant**

**The birth of Terah**



**Beginning of the Flood**



BEFORE AND AFTER

## Murky Past, Bright Future

**T**HE word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and is able to discern thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) So said the apostle Paul about the penetrating power of God's message. Its ability to reach the heart was especially evident during the first century C.E. Despite the unwholesome influence of the time, those who became Christians put on the new personality.—Romans 1:28, 29; Colossians 3:8-10.

The transforming power of God's word, as recorded in the Bible, is no less apparent today. For example, consider the case of a tall, strong man named Richard. Being hot-tempered, Richard would fight at the slightest provocation. His life was marred by violence. Richard even joined a boxing club. He trained hard and became heavyweight boxing champion of Westphalia, Germany. Richard also drank heavily and often got into brawls. On one such occasion, someone was killed, and Richard almost ended up in prison.

What about Richard's marriage? "Before Heike and I studied the Bible," recalls Richard, "we each went our own way. Heike spent a lot of time with her girlfriends, while I enjoyed my hobbies—chiefly boxing, surfing, and diving."

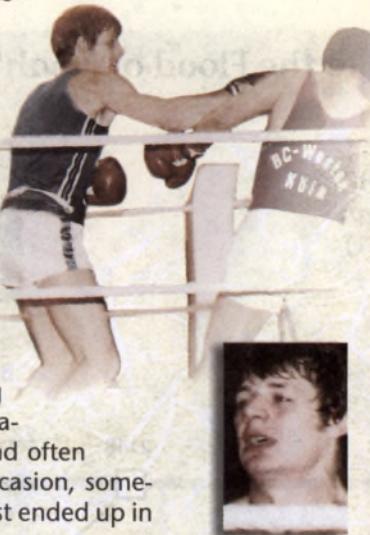
When Richard and Heike started studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, Richard was overwhelmed by the thought of having to make seemingly impossible changes in order to conform his life to the high standards set out in

God's Word. As he came to know Jehovah God better, however, Richard developed a strong desire to please him. Richard realized that God does not approve of lovers of violence or of those who exploit it for entertainment. "Anyone loving violence [Jehovah's] soul certainly hates," Richard learned.—Psalm 11:5.

Moreover, the hope of living forever in a paradise on earth fascinated both Richard and Heike. They wanted to be there together! (Isaiah 65:21-23) The invitation "draw close to God, and he will draw close to you" deeply touched Richard. (James 4:8) He saw the value of heeding this inspired counsel: "Do not become envious of the man of violence, nor choose any of his ways. For the devious person is a detestable thing to Jehovah, but His intimacy is with the upright ones."—Proverbs 3:31, 32.

Despite having a strong desire to change his ways, Richard realized that he could not do so in his own strength. He came to see the need to seek God's help in prayer. He thus acted in harmony with Jesus' words to His apostles: "Pray continually, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit, of course, is eager, but the flesh is weak."—Matthew 26:41.

After learning how God views violence and fits of anger, there was no doubt in Richard's mind that boxing was an unacceptable sport. With help from Jehovah and encouragement



from those who studied the Bible with him, Richard broke away from violence. He gave up boxing and brawling and decided to improve his family life. "Learning the truth from the Bible has helped me to stop and think before I act," says Richard, who is now a mild-tempered overseer in one of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. He adds: "The principles of love and respect now guide me in my relationship with my wife and children. As a result, our family has drawn together."

Misinformed people have at times accused Jehovah's Witnesses of destroying families. However, examples of individuals such as Richard refute their claim. In reality, Bible truth can result in domestic stability and a bright future for those who have had a murky past.—Jeremiah 29:11.

► *"The hope of a paradise earth gave me the motivation to change"*

## ◀ Bible Principles at Work ▶

The Bible can exert a powerful influence in people's lives. Here are some Scriptural principles that have helped violent individuals to change:

*"He that is slow to anger is better than a mighty man, and he that is controlling his spirit than the one capturing a city."* (Proverbs 16:32) Uncontrolled anger is a sign of weakness, not of strength.

*"The insight of a man certainly slows down his anger."* (Proverbs 19:11) Having insight and understanding of a situation helps one see beneath the apparent reasons for confrontation and can prevent anger from flaring up.

*"Do not have companionship with anyone given to rage that you may not get familiar with his ways."* (Proverbs 22:24, 25) Christians wisely avoid association with those who are prone to rage.



# CHRIST SPEAKS TO THE CONGREGATIONS

*"These are the things that he says who holds the seven stars in his right hand."*

—REVELATION 2:1.

**J**EHOVAH'S only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is the Head of the Christian congregation. To keep the congregation of his anointed followers unblemished, Christ exercises his headship by commanding and correcting them. (Ephesians 5:21-27) There are examples of this in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, where we find Jesus' powerful and loving messages directed to seven congregations in Asia Minor.

<sup>2</sup> Before he heard Jesus' words to the seven congregations, the apostle John was granted a vision of "the Lord's day." (Revelation 1:10) That "day" began when the Messianic Kingdom was established in 1914. What Christ said to the congregations is therefore vitally important in these last days. His encouragement and counsel help us to deal with these critical times.—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

<sup>3</sup> John beheld the glorified Jesus Christ, who "holds the seven stars in his right hand" and who "walks in the midst of the seven

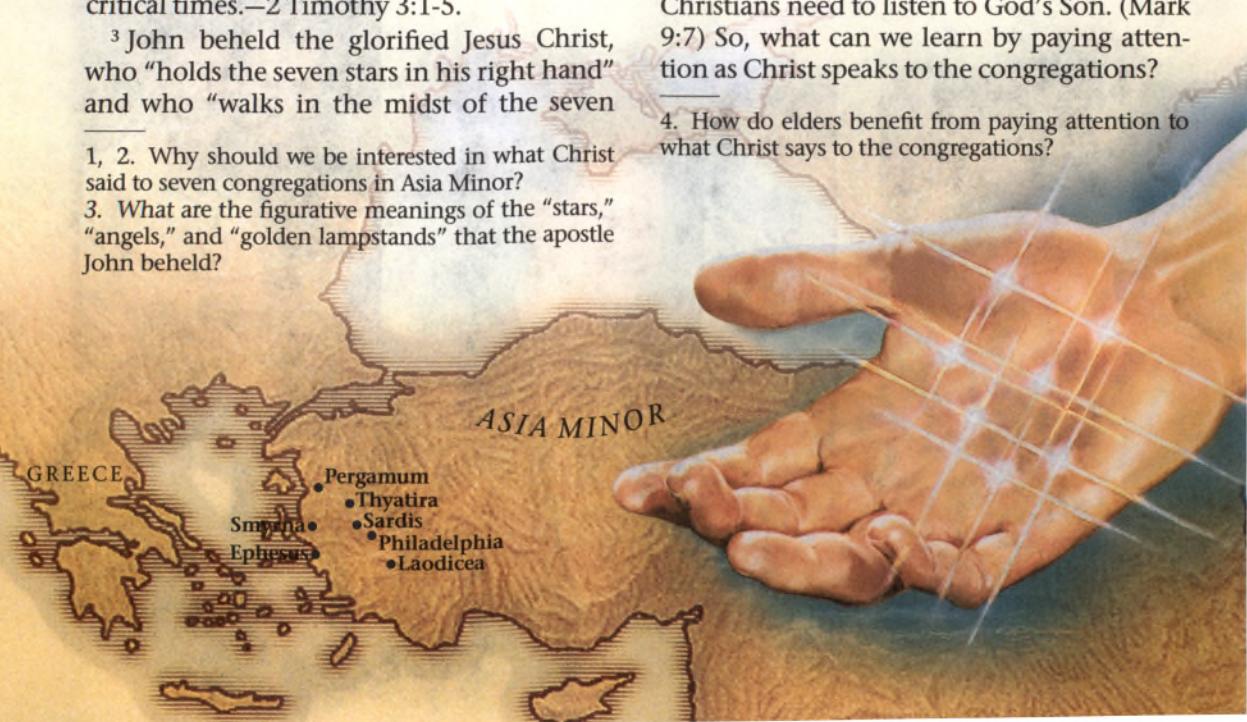
1. Why should we be interested in what Christ said to seven congregations in Asia Minor?

3. What are the figurative meanings of the "stars," "angels," and "golden lampstands" that the apostle John beheld?

golden lampstands," or congregations. The "stars" are "the angels of the seven congregations." (Revelation 1:20; 2:1) Stars sometimes symbolize angelic spirit creatures, but Christ would not use a man to record messages for spirit creatures. Hence, these "stars" logically denote spirit-anointed overseers, or bodies of elders. The term "angels" relates to their role as messengers. Because God's organization has grown, "the faithful steward" has also appointed qualified men of Jesus' "other sheep" as overseers.—Luke 12:42-44; John 10:16.

<sup>4</sup> The "stars" are in Jesus' right hand—with-in his power, control, favor, and protection. Therefore, they are accountable to him. By heeding his words to each of the seven congregations, present-day elders see how they can handle similar situations. Of course, all Christians need to listen to God's Son. (Mark 9:7) So, what can we learn by paying attention as Christ speaks to the congregations?

