

MAY 1, 1999

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

EVERYONE WANTS TO BE **FREE**



THE WATCHTOWER®

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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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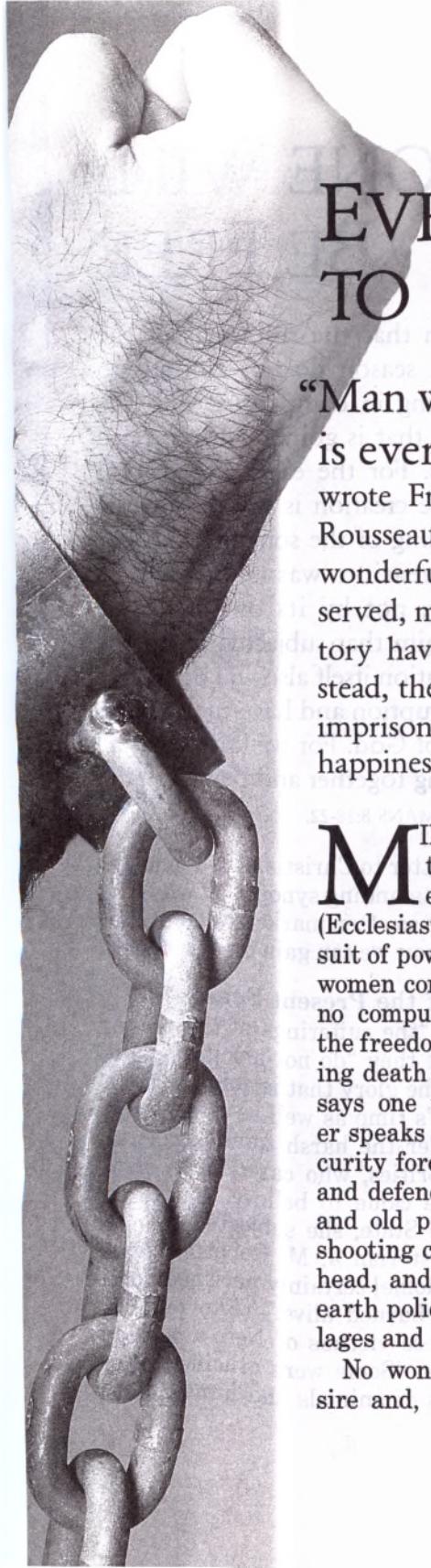
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EVERYONE WANTS TO BE FREE

"Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains,"

wrote French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1762. Born free. What a wonderful thought! But as Rousseau observed, millions of people throughout history have never experienced freedom. Instead, they have spent their lives "in chains," imprisoned in a system that has robbed them of any lasting happiness and satisfaction in life.



From the book
Beacon Lights of History, Vol. XIII

MILLIONS today still find that "man has dominated man to his injury." (Ecclesiastes 8:9) In their pursuit of power, ambitious men and women continue to show little or no compunction about crushing the freedoms of others. "Rampaging death squads kill 21 people," says one typical report. Another speaks of "butchery," with security forces 'killing unresisting and defenceless women, children and old people, cutting throats, shooting civilian prisoners in the head, and following a scorched-earth policy of destruction of villages and random shelling.'

No wonder people deeply desire and, indeed, fight for free-

dom from repression! The sad truth is, though, that fighting for one man's freedom often involves trampling on the rights and freedoms of another. Innocent men, women, and children are almost inevitably sacrificed in the process, their deaths "legitimized" by declaring the cause worthy and just. Last year in Ireland, for example, a car bomb planted by "freedom fighters" in the small country town of Omagh killed 29 innocent bystanders and injured hundreds more.

Still "in Chains"

When the fighting is over, what is gained? When the "freedom fighters" win their battles, some

limited freedom may be won. But, then, are they really free? Is it not true that even in the most liberated societies in the so-called free world, people are still "in chains" to such brutal masters as poverty, imperfection, sickness, and death? How can anyone say that he is truly free as long as such things continue to enslave him?

The ancient Bible writer Moses accurately described life as it has been for so many throughout history and as it still is today. We may live for 70 or 80 years, he said, "yet their insistence is on trouble and hurtful things." (Psalm 90:10) Will this ever change? Will it ever be possible for all of us to live fully satisfying lives, free from the pain and terror that so many suffer today?

The Bible says yes! It speaks of "the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:21) Let us consider closely that freedom, spoken of in the first century by the apostle Paul in a letter he wrote to Christians in Rome. In this letter Paul clearly explains how each of us can gain true, lasting "glorious freedom."



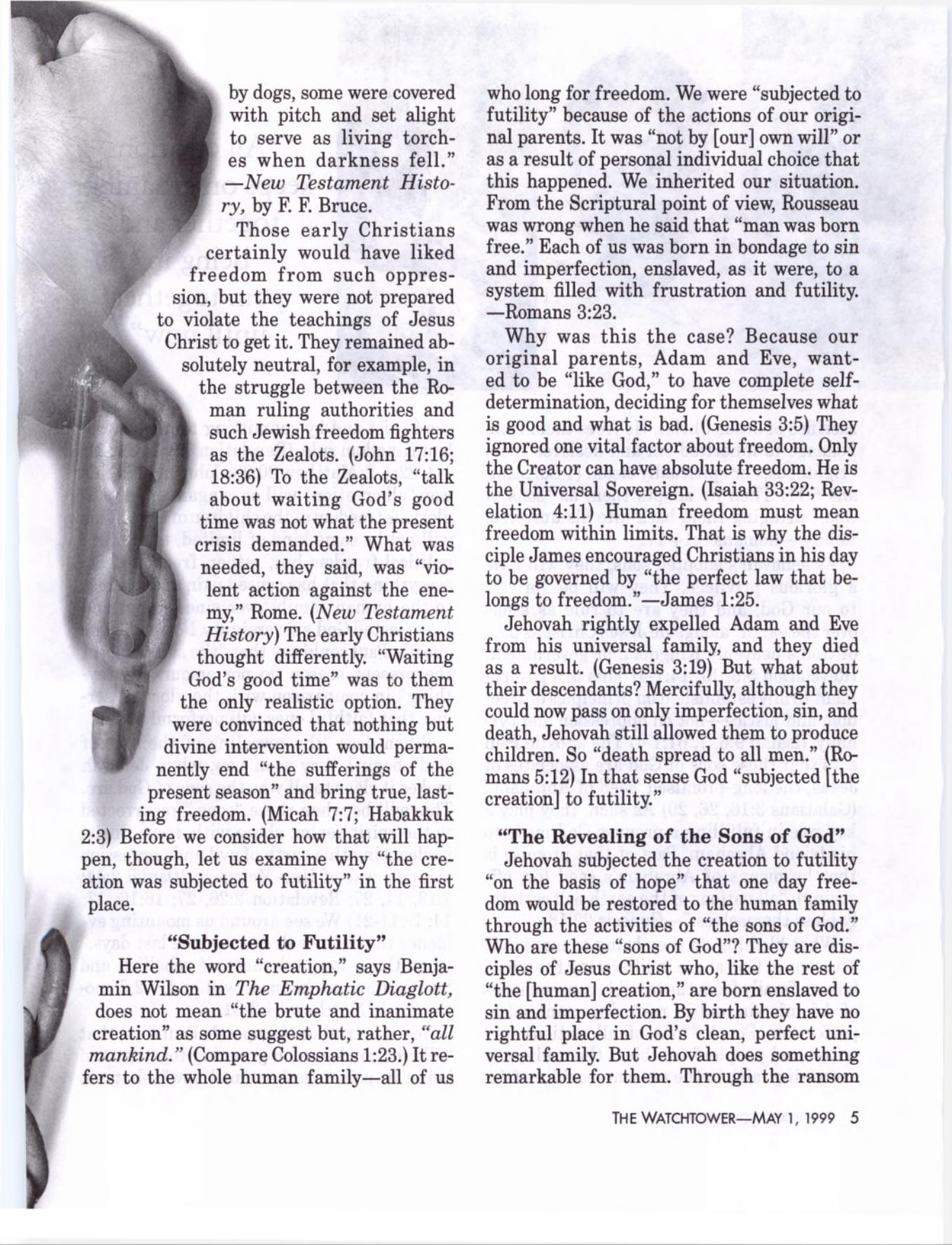
EVERYONE WILL BE FREE

"I reckon that the sufferings of the present season do not amount to anything in comparison with the glory that is going to be revealed in us. For the eager expectation of the creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will but through him that subjected it, on the basis of hope that the creation itself also will be set free from enslavement to corruption and have the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that all creation keeps on groaning together and being in pain together until now."—ROMANS 8:18-22.

IN THIS portion of his letter to Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul gives an outstanding synopsis of why lives lack true liberty and are so often marked by emptiness and pain. He also explains how we can gain true freedom.

"The Sufferings of the Present Season"

Paul does not minimize "the sufferings of the present season" when he says that they "do not amount to anything in comparison with the glory that is going to be revealed in us." During Paul's time as well as later, Christians suffered greatly under the harsh totalitarian rule exercised by Roman authorities, who cared little about human rights. Once Rome came to believe that Christians were enemies of the State, she subjected them to brutal repression. Says historian J. M. Roberts: "Many Christians in the capital [Rome] certainly perished horribly in the arena or were burned alive." (*Shorter History of the World*) Of these victims of Nero's persecution, another report states: "Some were crucified, some were sewn up in the skins of animals and hunted down



by dogs, some were covered with pitch and set alight to serve as living torches when darkness fell.”
—*New Testament History*, by F. F. Bruce.

Those early Christians certainly would have liked freedom from such oppression, but they were not prepared to violate the teachings of Jesus Christ to get it. They remained absolutely neutral, for example, in the struggle between the Roman ruling authorities and such Jewish freedom fighters as the Zealots. (John 17:16; 18:36) To the Zealots, “talk about waiting God’s good time was not what the present crisis demanded.” What was needed, they said, was “violent action against the enemy,” Rome. (*New Testament History*) The early Christians thought differently. “Waiting God’s good time” was to them the only realistic option. They were convinced that nothing but divine intervention would permanently end “the sufferings of the present season” and bring true, lasting freedom. (Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 2:3) Before we consider how that will happen, though, let us examine why “the creation was subjected to futility” in the first place.