4. How do elders benefit from paying attention to what Christ says to the congregations?



## To the Angel in Ephesus

<sup>5</sup> Jesus commanded and reproved the congregation in Ephesus. (Read Revelation 2:1-7.) The massive temple of the goddess Artemis stood in this wealthy commercial and religious center on the west coast of Asia Minor. Although Ephesus was filled with immorality, false religion, and the practice of magic, God blessed the ministry of the apostle Paul and others in that city.—Acts, chapter 19.

<sup>6</sup> Christ commended the congregation in Ephesus, saying: “I know your deeds, and your labor and endurance, and that you cannot bear bad men, and that you put those to the test who say they are apostles, but they are not, and you found them liars.” Today, congregations of Jesus’ true followers have a similar record of good deeds, hard work, and endurance. They do not put up with false brothers who want to be viewed as apostles. (2 Corinthians 11:13, 26) Like the Ephesians, loyal Christians today “cannot bear bad men.” To maintain the purity of Jehovah’s worship and to protect the congregation, therefore, they do not extend the hand of fellowship to unrepentant apostates.—Galatians 2:4, 5; 2 John 8-11.

<sup>7</sup> Yet, Christians in Ephesus had a serious problem. “I hold this against you,” said Jesus, “that you have left the love you had at first.” Members of the congregation needed to rekindle their first love for Jehovah. (Mark 12:28-30; Ephesians 2:4; 5:1, 2) We ourselves must guard against losing our first love for God. (3 John 3) But what if such things as a desire for material riches or the pursuit of pleasure are becoming paramount in our lives? (1 Timothy 4:8; 6:9, 10) Then we

5. What kind of city was Ephesus?

6. How are loyal Christians today like those in ancient Ephesus?

7, 8. What serious problem existed in the congregation in Ephesus, and how might we deal with a similar situation?

should fervently pray for divine help to replace such inclinations with deep-seated love for Jehovah and gratitude for all that he and his Son have done for us.—1 John 4:10, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Christ urged the Ephesians: “Remember from what you have fallen, and repent and do the former deeds.” What if they did not do this? “If you do not,” said Jesus, “I am coming to you, and I will remove your lampstand from its place.” If all the sheep were to lose their first love, the “lampstand,” or congregation, would no longer exist. As zealous Christians, may we therefore work hard to keep the congregation shining spiritually.—Matthew 5:14-16.

<sup>9</sup> To their credit, the Ephesians hated “the deeds of the sect of Nicolaus.” Aside from what is said in Revelation, nothing definite is known about the origin, teachings, and practices of this sect. Since Jesus condemned the following of men, however, we need to keep on hating sectarianism, as did the Christians in Ephesus.—Matthew 23:10.

<sup>10</sup> “Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations,” said Christ. When on earth, Jesus spoke under the influence of God’s spirit. (Isaiah 61:1; Luke 4:16-21) So we should pay attention to what God now says through him by holy spirit. Under the spirit’s direction, Jesus promised: “To him that conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” For anointed ones, who heed what the spirit says, this means immortality in the heavenly “paradise of God,” or Jehovah’s very presence. The “great crowd,” who also listen to what the spirit says, will enjoy an earthly paradise where they will drink from “a river of water of life” and will find healing from “the leaves of the trees” alongside it.—Revelation 7:9; 22:1, 2; Luke 23:43.

9. How should sectarianism be viewed?

10. What will be the experience of those who heed what the spirit says?

<sup>11</sup> The Ephesians had lost their first love, but what if a similar situation is developing in a congregation today? Let us individually promote love for Jehovah by talking about his loving ways. We can express our gratitude for the love God showed in providing the ransom by means of his dear Son. (John 3:16; Romans 5:8) When appropriate, we can mention God's love in comments and in program parts at meetings. We can show our own love for Jehovah by praising his name in the Christian ministry. (Psalm 145:10-13) Yes, our words and actions may do much to rekindle or strengthen a congregation's first love.

### To the Angel in Smyrna

<sup>12</sup> The congregation in Smyrna was commended by Christ, "the First and the Last," who became dead and came to life again" by a resurrection. (Read Revelation 2:8-11.) Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey) was built on the west coast of Asia Minor. Greeks settled the city, but the Lydians destroyed it in about 580 B.C.E. Successors of Alexander the Great rebuilt Smyrna on a new site. It became part of the Roman province of Asia and was a thriving commercial center noted for fine public buildings. Its temple of Tiberius Caesar made it a center of emperor worship. Worshipers had to burn a pinch of incense

- 
11. How may we be able to promote love for Jehovah?
  12. What does history reveal regarding Smyrna and religious practices there?

*The "great crowd" will enjoy an earthly paradise*

and say "Caesar is Lord." Christians could not comply because to them "Jesus is Lord." Hence, they suffered tribulation.—Romans 10:9.

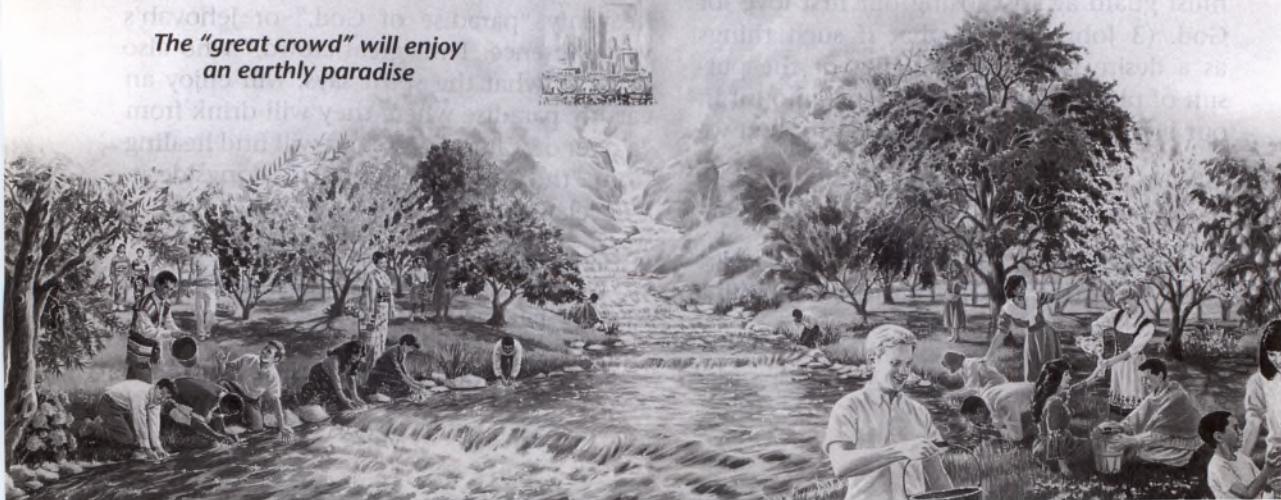
<sup>13</sup> Besides tribulation, Christians in Smyrna endured poverty, possibly suffering economic sanctions because they would not engage in emperor worship. Jehovah's present-day servants are not immune from similar trials. (Revelation 13:16, 17) Though materially poor, those who are like Christians in Smyrna are spiritually rich, and that is what really matters!—Proverbs 10:22; 3 John 2.

<sup>14</sup> Most Jews in Smyrna were "a synagogue of Satan" because they held to unscriptural traditions, rejected God's Son, and blasphemed his spirit-begotten followers. (Romans 2:28, 29) But what comfort anointed ones can draw from Christ's next words! He says: "Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer. Look! The Devil will keep on throwing some of you into prison that you may be fully put to the test, and that you may have tribulation ten days. Prove yourself faithful even to death, and I will give you the crown of life."—Revelation 2:10.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus was not afraid to die for upholding Jehovah's sovereignty. (Philippians 2:5-8) Although Satan is now waging war upon the anointed remnant, they do not fear the

13. Although poor materially, in what sense were Christians in Smyrna rich?

- 14, 15. What comfort can anointed ones draw from Revelation 2:10?



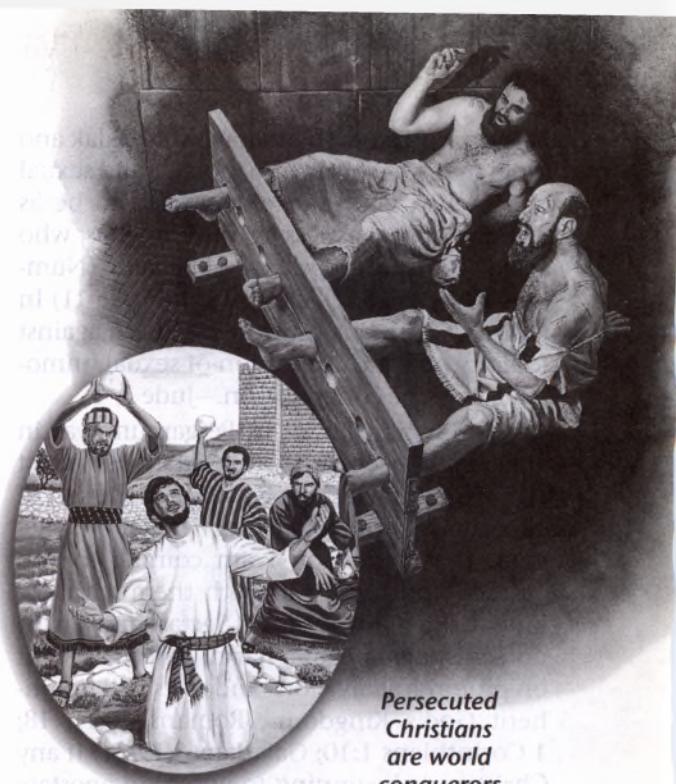
things they must suffer as a group—tribulation, imprisonment, or violent death. (Revelation 12:17) They will be world conquerors. And instead of a fading garland of flowers worn as a crown by victors in the pagan games, Christ promises resurrected anointed ones “the crown of life” as immortal creatures in heaven. What a priceless gift!