“Subjected to Futility”

Here the word “creation,” says Benjamin Wilson in *The Emphatic Diaglott*, does not mean “the brute and inanimate creation” as some suggest but, rather, “all mankind.” (Compare Colossians 1:23.) It refers to the whole human family—all of us

who long for freedom. We were “subjected to futility” because of the actions of our original parents. It was “not by [our] own will” or as a result of personal individual choice that this happened. We inherited our situation. From the Scriptural point of view, Rousseau was wrong when he said that “man was born free.” Each of us was born in bondage to sin and imperfection, enslaved, as it were, to a system filled with frustration and futility. —Romans 3:23.

Why was this the case? Because our original parents, Adam and Eve, wanted to be “like God,” to have complete self-determination, deciding for themselves what is good and what is bad. (Genesis 3:5) They ignored one vital factor about freedom. Only the Creator can have absolute freedom. He is the Universal Sovereign. (Isaiah 33:22; Revelation 4:11) Human freedom must mean freedom within limits. That is why the disciple James encouraged Christians in his day to be governed by “the perfect law that belongs to freedom.”—James 1:25.

Jehovah rightly expelled Adam and Eve from his universal family, and they died as a result. (Genesis 3:19) But what about their descendants? Mercifully, although they could now pass on only imperfection, sin, and death, Jehovah still allowed them to produce children. So “death spread to all men.” (Romans 5:12) In that sense God “subjected [the creation] to futility.”

“The Revealing of the Sons of God”

Jehovah subjected the creation to futility “on the basis of hope” that one day freedom would be restored to the human family through the activities of “the sons of God.” Who are these “sons of God”? They are disciples of Jesus Christ who, like the rest of “the [human] creation,” are born enslaved to sin and imperfection. By birth they have no rightful place in God’s clean, perfect universal family. But Jehovah does something remarkable for them. Through the ransom



**"All creation
keeps on groaning
together and
being in
pain together
until now"**

sacrifice of Jesus Christ, He frees them from bondage to inherited sin and declares them "righteous," or spiritually clean. (1 Corinthians 6:11) Then he adopts them as "sons of God," bringing them back into his universal family.—Romans 8:14-17.

As Jehovah's adopted sons, they will have a glorious privilege. They will be "priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth" alongside Jesus Christ as part of God's heavenly Kingdom, or government. (Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1-4) This is a government firmly established on principles of freedom and justice—not on oppression and tyranny. (Isaiah 9:6, 7; 61:1-4) The apostle Paul says that these sons of God are associates of Jesus, the long-promised 'seed of Abraham.' (Galatians 3:16, 26, 29) As such, they play a key role in fulfilling a promise God made to his friend Abraham. Part of that promise is that by means of Abraham's seed (or, offspring), "all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves."—Genesis 22:18.

What blessing do they bring to mankind? The sons of God share in liberating the whole human family from the terrible consequences of Adamic sin and in restoring mankind to perfection. People "out of all nations and tribes and peoples" can bless themselves by exercising faith in the ransom sacrifice of Je-

sus Christ and by submitting to his benevolent Kingdom rule. (Revelation 7:9, 14-17; 21:1-4; 22:1, 2; Matthew 20:28; John 3:16) In this way "all creation" will once again enjoy "the glorious freedom of the children of God." This will not be some kind of limited, temporary political freedom but, rather, freedom from everything that has caused pain and distress to the human family ever since Adam and Eve rejected God's sovereignty. No wonder the apostle Paul could say that "the sufferings of the present season do not amount to anything" in comparison with the glorious service that faithful ones will perform!

When does "the revealing of the sons of God" begin? Very soon now, when Jehovah makes it clear to all who the sons of God are. This will be when these "sons," resurrected to the spirit realm, share with Jesus Christ in cleansing this earth of evil and oppression at God's war of Har-Magedon. (Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14, 27; Revelation 2:26, 27; 16:16; 17:14; 19:11-21) We see around us mounting evidence that we are deep into "the last days," when God's long tolerance of rebellion and its resultant wickedness will end.—2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 24:3-31.

Yes, it is true, as the apostle Paul says, that "all creation keeps on groaning together and being in pain together until now"—but not

'Creation will be set free from all enslavement and have the glorious freedom of the children of God'



for much longer. Millions now living will see the "restoration of all things of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets of old time," including a restoration of peace, freedom, and justice to the whole human family.—Acts 3:21.

True Freedom at Last

What must you do to enjoy this "glorious freedom of the children of God"? Jesus Christ said: "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31, 32) That is the key to freedom—learning and then obeying Christ's commands and teachings. This brings a degree of freedom even now. In the near future, it will bring complete freedom under the rule of Christ Jesus. The wise course is to get to know Jesus' "word" through a study of the Bible. (John 17:3) Like the early Christians, actively associate with the congregation of Christ's true disciples. By doing so, you can benefit from the liberating truths Jehovah makes available through his organization today.—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

While "waiting for the revealing of the sons of God," you may cultivate the confidence the apostle Paul had in Christ's protective care and support, even when suffer-

ings and injustices seem almost unbearable. After discussing the revealing of the sons of God, Paul asked: "Who will separate us from the love of the Christ? Will tribulation or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword?" (Romans 8:35) Of course, Christians in Paul's day were still, to use Rousseau's words, "in chains" to repressive forces of one kind or another. They were "being put to death all day long" like "sheep for slaughtering." (Romans 8:36) Did they allow that to overwhelm them?

"To the contrary," writes Paul, "in all these things we are coming off completely victorious through him that loved us." (Romans 8:37) Victorious despite all that early Christians had to endure? How so? "I am convinced," he says in answer, "that neither death nor life nor angels nor governments nor things now here nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creation will be able to separate us from God's love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39) You too can 'come off victorious' from whatever "tribulation or distress or persecution" you may have to endure in the meantime. God's love guarantees that soon—very soon now—we "will be set free from [all] enslavement . . . and have the glorious freedom of the children of God."

“THESE THINGS MUST TAKE PLACE”

“Jesus said to them: ‘. . . These things must take place, but the end is not yet.’”—MATTHEW 24:6.

YOU are no doubt interested in your life and in your future. Then you should also be interested in a subject that seized the attention of C. T. Russell back in 1877. Russell, who later founded the Watch Tower Society, wrote *The Object and Manner of Our Lord’s Return*. This 64-page booklet dealt with Jesus’ return, or future coming. (John 14:3) On one occasion when on the Mount of Olives, the apostles asked about that return: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence [or, “coming,” King James Version] and of the conclusion of the system of things?”—Matthew 24:3.

² Do you know and understand Jesus’ answer? It is found in three of the Gospels. Professor D. A. Carson states: “Few chapters of the Bible have called forth more disagreement among interpreters than Matthew 24 and its parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21.” He then gives his own opinion—just another of the conflicting human views. In the last century or so, many such views reflected a lack of faith. Those offering them held that Jesus never said what we read in the



Gospels, that his sayings were later corrupted, or that his prediction failed—views shaped by higher criticism. One commentator even approached Mark’s Gospel ‘through the lens of Mahayana-Buddhist philosophy’!

³ In contrast, Jehovah’s Witnesses accept the authenticity and reliability of the Bible, including what Jesus told the four

apostles who were with him on the Mount of Olives three days before his death. Since the days of C. T. Russell, God’s people have progressively gained a clearer understanding of the prophecy Jesus there gave. In the last few years, *The Watchtower* has clarified yet further their view of this prophecy. Have you absorbed that information, seeing its impact on your life?^{*} Let us review it.

A Tragic Fulfillment in the Offing

⁴ The apostles knew that Jesus was the Messiah. So when they heard him mention his death, resurrection, and return, they must have wondered, ‘If Jesus dies and goes

* See the study articles in the *Watchtower* issues of February 15, 1994; October 15 and November 1, 1995; and August 15, 1996.

3. How do Jehovah’s Witnesses approach Jesus’ prophecy?
4. Why might the apostles have asked Jesus about the future?

1. What subject should command our interest?
2. Why are there many conflicting views of what Jesus foretold?



away, how can he carry out the wonderful things that the Messiah is expected to do?" Further, Jesus spoke of an end for Jerusalem and its temple. The apostles might have wondered, 'When and how will that occur?' In trying to understand these things, the apostles asked: "When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are destined to come to a conclusion?"—Mark 13:4; Matthew 16:21, 27, 28; 23:37-24:2.

⁵ Jesus foretold that there would be wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, hatred and persecution of Christians, false messiahs, and a widespread preaching of the good news of the Kingdom. Then the end was to come. (Matthew 24:4-14; Mark 13:5-13; Luke 21:8-19) Jesus said this early in the

5. How did what Jesus said find a fulfillment in the first century?

year 33 C.E. During the following decades, his alert disciples could recognize that the foretold things were in fact occurring in a significant way. Yes, history proves that the sign had a fulfillment at that time, leading to a conclusion of the Jewish system of things at the hands of the Romans in 66-70 C.E. How did that come about?

⁶ During the hot Judean summer of 66 C.E., Jewish Zealots led an assault on Roman guards in a fort near the temple in Jerusalem, sparking violence elsewhere in the land. In *History of the Jews*, Professor Heinrich Graetz relates: "Cestius Gallus, whose duty it was as Governor of Syria to uphold the honor of Roman arms, . . . could no longer witness the rebellion spreading around him without an effort to stem

6. What developed between the Romans and the Jews in 66 C.E.?

its progress. He called his legions together, and the neighboring princes voluntarily sent their troops." This army of 30,000 surrounded Jerusalem. After some fighting, the Jews withdrew behind walls near the temple. "During five successive days the Romans stormed the walls, but were always obliged to fall back before the missiles of the Judæans. It was only on the sixth day that they succeeded in undermining a part of the northern wall in front of the Temple."

⁷ Just think how confused the Jews would have been, since they had long felt that God would protect them and their holy city! Jesus' disciples, though, had been forewarned that calamity awaited Jerusalem. Jesus had foretold: "The days will come upon you when your enemies will build around you a fortification with pointed stakes and will encircle you and distress you from every side, and they will dash you and your children within you to the ground, and they will not leave a stone upon a stone in you." (Luke 19:43, 44) But would that spell death for Christians inside Jerusalem in 66 C.E.?

⁸ When replying to the apostles on the Mount of Olives, Jesus predicted: "Those days will be days of a tribulation such as has not occurred from the beginning of the creation which God created until that time, and will not occur again. In fact, unless Jehovah had cut short the days, no flesh would be saved. But on account of the chosen ones whom he has chosen he has cut short the days." (Mark 13:19, 20; Matthew 24:21, 22) So the days would be cut short and "the chosen ones" saved. Who were they? Certainly not rebellious Jews who claimed to worship Jehovah but who had rejected his Son. (John 19:1-7; Acts 2:

7. Why could Jesus' disciples view things differently from most Jews?
8. What tragedy did Jesus foretell, and who were "the chosen ones" for whom the days would be cut short?

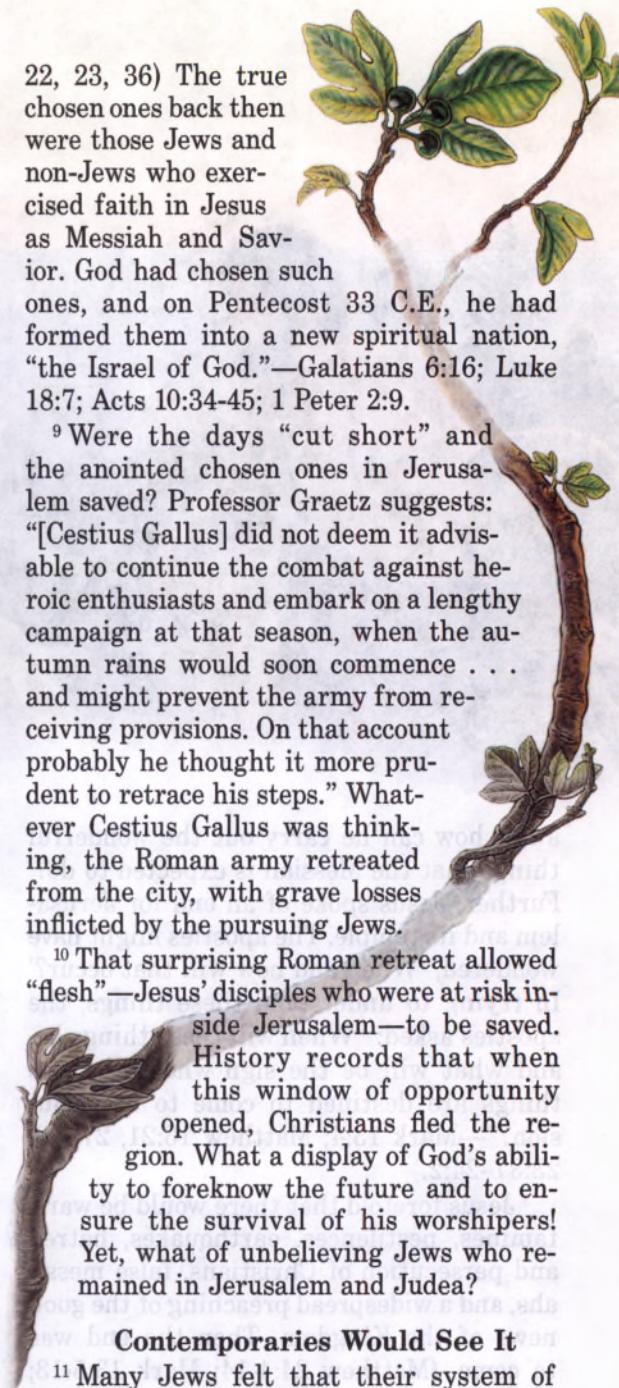
22, 23, 36) The true chosen ones back then were those Jews and non-Jews who exercised faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior. God had chosen such ones, and on Pentecost 33 C.E., he had formed them into a new spiritual nation, "the Israel of God."—Galatians 6:16; Luke 18:7; Acts 10:34-45; 1 Peter 2:9.

⁹ Were the days "cut short" and the anointed chosen ones in Jerusalem saved? Professor Graetz suggests: "[Cestius Gallus] did not deem it advisable to continue the combat against heroic enthusiasts and embark on a lengthy campaign at that season, when the autumn rains would soon commence . . . and might prevent the army from receiving provisions. On that account probably he thought it more prudent to retrace his steps." Whatever Cestius Gallus was thinking, the Roman army retreated from the city, with grave losses inflicted by the pursuing Jews.

¹⁰ That surprising Roman retreat allowed "flesh"—Jesus' disciples who were at risk inside Jerusalem—to be saved. History records that when this window of opportunity opened, Christians fled the region. What a display of God's ability to foreknow the future and to ensure the survival of his worshipers! Yet, what of unbelieving Jews who remained in Jerusalem and Judea?

Contemporaries Would See It

- ¹¹ Many Jews felt that their system of
- 9, 10. How were the days of the Roman attack "cut short," and with what result?
11. What did Jesus say about "this generation"?



worship, centered on the temple, would long continue. But Jesus said: “Learn from the fig tree . . . 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. *Truly I say to you that this generation will by no means pass away until all these things occur.* Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away.”—Matthew 24:32-35.

¹² In the years leading up to 66 C.E., Christians would have seen many of the preliminary elements of the composite sign being fulfilled—wars, famines, even an extensive preaching of the good news of the Kingdom. (Acts 11:28; Colossians 1:23) When, though, would the end come? What did Jesus mean when he said: ‘This generation [Greek, *ge·ne·a*] will not pass away’? Jesus had often called the contemporaneous mass of opposing Jews, including religious leaders, ‘a wicked, adulterous generation.’ (Matthew 11:16; 12:39, 45; 16:4; 17:17; 23:36) So when, on the Mount of Olives, he again spoke of “this generation,” he evidently did not mean the entire race of Jews throughout history; nor did he mean his followers, even though they were “a chosen race.” (1 Peter 2:9) Neither was Jesus saying that “this generation” is a period of time.

¹³ Rather, Jesus had in mind the opposing Jews back then who would experience the fulfillment of the sign he gave. Regarding the reference to “this generation” at Luke 21:32, Professor Joel B. Green notes: “In the Third Gospel, ‘this generation’ (and related phrases) has regularly signified a category of people who are resistant to the purpose of God. . . . [It refers] to people who stub-

12, 13. How would the disciples have understood Jesus’ reference to “this generation”?

bornly turn their backs on the divine purpose.”*

¹⁴ The wicked generation of Jewish opponents who could observe the sign being fulfilled would also experience the end. (Matthew 24:6, 13, 14) And that they did! In 70 C.E., the Roman army returned, led by Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian. The suffering of the Jews who were again bottled up in the city is almost beyond belief.¹⁵ Eye-witness Flavius Josephus reports that by the time the Romans demolished the city, about 1,100,000 Jews had died and some 100,000 were taken captive, most of those soon to perish horribly from starvation or in Roman theaters. Truly, the tribulation of 66-70 C.E. was the greatest that Jerusalem and the Jewish system had ever experienced or would ever experience. How different the outcome was for Christians who had heeded Jesus’ prophetic warning and had left Jerusalem after the departure of the Roman armies in 66 C.E.! The anointed Christian

* British scholar G. R. Beasley-Murray observes: “The phrase ‘this generation’ should cause no difficulty for interpreters. While admittedly *genea* in earlier Greek meant birth, progeny, and so race, . . . in the [Greek Septuagint] it most frequently translated the Hebrew term *dôr*, meaning age, age of humankind, or generation in the sense of contemporaries. . . . In sayings attributed to Jesus the term appears to have a twofold connotation: on the one hand it always signifies his contemporaries, and on the other hand it always carries an implicit criticism.”

¹⁵ In *History of the Jews*, Professor Graetz says that the Romans sometimes impaled 500 prisoners a day. Other captured Jews had their hands cut off and then were sent back into the city. What conditions prevailed there? “Money had lost its value, for it could not purchase bread. Men fought desperately in the streets over the most loathsome and disgusting food, a handful of straw, a piece of leather, or offal thrown to the dogs. . . . The rapidly increasing number of unburied corpses made the sultry summer air pestilential, and the populace fell a prey to sickness, famine, and the sword.”

14. What did that “generation” experience, but how was there a different outcome for Christians?

Detail on the Arch of Titus in Rome, showing spoils from Jerusalem's destruction

"chosen ones" were "saved," or kept safe, in 70 C.E.—Matthew 24:16, 22.

Another Fulfillment to Come

¹⁵ However, that was not the finale. Earlier, Jesus had indicated that *after* the city was devastated, he would come in Jehovah's name. (Matthew 23:38, 39; 24:2) He then made this clearer in his prophecy uttered on the Mount of Olives. Having mentioned the coming "great tribulation," he said that afterward false Christs would appear, and Jerusalem would be trampled on by the nations for an extended period. (Matthew 24:21, 23-28; Luke 21:24) Could it be that another, a greater, fulfillment was to come? The facts answer yes. When we compare Revelation 6:2-8 (written after the tribulation on Jerusalem in 70 C.E.) with Matthew 24:6-8 and Luke 21:10, 11, we see that warfare, food shortages, and plague on a *greater* scale lay ahead. This greater fulfillment of Jesus' words has been occurring since World War I erupted in 1914.

¹⁶ For decades now, Jehovah's Witnesses have taught that the current fulfillment of the sign proves that a "great tribulation" is yet to come. The present wicked "generation" will see that tribulation. It seems that there will again be an opening phase (an attack on all false religion), just as Galus' attack in 66 C.E. opened the tribulation on Jerusalem.* Then, after an interval of unspecified length, the end will come—destruction on a worldwide scale, paralleling that in 70 C.E.

* The next article discusses this aspect of the future tribulation.

15. How can we be sure that Jesus' prophecy would have a greater fulfillment after 70 C.E.? 16-18. What do we expect will yet occur?



Soprintendenza Archeologica di Roma

¹⁷ Referring to the tribulation just ahead of us, Jesus said: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days [the destruction of false religion] the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."—Matthew 24:29, 30.