<sup>16</sup> What if we, whether our hope is heavenly or earthly, are associated with a congregation like the one in ancient Smyrna? Then let us help fellow believers to focus on the main reason why God permits persecution—the issue of universal sovereignty. Every integrity-keeping Witness of Jehovah proves Satan to be a liar and demonstrates that even a persecuted human can be an unwavering advocate of God's right to rule as Universal Sovereign. (Proverbs 27:11) Let us encourage other Christians to endure persecution and, as a result, have the continual “privilege of fearlessly rendering sacred service to [Jehovah] with loyalty and righteousness before him all our days”—even forever.—Luke 1:68, 69, 74, 75.

### To the Angel of Pergamum

<sup>17</sup> Both commendation and correction were given to the congregation in Pergamum. (Read Revelation 2:12-17.) Situated about 50 miles north of Smyrna, Pergamum was a city steeped in pagan religion. Chaldean magi (astrologers) seem to have fled there from Babylon. Sick people flocked to Pergamum's renowned temple of Asclepius, the false god of healing and medicine. Pergamum, with its temple devoted to the worship of Caesar Augustus, has been called “the chief centre of the imperial cult under the early empire.”—*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1959, Volume 17, page 507.

16. If we are associated with a congregation like the one in ancient Smyrna, on what issue should our attention be focused? 17, 18. Pergamum was a center of what kind of worship, and what could result from refusal to participate in such idolatry?



*Persecuted Christians are world conquerors*

<sup>18</sup> In Pergamum there was an altar dedicated to Zeus. The city was also a seat of Devil-inspired deification of men. No wonder the congregation there was said to be dwelling where “the throne of Satan” was! Refusing to worship the emperor could result in death for an upholder of Jehovah's sovereignty. The world is still lying in the Devil's power, and national symbols are now being idolized. (1 John 5:19) From the first century to the present day, many faithful Christians have been martyred, like the one Christ called “Antipas, my witness, the faithful one, who was killed by your side.” Jehovah God and Jesus Christ certainly remember such loyal servants.—1 John 5:21.

<sup>19</sup> Christ also spoke of “the teaching of Balaam.” Greedy for material gain, the false prophet Balaam tried to curse Israel. When God turned his curse into a blessing,

19. What did Balaam do, and against what must all Christians be on guard?

Balaam worked with Moabite King Balak and lured many Israelites into idolatry and sexual immorality. Christian elders need to be as firm for righteousness as was Phinehas, who acted against the workings of Balaam. (Numbers 22:1-25:15; 2 Peter 2:15, 16; Jude 11) In fact, all Christians must be on guard against idolatry and the infiltration of sexual immorality into the congregation.—Jude 3, 4.

<sup>20</sup> The congregation in Pergamum was in great peril because it allowed in its midst “those holding fast the teaching of the sect of Nicolaus.” Christ told the congregation: “Repent. If you do not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will war with them with the long sword of my mouth.” Sectarians want to do Christians spiritual harm, and those bent on promoting divisions and sects will not inherit God’s Kingdom. (Romans 16:17, 18; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Galatians 5:19-21) If any Christian is beginning to entertain apostate views and wants to spread them, he ought to take a warning from Christ! To save himself from disaster, he should repent and seek the spiritual assistance of the elders in the congregation. (James 5:13-18) Prompt action is vital, for Jesus is coming quickly to execute judgment.

20. If any Christian is beginning to entertain apostate views, what should he do?

### How Would You Respond?

- Why should we pay attention to what Christ says to the congregations?
- How might we help to rekindle a congregation’s first love?
- Why can it be said that the materially poor Christians in ancient Smyrna really were rich?
- Reflecting on the situation in the congregation in Pergamum, how should we view apostate thinking?

<sup>21</sup> Faithful anointed Christians and their loyal companions need not fear the coming judgment. Blessings await all who heed Jesus’ counsel given by direction of God’s holy spirit. For instance, world-conquering anointed ones will be invited to eat some of “the hidden manna” and will be given “a white pebble” bearing “a new name.”

<sup>22</sup> God provided manna to sustain the Israelites during their 40-year trek through the wilderness. Some of that “bread” was kept in a golden jar inside the ark of the covenant and thus was hidden in the tabernacle’s Most Holy, where a miraculous light symbolized Jehovah’s presence. (Exodus 16:14, 15, 23, 26, 33; 26:34; Hebrews 9:3, 4) No one was permitted to eat that hidden manna. At their resurrection, though, Jesus’ anointed followers put on immortality, symbolized by eating “the hidden manna.”—1 Corinthians 15:53-57.

<sup>23</sup> A black pebble brought condemnation in Roman courts, whereas a white one meant acquittal. Jesus’ giving “a white pebble” to conquering anointed Christians indicates that he adjudges them innocent, pure, and clean. Since the Romans also used pebbles to gain entry to important events, the “white pebble” may denote the anointed one’s being admitted to a place in heaven at the marriage of the Lamb. (Revelation 19:7-9) The “new name” evidently signifies the privilege of being united with Jesus as joint-heirs in the heavenly Kingdom. How all of this encourages anointed ones as well as their associates in Jehovah’s service, who hope to live on a paradise earth!

<sup>24</sup> It is wise to remember that the Pergamum congregation was endangered by apos-

21, 22. Who partake of “the hidden manna,” and what does it symbolize?

23. Of what significance are the “white pebble” and the “new name”?

24. What position should we take with respect to apostasy?

tates. If a similar situation threatens the spiritual welfare of the congregation with which we are associated, let us completely reject apostasy and keep on walking in the truth. (John 8:32, 44; 3 John 4) Since false teachers or individuals leaning toward apostasy can corrupt an entire congregation, we must maintain a firm stand against apostasy, never allowing wicked persuasion to hinder us from obeying the truth.—Galatians 5:7-12; 2 John 8-11.

## LISTEN TO WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS!

*"Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations."—REVELATION 3:22.*

JEHOVAH'S servants must pay attention to the spirit-directed words of Jesus Christ to the seven congregations named in the Bible book of Revelation. Indeed, each of these messages contains this counsel: "Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations."—Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22.

<sup>2</sup> We have already considered Jesus' messages to the angels, or overseers, of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum. How can we benefit from what he said by holy spirit to the four other congregations?

### To the Angel in Thyatira

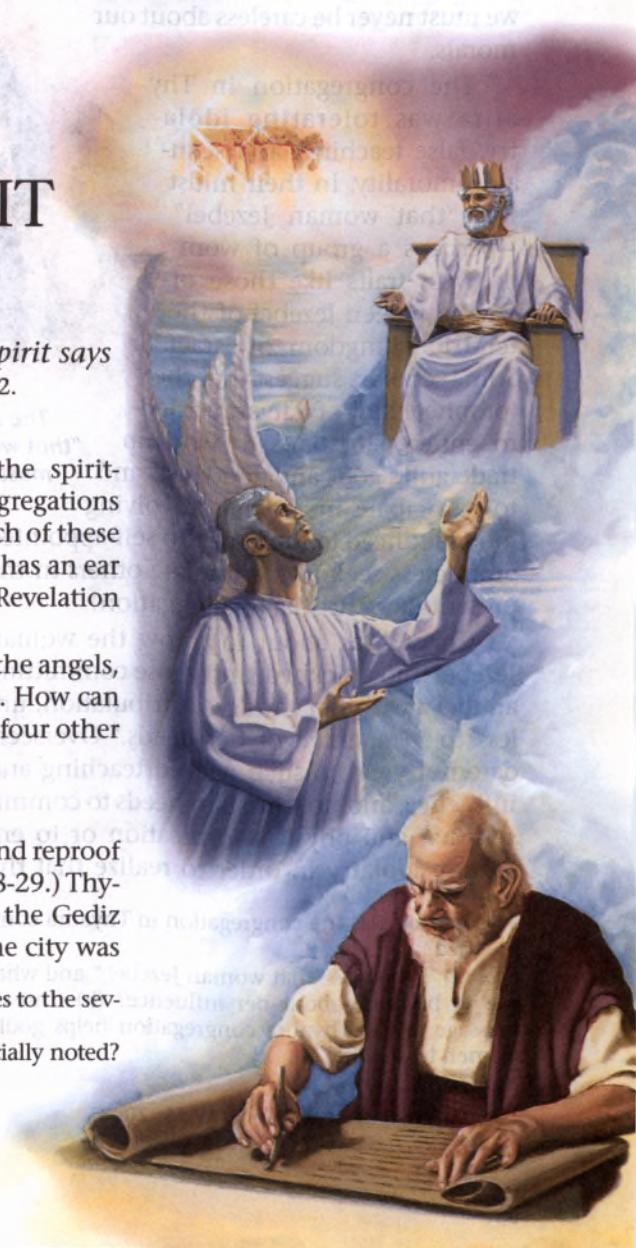
<sup>3</sup> "The Son of God" gives both commendation and reproof to the Thyatira congregation. (Read Revelation 2:18-29.) Thyatira (now Akhisar) was built along a tributary of the Gediz (ancient Hermus) River in western Asia Minor. The city was

1, 2. What counsel is repeated concerning Jesus' messages to the seven congregations named in Revelation?