¹⁸ Hence, Jesus himself says that "after the tribulation of those days," celestial phenomena of some sort will occur. (Compare Joel 2:28-32; 3:15.) This will so startle and shock disobedient humans that they will "beat themselves in lamentation." Many

will "become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth." But this will not be the case with true Christians! These 'will lift their heads up, because their deliverance is getting near.'—Luke 21:25, 26, 28.

Judgment Ahead!

¹⁹ Note that Matthew 24:29-31 foretells that (1) the Son of man comes, (2) this coming will be with great glory, (3) the angels will be with him, and (4) all the tribes of the earth will see him. Jesus repeats these elements in the parable of the sheep and the goats. (Matthew 25:31-46) Hence, we can conclude that this parable deals with the time, after the opening outbreak of tribulation, when Jesus will come with his angels and sit down on his throne to judge. (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; compare 1 Kings 7:7; Daniel 7:10, 13, 14, 22, 26; Matthew 19:28.) Who will be judged, and with what result? The parable shows that Jesus will give attention to all nations, as if they were assembled right before his celestial throne.

19. How can we establish when the parable of the sheep and the goats will be fulfilled?

Do You Recall?

- What fulfillment did Matthew 24:4-14 have in the first century?
- In the apostles' time, how were days cut short and flesh saved, as predicted at Matthew 24:21, 22?
- What characterized the "generation" mentioned at Matthew 24:34?
- How do we know that the prophecy given on the Mount of Olives would have another, a larger, fulfillment?
- When and how will the parable of the sheep and the goats be fulfilled?

²⁰ Sheeplike men and women will be separated to Jesus' right side of favor. Why? Because they used their opportunities to do good to his brothers—anointed Christians, who will share in Christ's heavenly Kingdom. (Daniel 7:27; Hebrews 2:9-3:1) In line with the parable, millions of sheeplike Christians have recognized Jesus' spiritual brothers and have been working in support of them. As a result, the "great crowd" have the Bible-based hope of surviving "the great tribulation" and then living forever in Paradise, the earthly realm of God's Kingdom.—Revelation 7:9, 14; 21:3, 4; John 10:16.

²¹ What a different outcome there will be for the goats! They are described at Matthew 24:30 as 'beating themselves in lamentation' when Jesus comes. And well they should, for they will have built up a record of rejecting the Kingdom good news, of opposing Jesus' disciples, and of preferring the world that is passing away. (Matthew 10:16-18; 1 John 2:15-17) Jesus—not any of his disciples on earth—determines who the goats are. Of them he says: "These will depart into everlasting cutting-off."—Matthew 25:46.

²² Our progress in understanding the prophecy in Matthew chapters 24 and 25 has been thrilling. However, there is a part of Jesus' prophecy that merits our further attention—'the disgusting thing that causes desolation standing in a holy place.' Jesus urged his followers to use discernment regarding this and to be ready to take action. (Matthew 24:15, 16) What is this "disgusting thing"? When does it stand in a holy place? And how are our present and future life prospects involved? The following article will discuss this.

20, 21. (a) What will happen to the sheep of Jesus' parable? (b) The goats will experience what in the future?

22. What part of Jesus' prophecy merits our further consideration?

"LET THE READER USE DISCERNMENT"

"When you catch sight of the disgusting thing that causes desolation . . . standing in a holy place, . . . then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains."—MATTHEW 24:15, 16.

OUR being alerted to an approaching calamity can enable us to avoid it. (Proverbs 22:3) So imagine the situation of Christians in Jerusalem after the Roman attack in 66 C.E. Jesus had warned that the city would be surrounded and destroyed. (Luke 19:43, 44) Most Jews ignored him. But his disciples heeded his warning. As a result, they were saved from the calamity of 70 C.E.

² In a prophecy with implications for us today, Jesus outlined a composite sign that included wars, food shortages, earthquakes, pestilences, and persecution of Christians preaching about God's Kingdom. (Matthew 24:4-14; Luke 21:10-19) Jesus also offered a clue that would help his disciples to know that the end was close—a 'disgusting thing that causes desolation *standing in a holy place*.' (Matthew 24:15) Let us reexamine those meaningful words to see how they can affect our lives now and in the future.

³ After outlining the sign, Jesus said: "When you catch sight of the disgusting thing that causes desolation, as spo-



ken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in a holy place, (let the reader use discernment,) then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains. Let the man on the housetop not come down to take the goods out of his house; and let the man in the field not return to the house to pick up his outer garment. Woe to the pregnant women and those suckling a baby in those days! Keep praying that your flight may not occur in winter-time, nor on the sabbath day; for

then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning."—Matthew 24:15-21.

⁴ The accounts by Mark and Luke provide supplemental details. Where Matthew uses "standing in a holy place," Mark 13:14 says "standing where it ought not." Luke 21:20 adds Jesus' words: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near." This helps us to see that the first fulfillment involved the Roman assault on Jerusalem and its temple—a place holy to the Jews but no longer the place holy to Jehovah—which began in 66 C.E. Complete desolation oc-

1. The warning Jesus gave as found at Luke 19:43, 44 had what outcome?

2, 3. Why should we be interested in Jesus' prophecy recorded at Matthew 24:15-21?

4. What indicates that Matthew 24:15 had a fulfillment in the first century?

curred when the Romans destroyed both city and temple in 70 C.E. What was “the disgusting thing” back then? And how did it ‘stand in a holy place’? Answers to these questions will help to clarify the modern-day fulfillment.

⁵ Jesus urged readers to use discernment. Readers of what? Likely, of Daniel chapter 9. There we find a prophecy indicating when Messiah would appear and foretelling that he would be “cut off” after three and a half years. The prophecy says: “Upon the wing of *disgusting things* there will be the one causing *desolation*; and until an extermination, the very thing decided upon will go pouring out also upon the one lying desolate.”—Daniel 9:26, 27; see also Daniel 11:31; 12:11.

⁶ The Jews thought that this applied to the profanation of the temple by Antiochus IV about 200 years earlier. However, Jesus showed otherwise, urging discernment because “the disgusting thing” was yet to appear and stand in “a holy place.” It is apparent that Jesus was referring to the Roman army that would come in 66 C.E. with distinctive ensigns. Such standards, long in use, were virtual idols and were disgusting to the Jews.* When, though, would they ‘stand in a holy place’? That happened when the Roman army, with its ensigns, attacked Jerusalem and its temple, which the Jews considered holy. The Romans even began to undermine the wall of the temple

* “The Roman standards were guarded with religious veneration in the temples at Rome; and the reverence of this people for their ensigns was in proportion to their superiority to other nations . . . [To soldiers it] was perhaps the most sacred thing the earth possessed. The Roman soldier swore by his ensign.”—*The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th Edition.

5, 6. (a) Why would readers of Daniel chapter 9 need discernment? (b) How was Jesus’ prophecy about “the disgusting thing” fulfilled?

area. Truly, what had long been disgusting now stood in a holy place!—Isaiah 52:1; Matthew 4:5; 27:53; Acts 6:13.

A Modern-Day “Disgusting Thing”

⁷ Since World War I, we have seen the larger fulfillment of Jesus’ sign recorded in Matthew chapter 24. Yet, recall his words: “When you catch sight of the disgusting thing that causes desolation . . . standing in a holy place, . . . then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains.” (Matthew 24: 15, 16) This aspect of the prophecy must have a fulfillment in our time too.

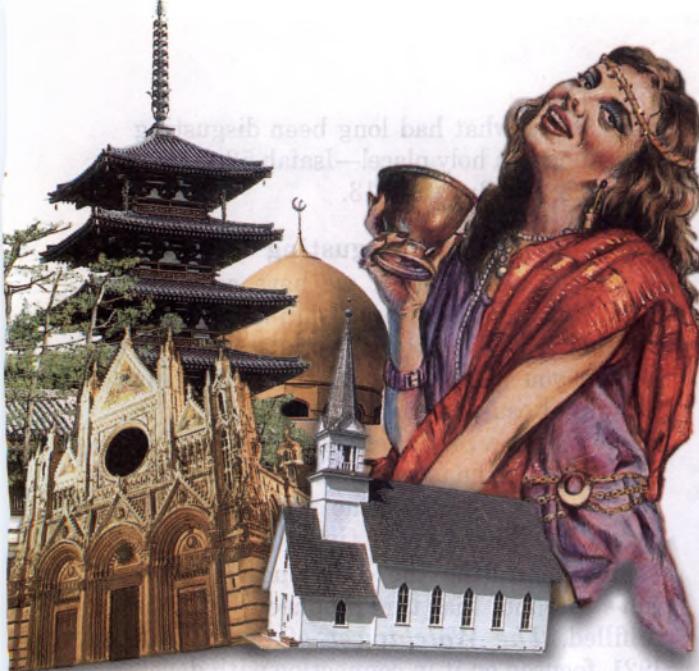
⁸ Demonstrating the confidence of Jehovah’s servants that this prophecy would be fulfilled, *The Watchtower* of January 1, 1921, focused on it in connection with developments in the Middle East. Subsequently, in its December 15, 1929, issue, on page 374, *The Watchtower* definitively said: “The whole tendency of the League of Nations is to turn the people away from God and from Christ, and it is therefore a desolating thing, the product of Satan, and an abomination in the sight of God.” So in 1919 “the disgusting thing” appeared. In time, the League gave way to the United Nations. Jehovah’s Witnesses have long exposed these human peace organizations as disgusting in God’s sight.

⁹ The preceding article summarized a clarified view of much of Matthew chapters 24 and 25. Is some clarification in order regarding ‘the disgusting thing standing in a holy place’? Apparently so. Jesus’ prophecy closely links the “standing in a holy place”

7. What prophecy of Jesus is being fulfilled in our time?

8. For years, how have Jehovah’s Witnesses identified “the disgusting thing” in modern times?

9, 10. How did an earlier understanding of the great tribulation influence our view of the time when “the disgusting thing” would stand in a holy place?



**Babylon the Great is called
“the mother of the harlots”**

it was not allowed to run its full course then but God stopped World War I in November of 1918. From then on God was allowing an interval for the activity of his anointed remnant of elect Christians before he let the final part of the ‘great tribulation’ resume at the battle of Armageddon.”

¹² Then a significantly adjusted explanation was offered: “To correspond with the events of the first century, . . . the anti-typical ‘great tribulation’ did not begin in 1914 C.E. Rather, what took place upon Jerusalem’s modern antitype in 1914–1918 was merely ‘a beginning of pangs of distress’ . . . The ‘great tribulation’ such as will not occur again is yet ahead, for it means the destruction of the world empire of false religion (including Christendom) followed by the ‘war of the great day of God the Almighty’ at Armageddon.” This meant that the entire great tribulation was yet ahead.

¹³ This has a direct bearing on discerning when “the disgusting thing” stands in a holy place. Recall what happened in the first century. The Romans attacked Jerusalem in 66 C.E., but they abruptly withdrew, which allowed Christian “flesh” to be saved. (Matthew 24:22) Accordingly, we expect the great tribulation to begin soon, but it will be cut short for the sake of God’s chosen ones. Note this key point: In the ancient pattern, ‘the disgusting thing standing in a holy place’ was linked to the Roman attack under General Gallus in 66 C.E. The modern-day parallel to that attack—the outbreak of the great tribulation—is still ahead. So “the disgusting thing that caus-

with the outbreak of the foretold “tribulation.” Hence, even though “the disgusting thing” has long existed, the link between its “standing in a holy place” and the great tribulation should affect our thinking. How so?

¹⁰ God’s people once understood that the first phase of the great tribulation began in 1914 and that the final part would come at the battle of Armageddon. (Revelation 16:14, 16; compare *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1939, page 110.) So we can understand why it was once thought that the latter-day “disgusting thing” must have stood in a holy place soon after World War I.

¹¹ However, in later years we have come to see things differently. On Thursday, July 10, 1969, at the “Peace on Earth” International Assembly in New York City, F. W. Franz, then vice president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, gave an electrifying talk. In reviewing the previous understanding of Jesus’ prophecy, Brother Franz said: “The explanation was given that the ‘great tribulation’ had begun in 1914 C.E. and that

^{11, 12} In 1969, what readjusted view of the great tribulation was presented?

¹³ Why is it logical to say that there will be a future ‘standing in a holy place’ by “the disgusting thing”?

The scarlet-colored wild beast of Revelation chapter 17 is "the disgusting thing" referred to by Jesus

es desolation," which has existed since 1919, apparently is yet to stand in a holy place.* How will this happen? And how can we be affected?

A Future Attack

¹⁴ The book of Revelation describes a future destructive attack on false religion. Chapter 17 outlines God's judgment against "Babylon the Great, the mother of the harlots"—the world empire of false religion. Christendom plays a central part and claims to have a covenant relationship with God. (Compare Jeremiah 7:4.) The false religions, including Christendom, have long had illicit dealings with "the kings of the earth," but this will end in the desolation of those religions. (Revelation 17:2, 5) At whose hands?

¹⁵ Revelation depicts "a scarlet-colored wild beast" that exists for a time, disappears, and then returns. (Revelation 17:3, 8) This beast is supported by world rulers. Details supplied in the prophecy help us to identify this symbolic beast as a peace organization that came into existence in 1919 as the League of Nations (a "disgusting thing") and that is now the United Nations. Revelation 17:16, 17 shows that God will yet put it into the hearts of certain human rulers who are prominent in this "beast" to *desolate* the world empire of false religion. That at-

* It should be noted that while the fulfillment of Jesus' words in 66-70 C.E. can help us to understand how they will be fulfilled at the great tribulation, the two fulfillments cannot be exactly parallel because the fulfillments occur against different backdrops.

14, 15. How does Revelation chapter 17 help us to understand events leading up to Armageddon?



tack marks the outbreak of the great tribulation.

¹⁶ Since the start of the great tribulation is yet future, is the "standing in a holy place" still ahead of us? Evidently so. While "the disgusting thing" made its appearance early in this century and has, thus, existed for decades, it will take a position in a unique way "in a holy place" in the near future. As first-century followers of Christ must have keenly watched to see how the "standing in a holy place" would develop, so do present-day Christians. Admittedly, we will have to wait for the actual fulfillment to know all the details. Yet, it is noteworthy that in some lands there is already a detectable and growing antipathy toward religion. Some political elements, in league with former Christians who have deviated from the true faith, are promoting hostility against religion in general and true Christians in particular. (Psalm 94:20, 21; 1 Timothy 6:20, 21) Consequently, political powers even now "battle with the Lamb," and as Revelation 17:14 indicates,

16. What noteworthy developments are taking place involving religion?



The scarlet-colored wild beast will lead a devastating attack on religion

“Fleeing”—How?

¹⁸ After foretelling ‘the standing of the disgusting thing in a holy place,’ Jesus warned discerning ones to act. Did he mean that at that late point—when “the disgusting thing” is “standing in a holy place”—many people will flee from false religion and take up true worship? Hardly. Consider the first fulfillment. Jesus said:

“Let those *in Judea* begin fleeing to the mountains. Let the man on the housetop not come down, *nor go inside to take anything out of his house*; and let the man in the field not return to the things behind *to pick up his outer garment*. Woe to the pregnant women and those suckling a baby in those days! Keep praying that it may not occur in wintertime.”—Mark 13:14-18.

¹⁹ Jesus did not say that only those in Jerusalem needed to withdraw, as if his point was that they needed to get out of the center of Jewish worship; nor did his warning mention changing religion—fleeing from the false and taking up the true. Jesus’ disciples certainly needed no warning about fleeing from one religion to another; they had already become true Christians. And the attack in 66 C.E. did not motivate practitioners of Judaism in Jerusalem and throughout Judea to abandon that religion and accept Christianity. Professor Heinrich Graetz says that those who chased the fleeing Romans came back to the city: “The Zealots, shouting exultant war songs, returned to Jerusalem (8th October), their hearts beating with the joyful hope of liberty and independence.... Had not God helped them as mercifully as He had helped their forefathers?”

this fight will intensify. While they cannot literally get their hands on the Lamb of God—Jesus Christ in his exalted, glorified state—they will further vent their opposition against God’s true worshipers, his “holy ones” in particular. (Daniel 7:25; compare Romans 8:27; Colossians 1:2; Revelation 12:17.) We have divine assurance that the Lamb and those with him will be victorious.

—Revelation 19:11-21.

¹⁷ We know that desolation awaits false religion. Babylon the Great is “drunk with the blood of the holy ones” and has acted as a queen, but her destruction is certain. The unclean influence she has wielded over the kings of the earth will dramatically change as that relationship turns into one of violent hatred on the part of the ‘ten horns and the wild beast.’ (Revelation 17:6, 16; 18:7, 8) When the “scarlet-colored wild beast” attacks the religious harlot, “the disgusting thing” will be standing in a menacing way in Christendom’s so-called holy place.* So desolation will begin on faithless Christendom, which portrays itself as holy.

* See *The Watchtower*, December 15, 1975, pages 741-4.

17. Without being dogmatic, what might we say as to how “the disgusting thing” will stand in a holy place?

18, 19. What reasons are given to show that “fleeing to the mountains” will not mean changing religion?

The hearts of the Zealots knew no fears for the future."

²⁰ How, then, did the comparatively small number of chosen ones back then act on Jesus' advice? By leaving Judea and fleeing to the mountains across the Jordan, they showed that they were no part of the Jewish system, politically or religiously. They left fields and homes, not even gathering their possessions from their houses. Confident of the protection and support of Jehovah, they put his worship ahead of everything else that might seem important.—Mark 10:29, 30; Luke 9:57-62.

²¹ Consider, now, the larger fulfillment. We have for many decades been urging people to get out of false religion and to take up true worship. (Revelation 18:4, 5) Millions have done so. Jesus' prophecy does not indicate that once the great tribulation breaks out, masses will turn to pure worship; certainly, there was no mass conversion of Jews in 66 C.E. Yet, true Christians will have great incentive to apply Jesus' warning and flee.

20. How did the early disciples respond to Jesus' warning to flee to the mountains?

21. We need not expect what when "the disgusting thing" attacks?

Do You Recall?

- How did "the disgusting thing that causes desolation" manifest itself in the first century?
- Why is it reasonable to think that the modern-day "disgusting thing" will stand in a holy place at a future time?
- What attack by a "disgusting thing" is foretold in Revelation?
- What sort of "fleeing" may yet be required on our part?

²² We cannot presently have full details about the great tribulation, but we can logically conclude that for us the flight Jesus spoke of will not be in a geographic sense. God's people are already around the globe, virtually in every corner. We can be sure, though, that when flight is necessary, Christians will have to continue to maintain a clear distinction between themselves and false religious organizations. It is also significant that Jesus warned about not going back to one's house to retrieve garments or other goods. (Matthew 24:17, 18) So there may be tests ahead as to how we view material things; are they the most important thing, or is the salvation that will come for all on God's side more important? Yes, our fleeing may involve some hardships and deprivations. We will have to be ready to do whatever it takes, as did our first-century counterparts who fled from Judea to Perea, across the Jordan.

²³ We must be certain that our refuge continues to be Jehovah and his mountainlike organization. (2 Samuel 22:2, 3; Psalm 18:2; Daniel 2:35, 44) That is where we will find protection! We will not imitate the masses of mankind who will flee to "the caves" and hide "in the rock-masses of the mountains"—human organizations and institutions that may remain for a very short while after Babylon the Great is desolated. (Revelation 6:15; 18:9-11) True, times may get more difficult—as they would have been in 66 C.E. for pregnant women who fled Judea or for anyone who had to travel in cold, rainy weather. But we can be sure that God will make survival possible. Let us even now reinforce our reliance on Jehovah and his Son, now reigning as King of the Kingdom.

22. Our applying Jesus' advice about fleeing to the mountains may involve what?

23, 24. (a) Where only will we find protection? (b) What effect should Jesus' warning about 'the disgusting thing standing in a holy place' have on us?