3. Where was Thyatira, and for what product was it especially noted?

<sup>25</sup> What thought-provoking words of commendation and counsel the glorified Jesus Christ spoke to the three of the seven congregations in Asia Minor that we have considered! As directed by holy spirit, however, he also has much to say to the four remaining congregations. These messages, directed to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, will be discussed in the next article.

25. Christ's messages to what congregations will be discussed in the next article?



noted for numerous crafts. Its dye makers used madder root as a source for their celebrated scarlet, or purple. Lydia, who became a Christian during Paul's visit to Philippi in Greece, was "a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira."—Acts 16:12-15.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus commends the congregation in Thyatira for its good deeds, love, faith, endurance, and work in the ministry. In fact, 'their deeds of late were more than those formerly.' Even if we have a fine record, however, we must never be careless about our morals.

<sup>5</sup> The congregation in Thyatira was tolerating idolatry, false teaching, and sexual immorality. In their midst was "that woman Jezebel"—perhaps a group of women with traits like those of wicked Queen Jezebel of the ten-tribe Kingdom of Israel. Some scholars suggest that the 'prophetesses' of Thyatira tried to entice Christians to worship trade-guild gods and goddesses and to participate in festivals involving food sacrificed to idols. Let no self-appointed prophetess seek to manipulate others in the present-day Christian congregation!

<sup>6</sup> Christ 'was about to throw the woman Jezebel into a sickbed, and those committing adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repented of her deeds.' Overseers dare not yield to such wicked teaching and influence, and no Christian needs to commit spiritual and physical fornication or to engage in idolatry in order to realize that the

4. For what was the congregation in Thyatira commended?

5-7. (a) Who was "that woman Jezebel," and what was to be done about her influence? (b) Christ's message to the Thyatira congregation helps godly women to do what?

"deep things of Satan" are totally evil. If we heed Jesus' warning, 'we will hold fast what we have,' and sin will not hold sway among us. Because they rejected ungodly practices, lusts, and aims, resurrected anointed ones receive "authority over the nations" and will join Christ in breaking them to pieces. Present-day congregations have symbolic stars, and anointed ones will be given "the bright morning star," the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, when they are resurrected to heaven.—Revelation 22:16.

<sup>7</sup> The Thyatira congregation was warned not to tolerate the evil influence of apostatizing women. Christ's spirit-inspired message to the congregation helps godly women to keep their God-assigned place today. They do not try to exercise authority over men and do not lure any brothers into spiritual or physical fornication. (1 Timothy 2:12)

Instead, such women set an example in fine deeds and service to God's praise. (Psalm 68:11; 1 Peter 3:1-6) If the congregation guards what it has—pure doctrine and conduct and treasured Kingdom service—Christ will come with blessed rewards, not execution.

### To the Angel in Sardis

<sup>8</sup> The congregation in Sardis needed urgent help because it was dead spiritually. (Read Revelation 3:1-6.) Situated about 30 miles south of Thyatira, Sardis was a thriving city. Commerce, the fertility of the area, and the production of woolen cloth and carpets helped to make it a wealthy city that once had some 50,000 residents. According to the

8. (a) Where was Sardis, and what are some details about it? (b) Why did the congregation in Sardis need help?



*The evil ways of  
"that woman Jezebel"  
must be avoided*

historian Josephus, Sardis had a large Jewish community in the first century B.C.E. Among the city's ruins are a synagogue and a temple of the Ephesian goddess Artemis.

<sup>9</sup> Christ told the angel of the Sardis congregation: "I know your deeds, that you have the name that you are alive, but you are dead." What if we have the reputation of being awake spiritually but we are largely asleep to Christian privileges and our service activities are perfunctory and spiritually "ready to die"? Then we need to 'continue mindful of how we received and heard' the Kingdom message, and we should revitalize our efforts in sacred service. We certainly ought to start participating wholeheartedly in Christian meetings. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Christ warned the congregation in Sardis: "Unless you wake up, I shall come as a thief, and you will not know at all at what hour I shall come upon you." What about our day? Soon we will have to render an account.

<sup>10</sup> Even in a situation like the one in Sardis, there may be a few who 'do not defile their outer garments and who can walk with Christ in white ones because they are worthy.' They maintain their Christian identity, remaining undefiled, without moral and religious spot from this world. (James 1:27) Hence, Jesus 'will by no means blot out their names from the book of life, but he will acknowledge them before his Father and the angels.' Pronounced worthy to walk with Christ, his bride class of anointed ones will be arrayed in bright, clean, fine linen that symbolizes the righteous acts of God's holy ones. (Revelation 19:8) The wonderful service privileges awaiting them in heaven spur them on to conquer this world. Blessings are also set before those in line for eternal earthly life. Their names too are written in the book of life.

9. What should be done if our service activities are perfunctory?

10. Even in a situation like the one in Sardis, what may be true of a few Christians?

<sup>11</sup> None of us want to get into the sad spiritual state of the congregation in Sardis. But what if we discern that we are getting sleepy spiritually? We should act quickly for our own good. Suppose we are being drawn to ungodly ways or are becoming lax in meeting attendance or in our ministry. Let us seek Jehovah's help in earnest prayer. (Philippians 4:6, 7, 13) Daily Bible reading and study of the Scriptures and the publications of "the faithful steward" will contribute to our spiritual wakefulness. (Luke 12:42-44) Then we will be like those in Sardis who had Christ's approval, and we will be a blessing to fellow believers.

### To the Angel in Philadelphia

<sup>12</sup> Jesus commended the Philadelphia congregation. (Read Revelation 3:7-13.) Philadelphia (now Alasehir) was the prosperous center of a wine-producing region in western Asia Minor. In fact, its chief deity was Dionysus, the god of wine. Evidently, Jews in Philadelphia unsuccessfully tried to persuade Jewish Christians there to retain certain practices of the Mosaic Law or to return to them.

<sup>13</sup> Christ "has the key of David," and he has thus been entrusted with all Kingdom interests and the administration of the household of faith. (Isaiah 22:22; Luke 1:32) Jesus used that key to open up Kingdom opportunities and privileges to Christians in ancient Philadelphia and elsewhere. Since 1919 he has set before "the faithful steward" "a large door" that leads to Kingdom preaching that no opposer can shut. (1 Corinthians 16:9; Colossians 4:2-4) Of course, the door to Kingdom privileges has been shut to those of "the synagogue of Satan," for they are not spiritual Israelites.

11. What should we do if we are getting sleepy spiritually?

12. How would you describe the religious situation in ancient Philadelphia?

13. How has Christ used "the key of David"?

<sup>14</sup> Jesus gave Christians in ancient Philadelphia this promise: "Because you kept the word about my endurance, I will also keep you from the hour of test, which is to come upon the whole inhabited earth." Preaching calls for the kind of endurance that Jesus displayed. He never gave in to the enemy but kept on doing his Father's will. Therefore, Christ was resurrected to immortal heavenly life. If we hold fast to our decision to worship Jehovah and we support the Kingdom by preaching the good news, we will be kept from falling during the present period of test-

14. (a) What promise did Jesus give the congregation in Philadelphia? (b) How can we keep from falling during "the hour of test"?

ing, "the hour of test." We will 'keep on holding fast what we have' from Christ by striving to increase those Kingdom interests. Doing this will result in a priceless heavenly crown for anointed ones and everlasting earthly life for their loyal companions.

<sup>15</sup> Christ adds: "The one that conquers—I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, . . . and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from my God, and that new

15. What is required of those who will be 'pillars in God's temple'?

*Jesus has set before his followers "a large door" that leads to Kingdom privileges*



name of mine." Anointed overseers must uphold true worship. They must stay in line for membership in "the new Jerusalem" by preaching about God's Kingdom and keeping spiritually clean. This is necessary if they want to be pillars in the glorified heavenly temple and if they are to bear the name of God's city as its heavenly citizens and share the name of Christ as his bride. And, of course, they must have ears that "hear what the spirit says to the congregations."

### To the Angel in Laodicea

<sup>16</sup> Christ reproved the complacent congregation in Laodicea. (Read Revelation 3:14-22.) Some 90 miles east of Ephesus and situated at the junction of major trade routes in the fertile valley of the Lycus River, Laodicea was a very prosperous manufacturing city and banking center. Garments made from the black wool of the region were widely known. As the seat of a famous medical school, Laodicea probably produced the eye medicine known as Phrygian powder. Asclepius, a god of medicine, was one of the city's chief deities. Laodicea seems to have had a considerable number of Jews, some of whom apparently were quite wealthy.