²⁴ There is no reason for us to live in fear of what is going to happen. Jesus did not want his disciples back then to be afraid, and he does not want us to be in fear, either now or in the days to come. He alerted us so that we can be preparing our hearts and minds. After all, obedient Christians will not be punished when destruction comes on false re-

ligion and the rest of this wicked system. They will be discerning and heed the warning about ‘the disgusting thing standing in a holy place.’ And they will act decisively on their unshakable faith. May we never forget what Jesus promised: “He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved.” —Mark 13:13.

BE VIGILANT AND BE DILIGENT!

“Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour.” —MATTHEW 25:13.

IN THE last dialogue in the Bible, Jesus promised: “I am coming quickly.” His apostle John replied: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.” The apostle had no doubt that Jesus would come. John was among the apostles who had asked Jesus: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence [Greek, *pa·rou·si'a*] and of the conclusion of the system of things?” Yes, John confidently looked forward to Jesus’ future presence.—Revelation 22:20; Matthew 24:3.

² Such confidence is rare nowadays. Many churches have an official doctrine about Jesus’ “coming,” but few of their members really expect it. They live accordingly. The book *The Parousia in the New Testament* notes: “There is little positive integration of the Parousia hope into the life, thought and work of the church. . . . The intense urgen-

1. To what was the apostle John looking forward?
2. As to Jesus’ presence, what is the situation in the churches?

cy with which the church should undertake its tasks of repentance and of missionary proclamation of the gospel, is weakened if not entirely lost.” But not to everyone!

³ Jesus’ true disciples are eagerly awaiting the end of the present wicked system of things. While loyally doing so, we need to keep the right outlook toward all that is involved in Jesus’ presence and act accordingly. That will enable us to ‘endure to the end and be saved.’ (Matthew 24:13) In the course of giving the prophecy that we find in Matthew chapters 24 and 25, Jesus provided wise advice that we can apply, to our lasting benefit. Chapter 25 contains parables that you likely know, including the one about ten virgins (the wise and the foolish virgins) and the parable of the talents. (Matthew 25:1-30) How can we benefit from those illustrations?

3. (a) How do true Christians feel about the *pa·rou·si'a*? (b) What in particular shall we now consider?

Be Vigilant, as the Five Virgins Were!

⁴ You may wish to reread the parable of the virgins, found at Matthew 25:1-13. The setting is a grand Jewish wedding in which the groom goes to the house of the bride's father to escort her to the groom's home (or to his father's). Such a procession might include musicians and singers, and the time of its arrival would not be known precisely. In the parable, ten virgins waited into the night for the groom's arrival. Five had foolishly not brought enough lamp oil and thus had to go and buy more. The other five had wisely brought extra oil in receptacles so that they could refill their lamps if necessary during the wait. Only these five were on hand and ready when the groom arrived. Hence, only they were allowed to enter the feast. When the five foolish virgins returned, it was too late for them to enter.

⁵ Many aspects of this parable can be understood as being symbolic. For example, the Scriptures speak of Jesus as a bridegroom. (John 3:28-30) Jesus likened himself to a king's son for whom a marriage feast was prepared. (Matthew 22:1-14) And the Bible compares Christ to a husband. (Ephesians 5:23) Interestingly, while anointed Christians are elsewhere described as the "bride" of Christ, the parable does not mention a bride. (John 3:29; Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9) It does, though, speak of ten virgins, and the anointed are elsewhere likened to a virgin promised in marriage to Christ.

—2 Corinthians 11:2.*

⁶ Aside from such details and any prophet-

* As to symbolic details of the parable, see *God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached*, pages 169-211, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

4. What is the gist of the parable of the virgins?
5. What scriptures shed light on the figurative meaning of the parable of the virgins?
6. Jesus gave what exhortation when concluding the parable of the virgins?

ic applications, there certainly are fine principles that we can learn from this parable. For instance, note that Jesus closed it with the words: "Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour." So the parable conveys the need for each of us to be vigilant, to be alert to the approaching end of this wicked system. This end is unquestionably coming, even though we cannot pinpoint a date. In this regard, note the attitudes manifested by the two groups of virgins.

⁷ Jesus said: "Five of them were foolish." Was that because they did not believe that the groom was coming? Were they off pursuing pleasures? Or were they deceived? None of those. Jesus said that these five "went out to meet the bridegroom." They knew that he was coming, and they wanted to be involved, even to share in the "marriage feast." Yet, were they sufficiently prepared? They waited a while for him, until "the middle of the night," but they were not prepared for his arrival whenever that would be—whether earlier or later than they initially expected.

⁸ The other five—those whom Jesus called discreet—also went out with lighted lamps, expecting the groom's arrival. They had to wait too, but they were "discreet." The Greek word translated "discreet" can convey the sense of being "prudent, sensible, practically wise." These five proved that they were discreet by bringing receptacles with extra oil to refill their lamps if necessary. In fact, they were so focused on being ready for the groom that they would not give away their oil. Such vigilance was not misplaced, as is proved by their being present and completely prepared when the groom

7. In what sense did five of the virgins in the parable prove to be foolish?
8. How did five of the virgins in the parable prove to be discreet?

arrived. These who “were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.”

⁹ Jesus was not offering a lesson in wedding decorum, nor was he giving counsel about sharing. His point was: “Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour.” Ask yourself, ‘Am I truly vigilant with regard to Jesus’ presence?’ We believe that Jesus now reigns in heaven, but how focused are we on the reality that ‘the Son of man will soon come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory?’ (Matthew 24:30) By “the middle of the night,” the groom’s arrival certainly was closer than when the virgins first went out to meet him. Similarly, the Son of man’s arrival to destroy the present wicked system is closer than when we began looking forward to his coming. (Romans 13:11-14) Have we maintained our vigilance, being even more vigilant as that time draws closer?

¹⁰ To obey the command “keep on the watch” requires constant vigilance. Five virgins let their oil run out and went to buy more. A Christian today might similarly be distracted so that he is not fully prepared for Jesus’ imminent arrival. It happened to some first-century Christians. It can happen to some today. So let us ask ourselves, ‘Is it happening to me?’—1 Thessalonians 5:6-8; Hebrews 2:1; 3:12; 12:3; Revelation 16:15.

Be Diligent as the End Nears

¹¹ In his next parable, Jesus did more than urge his followers to be vigilant. After telling of the wise and the foolish virgins, he related the illustration of the talents. (Read Matthew 25:14-30.) In many respects this

9, 10. What is the point of the parable of the virgins, and what questions should we ask ourselves?

11. What parable did Jesus next give, and to what was it similar?

resembles his earlier parable of the minas, which Jesus gave because many “were imagining that the kingdom of God was going to display itself instantly.”—Luke 19:11-27.

¹² In the parable of the talents, Jesus told of a man who, prior to making a journey abroad, summoned three slaves. To one he committed five talents, to another two, and to the last just one—“to each one according to his own ability.” Likely, this meant a silver talent, a standard amount then worth what a laborer would earn in 14 years—a lot of money! When the man returned, he had the slaves account for what they did during the “long time” that he was away. The first two slaves had doubled the value of what was entrusted to them. He said “well done,” promised each one more responsibility, and concluded: “Enter into the joy of your master.” Claiming that the master was extremely demanding, the slave with one talent had not put the talent to any profitable use. He hid the money, not even depositing it with bankers to earn interest. The master termed him “wicked and sluggish” because he had worked against his master’s interests. Consequently, the talent was taken from him, and he was put outside “where his weeping and the gnashing of his teeth” would be.

¹³ Again, details of this can be understood in a symbolic sense. For example, Jesus, pictured by the man traveling abroad, would leave his disciples, go to heaven, and wait a long time until he received kingly power.* (Psalm 110:1-4; Acts 2:34-36; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 10:12, 13) Again, though, we can perceive a broader lesson or principle that

* See *God’s Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached*, pages 212-56.

12. What is the gist of the parable of the talents?

13. How did Jesus prove to be like the master in the parable?



What lessons do you learn from the parable of the virgins and that of the talents?

all of us ought to apply in our lives. What is that?

¹⁴ Whether our hope is that of immortal life in heaven or of everlasting life on a paradise earth, it is clear from Jesus' parable that we should be exerting ourselves in Christian activities. In fact, the message of this parable can be summed up in a word: diligence. The apostles set the pattern from Pentecost 33 C.E. onward. We read: "With many other words [Peter] bore thorough witness and kept exhorting them, saying: 'Get saved from this crooked generation.'" (Acts 2:40-42) And what excellent returns he had on his efforts! As others joined the apostles in the Christian preaching work, they too were diligent, with the good news "increasing in all the world."—Colossians 1:3-6, 23; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9.

¹⁵ Bear in mind the context of this parable—a prophecy about Jesus' presence. We have ample confirmation that Jesus' *pa·rou·si'a* is in progress and will soon reach a climax. Recall the connection Jesus made between "the end" and the work Christians

14. The parable of the talents emphasizes what vital need?

15. In what special way should we be applying the thrust of the parable of the talents?

need to do: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14) With this in mind, which sort of slave do we resemble? Ask yourself: 'Would there be reason to conclude that I am like the slave who hid what was entrusted to him, perhaps while he took care of his own personal concerns? Or is it clear that I am like those who were good and faithful? Am I totally committed to increasing the Master's interests on every occasion?'

Vigilant and Diligent During His Presence

¹⁶ Yes, aside from their figurative and prophetic meaning, these two parables present us with clear encouragement that comes from the mouth of Jesus himself. His message is this: Be vigilant; be diligent, especially when the sign of Christ's *pa·rou·si'a* is seen. That is now. So are we really being vigilant and diligent?

¹⁷ Jesus' half brother James was not on

16. What message do the two parables that we have discussed hold for you?

17, 18. What did the disciple James counsel concerning Jesus' presence?

the Mount of Olives to hear Jesus' prophecy; but he later learned of it, and he clearly grasped its import. He wrote: "Exercise patience, therefore, brothers, until the presence of the Lord. Look! The farmer keeps waiting for the precious fruit of the earth, exercising patience over it until he gets the early rain and the late rain. You too exercise patience; *make your hearts firm, because the presence of the Lord has drawn close.*" —James 5:7, 8.