<sup>17</sup> Addressing the congregation in Laodicea through its "angel," Jesus speaks authoritatively as "the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God." (Colossians 1:13-16) The Laodiceans were reproved for being "neither cold nor hot" spiritually. Because they were lukewarm, Christ was going to vomit them out of his mouth. It should not have been hard for them to grasp that point. Nearby Hierapolis had hot springs, and Colossae had cold water. Since water had to be piped to Laodicea over quite a distance, however, it was likely lukewarm when it reached the city. Part of the way, it

was conveyed by an aqueduct. Closer to Laodicea, it ran through bored stone blocks cemented together.

<sup>18</sup> Individuals of the Laodicean type today are neither stimulatingly hot nor refreshingly cold. Like lukewarm water, out of the mouth they go! Jesus does not want them as his mouthpiece, as anointed "ambassadors substituting for Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:20) Unless they repent, they will lose their privilege as Kingdom proclaimers. The Laodiceans sought earthly riches and 'did not know that they were miserable, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.' To remove their spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness, any who are like them today need to buy from Christ the 'refined gold' of tested faith, "white outer garments" of righteousness, and "eyesalve" that promotes spiritual sight. Christian overseers are glad to help them to be conscious of their spiritual need so that they become "rich in faith." (James 2:5; Matthew 5:3) Furthermore, overseers need to assist them to apply spiritual "eyesalve"—to accept and conform to Jesus' teaching, counsel, example, and mental attitude. This is a healing remedy against "the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life." —1 John 2:15-17.

<sup>19</sup> Jesus reproves and disciplines all those for whom he has affection. Overseers under him must with tenderness do the same thing. (Acts 20:28, 29) The Laodiceans needed to "be zealous and repent," making changes in their thinking and way of life. Well, have some of us become accustomed to a life-style that relegates our sacred service to God to a minor role in life? Then let us 'buy eyesalve from Jesus' so that we can see the importance of zealously seeking first the Kingdom.—Matthew 6:33.

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16. What are some facts about Laodicea?  
17. Why were the Laodiceans reproved?

- 18, 19. How may present-day Christians like those in Laodicea be helped?

<sup>20</sup> "Look!" says Christ, "I am standing at the door and knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into his house and take the evening meal with him and he with me." Jesus often imparted spiritual instruction as he partook of meals. (Luke 5: 29-39; 7:36-50; 14:1-24) He now knocks on the door of the Laodicean kind of congregation. Will its members respond to his knock, revive their affection for him, welcome him into their midst, and let him teach them? If so, Christ will feast with them to their great spiritual benefit.

<sup>21</sup> Today's "other sheep" are figuratively letting Jesus in, and such action leads to everlasting life. (John 10:16; Matthew 25:34-40, 46) To each conquering anointed one, Christ will grant the privilege of 'sitting down with him on his throne, even as he conquered and sat

20, 21. Who are responding properly to Jesus' "knocking" today, and what are their prospects?

### How Would You Respond?

- Who was "that woman Jezebel," and why do godly women not imitate her?
- What condition existed in the congregation in Sardis, and what can we do to avoid becoming like many Christians living there?
- What promises did Jesus give the Philadelphia congregation, and how do they apply today?
- Why were the Laodiceans reproved, but what prospects are set before zealous Christians?



*Do you welcome Jesus and listen to him?*

down with his Father on His throne.' Yes, to the anointed conquerors, Jesus promises the grand reward of a throne with him at his Father's right hand in heaven. And the conquering other sheep look forward to a wonderful place on earth under Kingdom rule.

### Lessons for All of Us

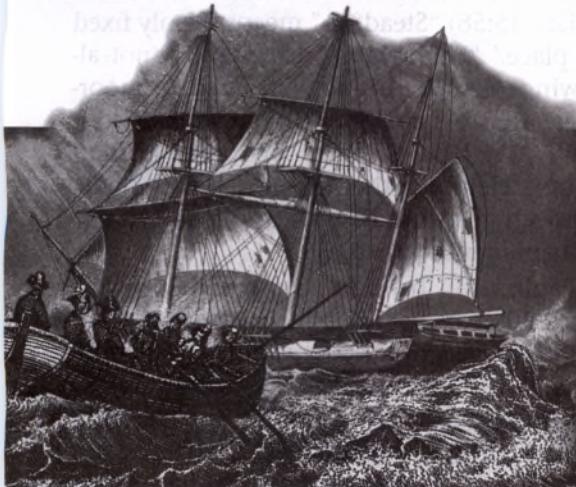
<sup>22</sup> There is no doubt that all Christians can benefit greatly from Jesus' words to the seven congregations in Asia Minor. Noting that Christ offered appropriate commendation, for instance, loving Christian elders are moved to commend individuals and congregations that are doing well spiritually. Where weaknesses exist, the elders help fellow believers to apply Scriptural remedies. All of us can continue to benefit from various features of the counsel Christ gave to the seven congregations, as long as we apply it prayerfully and without delay.\*

<sup>23</sup> These last days are no time for complacency, materialism, or anything else that might cause us to render mere token service to God. Let all the congregations therefore keep shining brightly as lampstands that Jesus retains in their place. As faithful Christians, may we always be determined to pay attention when Christ speaks and listen to what the spirit says. Then we will have lasting joy as light bearers to Jehovah's glory.

\* Revelation 2:1-3:22 is also discussed in chapters 7 through 13 of the book *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

22, 23. (a) How can all Christians benefit from Jesus' words to the seven congregations? (b) What should be our determination?

**I**F YOU had to travel through a stormy sea, what kind of vessel would you prefer? Would you want a flimsy dinghy or a sturdy, well-built ship? You would undoubtedly choose the ship, since it could more effectively negotiate the violent waves.



As we pass through this stormy and hazardous system of things, we face unsettling challenges. Young people, for instance, may sometimes feel disoriented and insecure amid this world's confusing ideas and trends. Individuals who recently started on the Christian course may still feel rather unsteady. Even some steadfast ones with many years of faithful service to God behind them may be undergoing a test because their expectations have not yet been completely fulfilled.

Such feelings are not new. Faithful servants of Jehovah, such as Moses, Job, and David, felt unsettled at times. (Numbers 11:14, 15; Job 3:1-4; Psalm 55:4) Yet, their life course was marked by steadfast devotion to Jehovah. Their fine example encourages steadfastness on our part, but Satan the Devil wants to sidetrack us from the race for life everlasting. (Luke 22:31) So how can we remain steadfast, "solid in the faith"? (1 Peter 5:9) And how can we strengthen our fellow believers?

## Jehovah Wants Us to Be Steadfast

If we are faithful to Jehovah, he will always be there to help us maintain our stability. The psalmist David faced many challenging situations, but he hoped in God and could therefore sing: "[Jehovah] also proceeded to bring me up out of a roaring pit, out of the mire of the sediment. Then he raised up my feet

## REMAIN STEADFAST, *and Win the Race for Life*

The Complete Encyclopedia of Illustration/J. G. Heck

upon a crag; he firmly established my steps." —Psalm 40:2.

Jehovah strengthens us to wage "the fine fight of the faith" so that we can 'get a firm hold on everlasting life.' (1 Timothy 6:12) He also provides the means for us to remain stable and come off victorious in our spiritual warfare. The apostle Paul urged fellow Christians to "go on acquiring power in the Lord and in the mightiness of his strength," and to 'put on the complete suit of armor from God so that they might be able to stand firm against the machinations of the Devil.' (Ephesians 6:10-17) But what could unsettle us? And how can we ward off such perilous influences?

### Beware of Destabilizing Factors

It is wise to remember this vital fact: The decisions we make eventually affect our Christian stability either positively or negatively. Youths are faced with decisions

regarding such matters as a career, further education, and marriage. Adults may have to decide whether to move to another location or to take an additional job. We make decisions every day regarding the use of time and many other matters. What will help us to make wise decisions that will contribute to our stability as God's servants? One longtime Christian said: "I ask for Jehovah's help when making decisions. I believe it is important to accept and apply counsel given in the Bible, at Christian meetings, by the elders, and in Bible-based publications."

When making decisions, we would do well to ask ourselves: 'Five or ten years from now, will I be happy with the decisions I am making today, or will I regret them? Do I endeavor to make sure that my decisions will not destabilize me spiritually but will contribute to my spiritual progress?'—Philippians 3:16.

Succumbing to temptations or allowing themselves to come close to violating God's laws has caused some baptized individuals to lead an unsteady life. A few who have been expelled from the congregation because of unrepentantly pursuing a sinful course have worked hard to be reinstated, only to be disfellowshipped again—sometimes shortly afterward—because of similar wrongdoing. Could it be that they have not prayed for divine help to 'abhor what is wicked and cling to what is good'? (Romans 12:9; Psalm 97:10) All of us need to "keep making straight paths for [our] feet." (Hebrews 12:13) Let us therefore consider some points that can help us to maintain spiritual stability.

### Keep Steadfast Through Christian Activity

One way to keep a steady pace in our race for life is to have much to do in the Kingdom-preaching work. Yes, our Christian ministry is a valuable aid in keeping our hearts and minds focused on the doing of God's will and

firmly fixed on the prize of everlasting life. In this regard, Paul urged the Corinthians: "My beloved brothers, become steadfast, unmovable, always having plenty to do in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in connection with the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58) "Steadfast" means 'firmly fixed in place.' "Unmovable" can signify 'not allowing oneself to be loosed from one's moorings.' Hence, being busy in our ministry can have a stabilizing effect on our Christian course. Helping other people to get to know Jehovah gives our lives meaning and brings us happiness.—Acts 20:35.

Pauline, a Christian who has spent more than 30 years as a missionary and in other full-time preaching activity, notes: "The ministry is a protection because witnessing to others confirms to me that I do have the truth." Similar conviction also results from regularly engaging in other Christian activities, such as attending meetings for worship and doing diligent personal Bible study.

### Stabilized by a Loving Brotherhood

Being part of the worldwide organization of true worshipers can have a powerful stabilizing effect on us. What a blessing it is to be associated with such a loving, global brotherhood! (1 Peter 2:17) And we can have a stabilizing effect on our fellow believers.

Consider the helpful actions of the upright man Job. Even the false comforter Eliphaz was forced to admit: "Anyone stumbling, your words would raise up; and knees giving way you would make firm." (Job 4:4) How are we doing in this respect? We individually have the responsibility to help our spiritual brothers and sisters to endure in God's service. In our dealings with them, we can act in the spirit of the words: "Strengthen the weak hands, you people, and make the knees that are wobbling firm." (Isaiah 35:3) So why not make it your aim to strengthen and en-

*Are you doing all you can to help fellow Christians remain steadfast?*

courage one or two fellow Christians every time you meet with them? (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Heartening words of commendation and gratitude for their continued efforts to please Jehovah can really help them to remain steadfast with a view to winning the race for life.

Christian elders can do much good by encouraging newer ones. This may be possible by offering helpful suggestions and sound Scriptural advice and by working with them in the field ministry. The apostle Paul always seized opportunities to strengthen others. He longed to see the Christians in Rome so that he could help to fortify them spiritually. (Romans 1:11) He considered his beloved brothers and sisters in Philippi to be his "joy and crown" and exhorted them to "stand firm in this way in the Lord." (Philippians 4:1) Upon hearing about the hardships of his brothers in Thessalonica, Paul sent Timothy to 'make them firm and comfort them, that no one might be swayed by tribulations.'—1 Thessalonians 3:1-3.

The apostles Paul and Peter acknowledged and appreciated the faithful efforts of their fellow worshipers. (Colossians 2:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:7, 8; 2 Peter 1:12) Let us similarly focus, not on the weaknesses of our brothers, but on their fine qualities and their successful fight to remain steadfast and honor Jehovah.

If we are negative or critical, we may inadvertently make it more difficult for some to maintain firmness in the faith. How appropriate it is to remember that our brothers are "skinned and thrown about" in this system of things! (Matthew 9:36) In the Christian congregation, they rightly expect to find comfort and refreshment. May all of us,



therefore, do our very best to build up fellow believers and help them to remain steadfast.

Others may occasionally deal with us in a way that could diminish our steadfastness. Will we let a harsh comment or an unkind act bring us to a low ebb in our service to Jehovah? May we never let anyone draw us away from our steadfastness!—2 Peter 3:17.

#### **God's Promises—A Stabilizing Influence**

Jehovah's promise of a marvelous future under Kingdom rule gives us hope that helps us to maintain our steadfastness. (Hebrews 6:19) And the conviction that God always fulfills his promises motivates us to 'stay awake and stand firm in the faith.' (1 Corinthians 16:13; Hebrews 3:6) A seeming delay in the fulfillment of some of God's promises may test our faith. It is therefore imperative that we be on guard against being misled by false teachings and shifted away from our hope.—Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 13:9.

The bad example of the Israelites who perished because they did not have faith in Jehovah's promises should serve as a warning for us. (Psalm 78:37) Rather than being like them, may we be steadfast, serving God with a sense of urgency in these last days. "I live every day as if the great day of Jehovah will

come tomorrow," said one experienced elder.  
—Joel 1:15.

Yes, the great day of Jehovah is imminent. However, we have nothing to fear as long as

we stay close to God. If we firmly adhere to his righteous standards and remain steadfast, we can successfully run the race for life eternal!—Proverbs 11:19; 1 Timothy 6:12, 17-19.

## Each One Will Sit Under His FIG TREE

**S**HADE is at a premium during the hot summers in the lands of the Middle East. Any tree offering refuge from the sun's rays is welcome, especially when it grows near one's home. With its large, broad leaves and wide-spreading branches, the fig tree provides better shade than almost any other tree of the region.

According to the book *Plants of the Bible*, the "shade [of a fig tree] is said to be fresher and cooler than that of a tent."

Fig trees growing at the edges of vineyards in ancient Israel offered field workers ideal places for a brief rest.

At the end of a long, hot day, family members could sit under their fig tree and enjoy pleasant association. Moreover, the fig tree rewards its owner with abundant, nutritious fruit. From the time of King Solomon, therefore, sitting under one's own fig tree represented peace, prosperity, and plenty.  
—1 Kings 4:24, 25.



Centuries earlier, the prophet Moses described the Promised Land as 'a land of figs.' (Deuteronomy 8:8) Twelve spies provided evidence of its fertility by bringing figs and other fruit back to the Israelite camp. (Numbers 13:21-23) In the 19th century, a traveler to the Bible lands reported that the fig tree was one of the most common trees there. No wonder the Scriptures often mention figs and fig trees!

### A Tree With a Double Harvest

The fig tree adapts to most soils, and its extensive root system enables it to endure the long, dry summers of the Middle East. The tree is unusual in that it provides a harvest of early figs in June and a main crop generally from August onward. (Isaiah 28:4) The Israelites usually ate the early crop as fresh fruit. They dried the later crop for use throughout

the year. Dried figs could be pressed into round cakes, sometimes with almonds added. These fig cakes were convenient, nourishing, and delicious.

The discreet woman Abigail gave David 200 cakes of pressed figs, no doubt thinking that this would be an ideal food for fugitives. (1 Samuel 25:18, 27) Pressed figs also had medicinal value. A poultice of pressed, dried figs was applied to a boil that threatened the life of King Hezekiah, though his subsequent recovery was principally due to divine intervention.\*—2 Kings 20:4-7.



In ancient times, dried figs were greatly appreciated throughout the Mediterranean region. The statesman Cato brandished a fig to convince the Roman Senate to embark on the Third Punic War, against Carthage. The best dried figs in Rome came from Caria, in Asia Minor. Thus, *carica* became the Latin name for dried figs. The same region of present-day Turkey still produces dried figs of excellent quality.

Israelite farmers often planted fig trees in vineyards, but they would cut down unpro-

\* H. B. Tristram, a naturalist who visited the Bible lands in the middle of the 19th century, observed that the local people still used a poultice of figs for treating boils.

ductive trees. Good soil was too scarce to be wasted on unfruitful trees. In Jesus' illustration of an unproductive fig tree, the farmer told the vinedresser: "Here it is three years that I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, but have found none. Cut it down! Why really should it keep the ground useless?" (Luke 13:6, 7) Since fruit trees were taxed in the time of Jesus, any unproductive tree would also be an undesirable economic burden.

Figs were of great importance in the Israelite diet. Consequently, a poor fig harvest—perhaps associated with adverse judgment from Jehovah—would be a calamity. (Hosea 2:12; Amos 4:9) The prophet Habakkuk said: "Although the fig tree itself may not blossom, and there may be no yield on the vines; the work of the olive tree may actually turn out a failure, and the terraces themselves may actually produce no food . . . Yet, as for me, I will exult in Jehovah himself; I will be joyful in the God of my salvation."—Habakkuk 3:17, 18.

### Symbol of a Faithless Nation

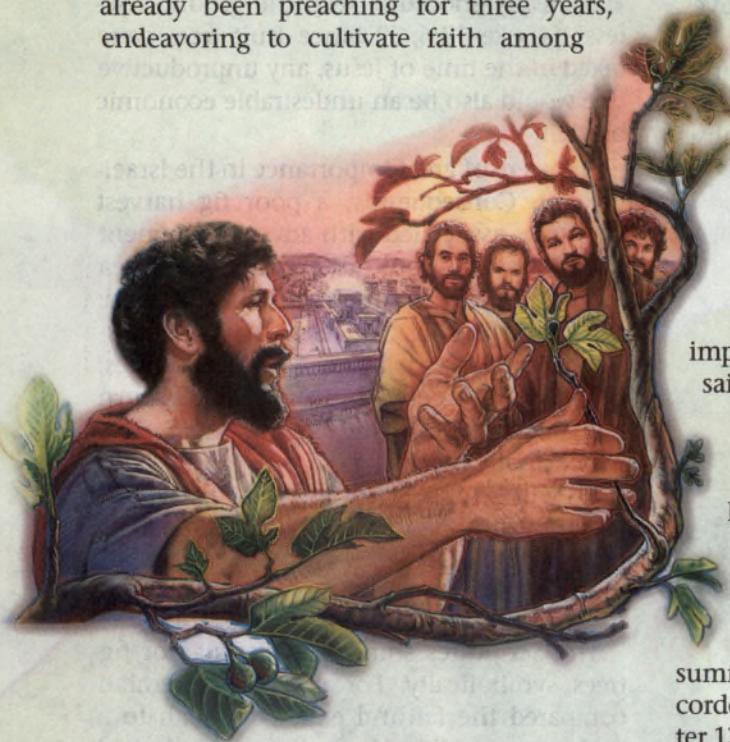
The Scriptures sometimes use figs or fig trees symbolically. For instance, Jeremiah compared the faithful exiles of Judah to a basket of good figs, the early figs that would usually be eaten fresh. However, the unfaithful exiles were likened to bad figs, which could not be eaten and would have to be discarded.—Jeremiah 24:2, 5, 8, 10.