¹⁸ Having given assurance that God will judge adversely those who misuse their riches, James urged Christians not to be impatient while waiting for Jehovah to act. An impatient Christian might become vindictive, as if he himself had to right the wrongs committed. That should not be, though, because the time of judgment is certain to arrive. The example of a farmer illustrates that, as James explained.

¹⁹ An Israelite farmer who planted seed had to wait, first for the blade to appear, then for the plant to mature, and finally for the harvest. (Luke 8:5-8; John 4:35) Over those months, there was time and perhaps cause for some anxiety. Would the early rains come and be ample? What of the later rains? Might insects or a storm kill the plants? (Compare Joel 1:4; 2:23-25.) Nonetheless, overall an Israelite farmer could trust Jehovah and the natural cycles he has set in place. (Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 5:24) The farmer's patience could really amount to confident expectation. In faith he knew that what he was waiting for would come. It really would!

²⁰ While a farmer might have some knowledge of when the harvest will be, first-

19. An Israelite farmer could exercise what sort of patience?

20. How can we manifest patience in harmony with James' counsel?

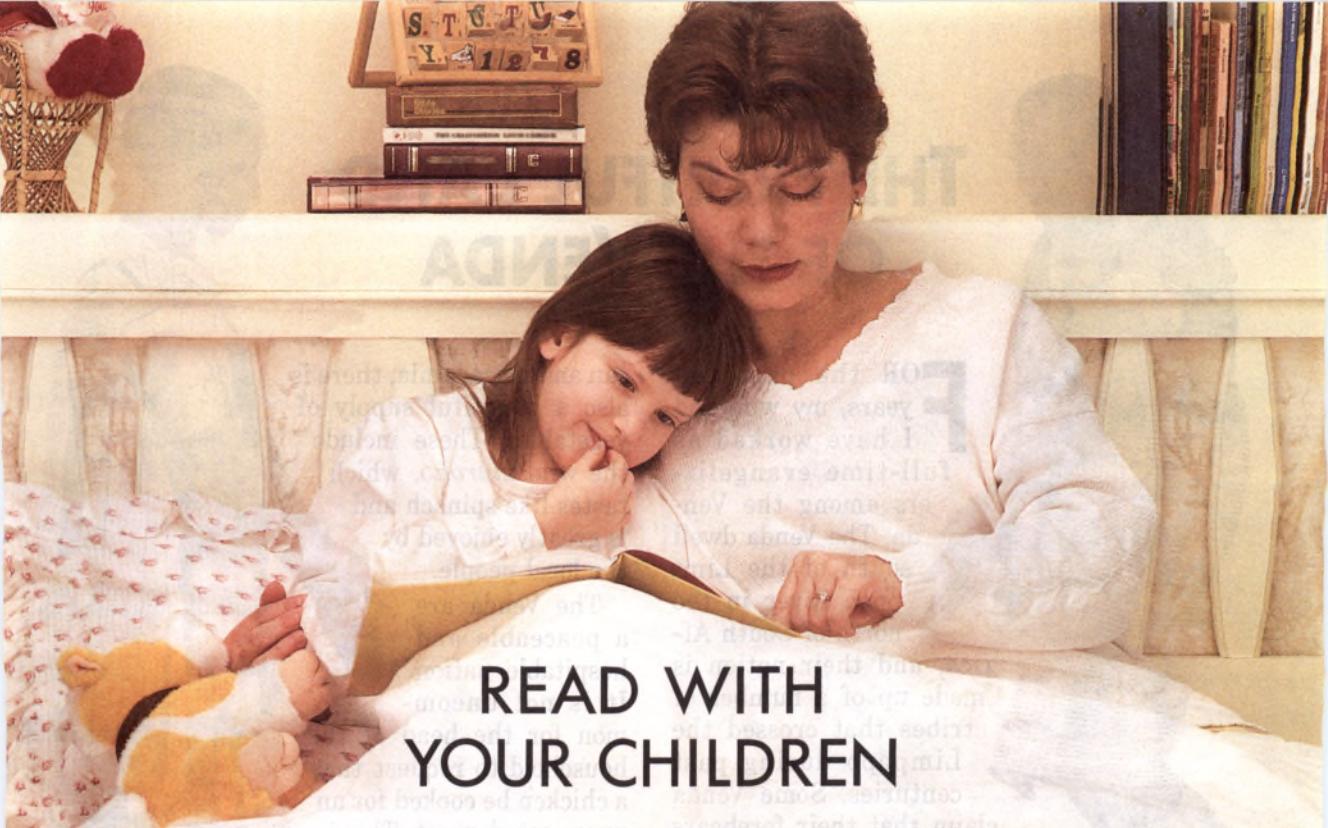
century Christians could not calculate when Jesus' presence would be. It was certain to come, though. James wrote: "The presence [Greek, *pa·rou·si'a*] of the Lord has drawn close." At the time James penned those words, the large-scale, or global, sign of Christ's presence was not yet in evidence. But it is now! So how should we feel in this period? The sign is actually visible. We see it. We can say with assurance, 'I see the sign being fulfilled.' We can confidently say, 'The presence of the Lord is here, and its climax is at hand.'

²¹ Since that is the case, we have especially strong reason to take to heart and apply the fundamental lessons of Jesus' two parables that we have discussed. He said: "Keep on the watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour." (Matthew 25:13) Now is unquestionably the time for us to be zealous in our Christian service. Let us show daily in our lives that we understand Jesus' point. Let us be vigilant! Let us be diligent!

21. What are we absolutely resolved to do?

Do You Recall?

- What key message have you drawn from the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins?
- By means of the parable of the talents, what fundamental advice is Jesus offering to you?
- In what sense is your patience relative to the *pa·rou·si'a* like that of an Israelite farmer?
- Why is this an especially exciting and challenging time in which to be living?



READ WITH YOUR CHILDREN

According to the Brazilian magazine *Veja*, children of diligent readers are more likely to develop a fondness for books than are children who lack such an example of reading in the home. "Shared reading reinforces intimacy between parents and children and allows the child to assimilate the books' contents better," notes Martha Hoppe, a specialist in child development.

Reading out loud to your children also gives you the opportunity to answer questions. You can discuss any pictures that accompany the text. "The more a child understands the contents of books," observes Hoppe, "the more he will be stimulated to look for them when he wants to satisfy his curiosity."

Many parents among Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy reading with their children. They may read such publications as *My Book of Bible Stories*, *Listening to the Great Teacher*, and *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*.* Books like these not only help children to become good readers but also broaden their interest in the world's best-seller—the Holy Bible. Therefore, if you are a parent, set the example for your children by being an avid reader of God's Word. (Joshua 1:7, 8) And by all means, take the time to read to them!

* Published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

A black and white photograph showing two Venda women from the waist up. They are wearing traditional wrap dresses with intricate patterns and beaded headbands. They are both smiling and performing a traditional greeting, with their hands held open and palms facing each other. The background is plain.

THE FRUITFUL LAND OF THE VENDA

FOR the past ten years, my wife and I have worked as full-time evangelizers among the Venda. The Venda dwell south of the Limpopo River in the north of South Africa, and their nation is made up of a number of tribes that crossed the Limpopo during past centuries. Some Venda claim that their forebears settled here over 1,000 years ago.

Indeed, this region was once part of an old civilization called the Mapungubwe Kingdom. It was South Africa's first large

urban settlement, and it controlled the vast Limpopo River valley, from Botswana in the west to Mozambique in the east. From about 900 C.E. to 1100 C.E., Mapungubwe provided Arab traders with ivory, rhino horn, animal skins, copper, and even gold. Skillfully sculptured objects plated with gold have been unearthed on a royal burial hill called Mapungubwe. These are among "the earliest indications of gold mining in southern Africa," suggests one encyclopedia.

Gold is no longer mined here. Today, the land of the Venda is renowned for its fruitfulness. South of the Soutpansberg Mountains lies a lush valley, where such fruits as avocados, bananas, mangoes, and guavas grow in abundance. Besides such nuts as pe-

can and macadamia, there is also a bountiful supply of vegetables. These include the wild *muroho*, which tastes like spinach and is greatly enjoyed by the local people.

The Venda are a peaceable and hospitable nation. It is not uncommon for the head of the household to request that a chicken be cooked for an unexpected guest. This is eaten along with *vhuswa*, the staple food, made from corn. After the visit, the head of the household will accompany his guest for a short distance. This is the traditional way of showing respect for a visitor. Children are taught to greet visitors in a graceful way by bowing and sliding one hand across the other. On this page you see two Venda women greeting each other in this customary manner.

A Difficult Language

The Venda language is not easily mastered by people of European origin. One difficulty is that many words are spelled the same but are pronounced differently. While giving a Bible talk to a Venda congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses one day, I was trying to encourage the audience to speak to *every person*. An individual in the audience could not

help but laugh because I said "finger to finger" instead of "person to person."

When I first tried to speak Venda in the public witnessing work, a Venda lady replied: "I don't speak English." I thought I had just spoken good Venda, but she thought it was English! As I approached a house on another occasion, I asked a youngster to call the head of the family. The Venda word for family head is *tho'ho*. By mistake, I had said *thoho'*, thus asking to speak to the monkey of the house! Mistakes like this discouraged me, but by perseverance both my wife and I are now able to converse reasonably well in Venda.

Spiritual Fruitage

The land of the Venda is proving to be fruitful in a spiritual way. In the 1950's, a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses was formed among migrants who had come from neighboring countries to work at a copper mine in the town of Messina. Their zealous activity introduced many Venda to Bible truths. A decade later a group of Venda Witnesses was holding meetings in a private home in the town of Sibasa.

To speed up the increase, the South Africa branch of the Watch Tower Society sent full-time evangelizers into this fruitful field. Soon the Sibasa group had grown into a large congregation. Christian meetings were held in a classroom at that time. With the help of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Pietersburg area some 100 miles to the south, however, a Kingdom Hall was built in Thohoyandou, a neighboring town.