In his illustration of the unproductive fig tree, Jesus showed God's patience with the Jewish nation. As noted earlier, he spoke of a certain man who had a fig tree in his vineyard. The tree had been unproductive for three years, and the owner was about to have it cut



down. But the vinedresser said: "Master, let it alone also this year, until I dig around it and put on manure; and if then it produces fruit in the future, well and good; but if not, you shall cut it down."—Luke 13:8, 9.

When Jesus gave this illustration, he had already been preaching for three years, endeavoring to cultivate faith among



members of the Jewish nation. Jesus intensified his activity, "fertilizing" the symbolic fig tree—the Jewish nation—and affording it an opportunity to produce fruit. The week before Jesus died, however, it became evident that the nation in general had rejected the Messiah.—Matthew 23:37, 38.

Once again Jesus used the fig tree to illustrate the bad spiritual state of the nation. While traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem four days before his death, he saw a fig tree that had abundant leaves but no fruit whatsoever. Since the early figs appear along with the leaves—and sometimes even be-

fore the leaves develop—the tree's lack of fruit showed that it was worthless.—Mark 11:13, 14.\*

Like the unproductive fig tree that looked healthy, the Jewish nation had a deceptive outward appearance. But it had not produced godly fruitage, and it finally rejected Jehovah's own Son. Jesus cursed the sterile fig tree, and on the following day, the disciples noticed that it had already withered. That dried-up tree aptly signified God's forthcoming rejection of the Jews as his chosen people.—Mark 11:20, 21.

### "Learn From the Fig Tree"

Jesus also used the fig tree to teach an important lesson about his presence. He said: "Learn from the fig tree as an illustration this point: Just as soon as its young branch grows tender and it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. Likewise also you, when you see all these things, know that he is near at the doors." (Matthew 24:32, 33) The fig tree's bright-green leaves are a noticeable and unmistakable harbinger of summer. Likewise, Jesus' great prophecy recorded in Matthew chapter 24, Mark chapter 13, and Luke chapter 21 provides clear evidence of his presence now in heavenly Kingdom power.—Luke 21:29-31.

Since we are living at such a crucial time in history, surely we want to learn from the fig tree. If we do so and keep awake spiritually, we have the hope of experiencing the fulfillment of the grand promise: "They will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble; for the very mouth of Jehovah of armies has spoken it."—Micah 4:4.

\* This incident took place near the village of Bethphage. Its name means "House of the Early Figs." This may indicate that the area was known for producing good crops of early figs.

# Tatian—Apologist or Heretic?

TOWARD the end of his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul called a meeting of the older men of the congregation in Ephesus. He told them: "I know that after my going away oppressive wolves will enter in among you and will not treat the flock with tenderness, and from among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves." —Acts 20:29, 30.

True to Paul's words, the second century C.E. proved to be a time both of change and of the foretold apostasy. Gnosticism, a widespread religious and philosophical movement that polluted the faith of some believers, was on the move. Gnostics believed that spiritual things are good and that all matter is evil. Reasoning that all flesh is evil, they rejected marriage and procreation, claiming that Satan originated these. Some of them believed that since only that which pertains to the spirit is good, it does not matter what a man does with his physical body. Such viewpoints resulted in extreme life-styles, either asceticism or fleshly indulgence. The Gnostic claim that salvation came only from mystical Gnosticism, or self-knowledge, left no room for the truth of God's Word.

How did professed Christians respond to the threat of Gnosticism? Some learned men spoke out against its erroneous doctrine, while others succumbed to its influence. Irenaeus, for example, embarked on a lifelong struggle against heretical teachings. He had been educated by Polycarp, a man who was a living link to the apostles. Polycarp recommended strong adherence to the teachings of

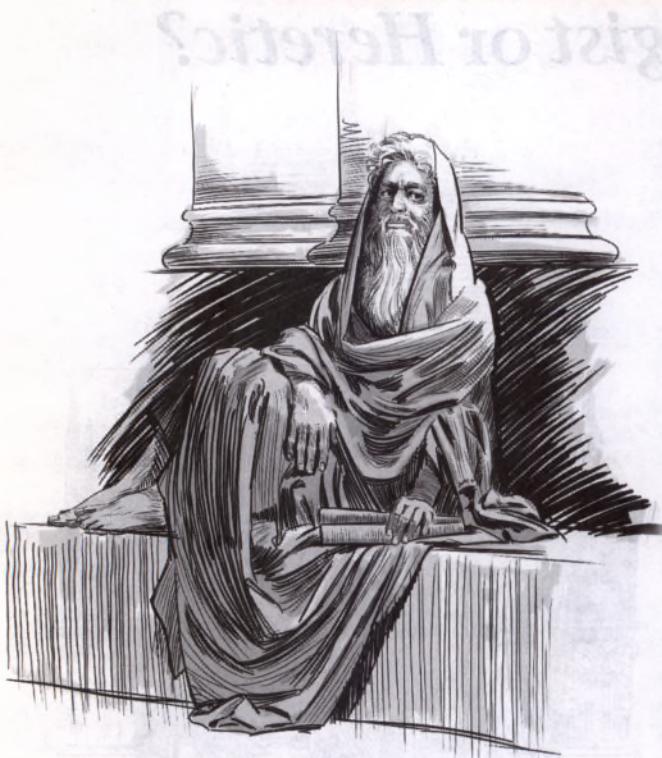


Jesus Christ and his apostles. Despite having learned under the same tutelage, however, Irenaeus' friend Florinus lapsed into the teachings of Valentinus, the most prominent leader of the Gnostic movement. Those were turbulent times indeed.

Shedding light on the climate of that period are the works of Tatian, a notable writer of the second century. What kind of a man was Tatian? How did he become a professed Christian? And how did Tatian fare under the influence of Gnostic heresy? His intriguing rejoinders and his own example provide valuable lessons for truth-seekers of today.

## Meeting With “Certain Barbaric Writings”

Tatian was a native of Syria. Extensive travels and prolific reading made him



knowledgeable in the Greco-Roman culture of his day. Tatian came to Rome as an itinerant rhetorician. While he was in Rome, though, his attention was diverted to Christianity. He began to associate with Justin Martyr, perhaps becoming his pupil.

In a revealing account of his conversion to nominal Christianity, Tatian claims: "I sought how I might be able to discover the truth." Expounding on his personal experience when exposed to the Scriptures, he says: "I happened to meet with certain barbaric writings, too old to be compared with the opinions of the Greeks, and too divine to be compared with their errors; and I was led to put faith in these by the unpretending cast of the language, the inartificial character of the writers, the foreknowledge displayed of future events, the excellent quality of the precepts, and the declaration of the

government of the universe as centered in one Being."

Tatian did not hesitate to invite his contemporaries to examine the Christianity of his day and to observe its simplicity and clarity in contrast with the darkness of heathenism. What can we learn from his writings?

### What Do His Writings Reveal?

Tatian's writings portray him as an apologist, a writer who speaks out in defense of his faith. He had a stern and antagonistic attitude toward pagan philosophy. In his work *Address to the Greeks*, Tatian accentuates the worthlessness of paganism and the reasonableness of nominal Christianity. His style is very harsh as he expresses contempt for Greek ways. For example, with reference to philosopher Heraclitus, he states: "Death, however, demonstrated the stupidity of this man; for, being attacked by dropsy, as he had studied the art of medicine as well as philosophy, he plastered himself with cow dung, which, as it hardened, contracted the flesh of his whole body, so that he was pulled in pieces, and thus died."

Tatian held in high esteem the belief in one God, the Creator of all things. (Hebrews 3:4) In *Address to the Greeks*, he refers to God as "a Spirit" and says: "He alone is without beginning, and He Himself is the beginning

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Learning the Secret of Self-Sufficiency

Stand Still and See the Salvation  
of Jehovah!

Incense-Burning—Does It Have  
a Place in True Worship?

of all things." (John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17) Rejecting the use of images in worship, Tatian writes: "How can I speak of stocks and stones as gods?" (1 Corinthians 10:14) He believed that the Word, or the Logos, came into existence as the firstborn of the heavenly Father's works and thereafter was used in the creation of the material universe. (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:13-17) Concerning the resurrection at the appointed time, Tatian states: "We believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of all things." As to why we die, Tatian writes: "We were not created to die, but we die by our own fault. Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through sin."

The explanation Tatian gives of the soul is confusing. He says: "The soul is not in itself immortal, O Greeks, but mortal. Yet it is possible for it not to die. If, indeed, it knows not the truth, it dies, and is dissolved with the body, but rises again at last at the end of the world with the body, receiving death by punishment in immortality." Exactly what Tatian meant by these statements is unclear. Could it be that while sticking to certain Bible teachings, he also tried to keep in favor with his contemporaries and therefore tainted Scriptural truths with pagan philosophies?

Another notable work of Tatian's is the *Diatessaron*, or *Harmony of the Four Gospels*. Tatian was the first to give the congregations in Syria the Gospels in their own tongue. This was a highly regarded work, weaving the four Gospels into a single narrative. It was used by the Syrian Church.

### A Christian or a Heretic?

A careful examination of Tatian's writings reveals that he was familiar with the Scriptures and had great respect for them. He writes regarding their influence on him: "I

am not anxious to be rich; I decline military command; I detest fornication; I am not impelled by an insatiable love of gain to go to sea; . . . I am free from a mad thirst for fame . . . The same sun is for all, and one death for all, whether they live in pleasure or destitution." Tatian admonishes: "Die to the world, repudiating the madness that is in it. Live to God, and by apprehending Him lay aside your old nature."—Matthew 5:45; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Timothy 6:10.

Consider, however, Tatian's writing entitled *On Perfection According to the Doctrine of the Savior*. In this work he attributes matrimony to the Devil. Claiming that individuals would be tying their flesh to the perishable world through marriage, Tatian strongly condemns it.

It appears that about 166 C.E., after the death of Justin Martyr, Tatian either founded or associated with an ascetic sect called the Encratites. Its adherents emphasized strict self-control and mastery of one's body. They practiced an asceticism requiring abstinence from wine, marriage, and possessions.

### A Lesson to Be Learned

Why did Tatian deviate so far from the Scriptures? Did he become "a forgetful hearer"? (James 1:23-25) Did Tatian fail to turn down false stories and thereby fall prey to human philosophy? (Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:7) Since the errors he subscribed to were so great, could some mental aberration be suspected?

Whatever the case, Tatian's writings and example provide a glimpse of the religious climate of his day. They demonstrate how damaging the influence of worldly philosophy can be. May we take to heart the apostle Paul's warning to turn away "from the empty speeches that violate what is holy and from the contradictions of the falsely called 'knowledge.'"—1 Timothy 6:20.

## Questions From Readers

Why did *The Watchtower* of April 1, 2002, state on page 11, in paragraph 7, that water baptism of new Jewish believers at Pentecost 33 C.E. was in symbol of "their personal dedication to God through Christ," whereas the previously held view was that immersion of the Jews from 33 C.E. until 36 C.E. did not require such a personal dedication?

In 1513 B.C.E., Jehovah God gave the Israelites an opportunity to become a holy nation to him on the condition that they 'strictly obey his voice and keep his covenant.' They answered: "All that Jehovah has spoken we are willing to do."—Exodus 19:3-8; 24:1-8.

By agreeing to keep the Mosaic Law covenant, the Israelites dedicated

themselves to God. Subsequent generations of Jews were born into this dedicated nation. However, the baptism of Jews who became followers of Jesus Christ from Pentecost 33 C.E. onward meant something other than presenting themselves to God as members of a dedicated nation. It symbolized their dedication to Jehovah God in a new relationship with him through Jesus Christ. How so?

Following the outpouring of holy spirit upon about 120 disciples gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem at Pentecost 33 C.E., the apostle Peter stood up and began preaching to the multitude of Jews and proselytes who had come together to see what had happened. After giving a thorough witness, he said to the conscience-stricken Jews: "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of your sins." In response to Peter's further exhortation, "those who embraced his word heartily were baptized, and on that day about three thousand souls were added."

—Acts 2:1-41.

Were not those Jews baptized following Peter's exhortation already members of a dedicated nation? Did they not enjoy a dedicated relationship with God? No. The apostle Paul wrote that 'God had taken the Law out of the way by nailing it to the torture stake.' (Colossians 2:14) By means of Christ's death in 33 C.E., Jehovah God removed the Law covenant—the very basis for bringing the Israelites into a dedi-

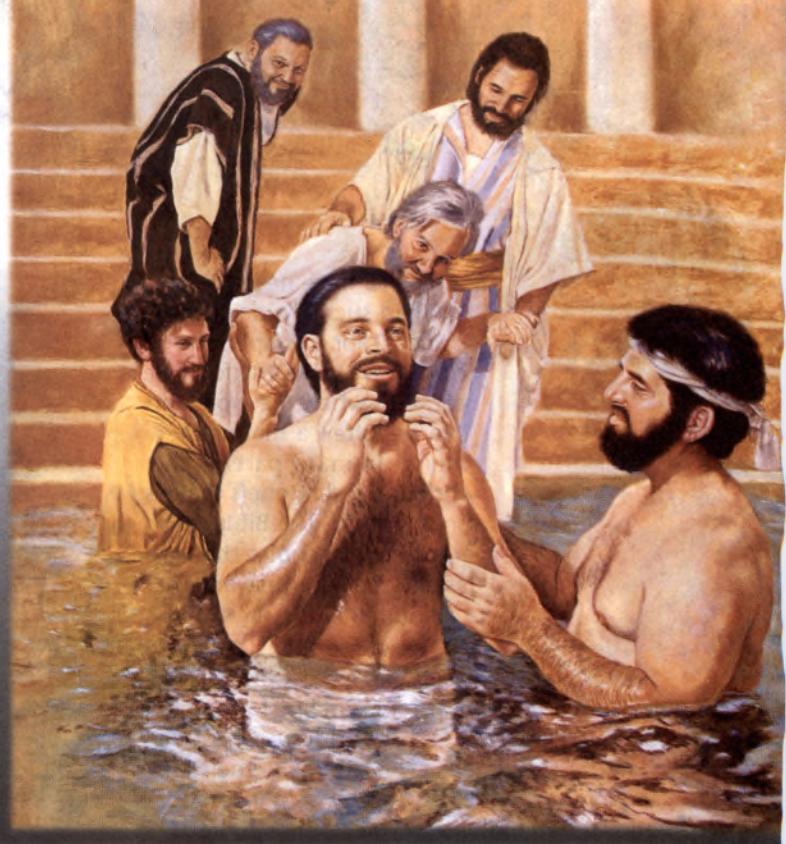
with Him. The nation that rejected God's Son was now rejected by God himself. 'That which was Israel in a fleshly way' could no longer claim to be a nation dedicated to God.—1 Corinthians 10:18; Matthew 21:43.

The Law covenant was abolished in 33 C.E., but God's period of special favor and attention to the Jews did not end at that time.\* That period was to continue until 36 C.E., when Peter preached to the devout Italian Cornelius and his household as well as to other Gentiles. (Acts 10:1-48) What was the basis for this extension of favor?

"[The Messiah] must keep the covenant in force for the many for one week," states Daniel 9:27. The covenant that was kept in force for seven years, or "one week," from Jesus' baptism and the beginning of the Messiah's public ministry in 29 C.E. was the Abrahamic covenant. To be in that covenant relationship, a person simply had to be one of Abraham's Hebrew offspring. That unilateral covenant did not give the individual a dedicated relationship with Jehovah. Hence, the Jewish believers undergoing baptism after Peter's speech at Pentecost 33 C.E., though recipients of special attention as natural Jews, had no claim to a dedicated relationship with God once the Law covenant had been removed. They personally needed to dedicate themselves to God.

A personal dedication on the part of Jews and proselytes presenting themselves for baptism

\* When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven and presented the value of his sacrificed human life to Jehovah God, the Mosaic Law covenant was voided and the basis was laid for the foretold "new covenant."—Jeremiah 31:31-34.



on the day of Pentecost 33 C.E. was essential for yet another reason. The apostle Peter exhorted his listeners to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name. Doing so required that they renounce the way of the world and acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Messiah, as High Priest, and as the one who sits at God's right hand in heaven. They needed to call upon the name of Jehovah God for salvation through Christ Jesus, which involved exercising faith in Christ and recognizing him as their Leader. The entire basis for having a relationship with God and for gaining forgiveness of sins had now changed. As individuals, the believing Jews needed to accept this new arrangement. How? By making a dedication to God and by going on public record as having done so by being immersed in water in the name of Jesus Christ. Water baptism was a symbol of their dedication to God, bringing them into a new relationship with him through Jesus Christ.—Acts 2:21, 33-36; 3:19-23.



**P**EOPLE have never before had such a wide array of choices. For example, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and where we work and live are often a matter of choice. In many parts of the world, choosing one's mate is also the norm. The Bible, however, presents a choice that surpasses all other choices—one that is open to all humankind.

The Bible says: "The one firmly standing for righteousness is in line for life, but the one chasing after what is bad is in line for his own death." (Proverbs 11:19) And Jesus Christ declared: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ."—John 17:3.

Yes, our Creator has extended to us the opportunity to choose a course that can lead to life everlasting! What must we do to gain eternal life?

According to the Bible, "in the path of righteousness there is life." (Proverbs 12:28) We can be among the righteous who are on the path to life everlasting. How? By making sure that our lives conform to God's will and his commands. (Matthew 7:13, 14) May we therefore make the right choice and receive God's gift of everlasting life.—Romans 6:23.

# Choose Life Eternal