The Venda-speaking population in the north of South Africa numbers over 500,000. There were no Venda Witnesses when the Kingdom-preaching work started here in the 1950's. Now there are more than 150. But there are still many untouched areas and much work to be done. In 1989 we be-

gan visiting a Venda village called Hamutscha. Only one Witness was living there at the time. Now over 40 Kingdom proclaimers live in that village. We are busy completing our Kingdom Hall, thanks again to the help of Witnesses from the Pietersburg congregations and the financial contributions of brothers in more affluent lands.

We live in a caravan (small trailer) on a farm. By keeping our life simple, we have more time to reach the local people with the good news. (Mark 13:10) As a result, we have been richly blessed with the privilege of helping many to dedicate their lives to Jehovah God. One example is a man named Michael, who saw the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* at a friend's house.* He started reading it and immediately recognized the truth. So he wrote to the Watch Tower Society for more Bible literature. In his letter Michael explained that he had recently been baptized as a member of a local Apostolic church. "I have discovered," he continued, "that I am on the wrong way to the Kingdom of God. I have decided to become one of your members, but I don't know how to do so." He then gave his address and requested that one of Jehovah's Witnesses be sent to help him. I managed to locate Michael and started a home Bible study with him. Today, he is a baptized Witness and serves Jehovah loyally.

In December 1997, we attended the "Faith in God's Word" District Convention of Jehovah's Witnesses that was held in a sports stadium at Thohoyandou. There were 634 in attendance, and 12 new ones were baptized. I had the privilege of giving two talks in Venda. That was truly a milestone in our happy decade spent in this fruitful land!—Contributed.

* Published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

Does God Work in "Crooked" Ways?

Job Hearing of His Ruin (The Dove Bible Illustrations) Dover Publications



"DEUS ESCREVE CERTO POR LINHAS TORTAS" ("GOD WRITES correctly using crooked lines") is a saying in Brazil. It suggests that God always does the right thing but sometimes in a way that seems crooked to man. For instance, when someone in the prime of life dies, many say, 'God called him to heaven.' If someone suffers from a physical disability or faces a tragedy, some remark, 'It is God's will.' Since death, physical problems, and other causes of sorrow are thus blamed on God, such expressions imply that God 'writes crookedly,' that he does things in a way that man cannot understand.

Why is it that many religious people believe that God is responsible for death and hardships? These beliefs are often based on the misunderstanding of some isolated Bible texts. Let us briefly look at a few of them.

- "Who appoints the speechless or the deaf or the clear-sighted or the blind? Is it not I, Jehovah?"—Exodus 4:11.

Does this mean that God is to blame for all of those who suffer from various disabilities? No. This would be out of harmony with God's personality. The Bible tells us: "Every creation of God is fine." (1 Timothy 4:4) He is not to blame if someone is born blind, speechless, or deaf. He wants only what is good for his creation, for he is the Source of "every good gift and every perfect present." —James 1:17.

It was our first parents, Adam and Eve, who by their own choice rebelled against God and lost their perfection and therefore their ability to produce perfect children.

(Genesis 3:1-6, 16, 19; Job 14:4) As their descendants married and had children, more and more imperfections, including physical defects, began to be manifest among humans. While Jehovah God did not cause this, he has allowed it to happen. Hence, he could speak of himself as 'appointing' the speechless, the deaf, and the blind.

- "That which is made crooked cannot be made straight."— Ecclesiastes 1:15.

Was it God who made things crooked? Obviously not. Ecclesiastes 7:29 notes: "God made mankind upright, but they themselves have sought out many plans." The *Contemporary English Version* paraphrases this verse: "We were completely honest when God created us, but now we have

twisted minds." Instead of abiding by God's righteous standards, men and women have, for the most part, willfully chosen to follow their own plans, schemes, devices, or ways—to their injury.—1 Timothy 2:14.

Also, as noted by the apostle Paul, because of mankind's sin, "the creation was subjected to futility." (Romans 8:20) And this situation "cannot be made straight" by human efforts. Only by divine intervention will all the crookedness and futility in earthly affairs be removed.

● "See the work of the true God, for who is able to make straight what he has made crooked?"—Ecclesiastes 7:13.

In other words, King Solomon asks: 'Who among mankind can straighten out the defects and imperfections that God allows?' No one, for there is a reason why Jehovah God permits these things to happen.

Therefore, Solomon recommends: "On a good day prove yourself to be in goodness, and on a calamitous day see that the true God has made even this exactly as that, to the intent that mankind may not discover anything at all after them." (Ecclesiastes 7:14) A person should appreciate a day when things go well and show his appreciation by reflecting goodness. He should view a good day as a gift from God. But what if the day brings calamity? A person does well to "see," that is, to recognize, that God has allowed the calamity to take place. Why has he done so? Solomon says: "To the intent that mankind may not discover anything at all after them." What does this mean?

The fact that God permits us to face both joys and troubles reminds us that we cannot tell what the future will bring. Calamity can befall both the righteous and the wicked. There are no exceptions. This should make us realize the importance of depending, not on ourselves, but on God, remembering that "God is love." (1 John 4:8) While

we may not understand certain things now, we can rest assured that after everything has run its full course, what God has permitted will have served a beneficial purpose for all concerned.

Whatever he permits will never result in everlasting harm to righthearted ones. The apostle Peter made this clear when commenting on the suffering coming upon fellow believers in his time: "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all undeserved kindness, who called you to his everlasting glory in union with Christ, will himself finish your training, he will make you firm, he will make you strong."—1 Peter 5:10.

Time to Set Things Straight

Jehovah gives us strength to endure our present trials. He also promises to make "all things new." (Revelation 21:5) Yes, it is his purpose that his heavenly Kingdom will soon restore health to those suffering from disabilities and will oversee the resurrection of the dead. That government will also eliminate the one whose ways are indeed crooked—Satan the Devil. (John 5:28, 29; Romans 16:20; 1 Corinthians 15:26; 2 Peter 3:13) What a blessing it will be for God-fearing people all over the earth when God's time to set things straight arrives!

In Our Next Issue

Do You Spend Time
With Your Family?

The Christian Congregation—A
Source of Strengthening Aid

Saul—A Chosen Vessel to the Lord

Paul Triumphs Over Adversity

PAUL is in a desperate situation. He and 275 others are aboard a vessel that is caught in the throes of Euroaquito—the most violent wind on the Mediterranean. The storm is so severe that the sun cannot be seen by day, nor the stars by night. Understandably, the passengers are afraid for their lives. Yet, Paul comforts them by relating what was divinely revealed to him in a dream: "Not a soul of you will be lost, only the boat will."—Acts 27:14, 20-22.

On the 14th night of the storm, the sailors make a startling discovery—the water is just 20 fathoms deep.* After a short distance, they make another sounding. This time, the water is 15 fathoms deep. Land is near! But this good news carries a sobering implication. Being tossed to and fro at night in shallow waters, the ship might smash against rocks and be demolished. Wisely, the sailors drop the anchors. Some of them want to lower the skiff and board it, taking their chances at sea.[#] But Paul stops them. He tells the army officer and the soldiers: "Unless these men remain in the boat, you cannot be saved." The officer listens to Paul, and now all 276 passengers wait anxiously for daybreak.—Acts 27:27-32.

Shipwrecked

The next morning, the ship's passengers catch sight of a bay with a beach. With renewed hope, the sailors cut away the anchors and raise the fore-sail to the wind. The ship begins moving toward the shore—no doubt amid shouts of joy.—Acts 27:39, 40.

* A fathom is commonly viewed as being four cubits, or about six feet.

[#] The skiff was a small boat that was used to get to shore when a ship was anchored near a coast. Evidently, the sailors were trying to save their own lives at the expense of those who would be left behind, who had no expertise in handling a ship.

Suddenly, however, the ship becomes stuck on a shoal. Worse still, violent waves smash against the boat's stern, breaking it to pieces. All passengers will have to abandon ship! (Acts 27:41) But this presents a problem. Many of those on board—including Paul—are prisoners. Under Roman law, a guard who allows his prisoner to escape must undergo the punishment intended for his prisoner. If a murderer escaped, for example, the negligent guard would have to pay with his life.

Fearing such consequences, the soldiers determine to have all prisoners put to death. However, the army officer, who is friendly with Paul, intercedes. He commands all of those who can do so to jump into the water and swim for land. Those who cannot swim must grab on to planks or other items from the boat. One by one, the passengers from the doomed ship crawl ashore. True to Paul's words, not one life has been lost!—Acts 27:42-44.

Miracle on Malta

The exhausted group have found refuge on an island called Malta. The inhabitants are "foreign-speaking people," literally "barbarians" (Greek, *bar'ba·ros*).^{*} But the Maltese people are not savages. On the contrary, Luke, a traveling companion of Paul, reports that they "showed us extraordinary human kindness, for they kindled a fire and received all of us helpfully because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold." Paul himself joins the natives of Malta in collecting and laying sticks on the fire.—Acts 28:1-3, footnote.

Suddenly, a viper fastens itself to Paul's hand! The islanders assume that Paul must be a murderer. They probably think that God punishes sinners by attack-

^{*} Wilfred Funk's *Word Origins* notes: "The Greeks were scornful of languages other than their own, and said they sounded like 'bar-bar' and they called anyone who spoke them *barbaros*."



ing the part of their body that was the instrument of sin. But look! Much to the surprise of the natives, Paul shakes the viper off into the fire. As Luke's eyewitness account says, "they were expecting [Paul] was going to swell up with inflammation or suddenly drop dead." The islanders change their minds and begin saying that Paul must be a god.—Acts 28:3-6.

Paul spends the next three months in Malta, during which time he heals the father of Publius, the principal man of the island, who received Paul hospitably, and others who are afflicted with illnesses. In addition, Paul sows seeds of truth, resulting in many blessings to the hospitable inhabitants of Malta.—Acts 28:7-11.

Lesson for Us

In the course of his ministry, Paul faced many challenges. (2 Corinthians 11:23-27) In the above account, he was a prisoner for the sake of the good

news. Then, he had to face unexpected trials: a fierce storm and subsequent shipwreck. Through all of this, Paul never wavered in his determination to be a zealous preacher of the good news. From experience, he wrote: "In all circumstances I have learned the secret of both how to be full and how to hunger, both how to have an abundance and how to suffer want. For all things I have the strength by virtue of him who imparts power to me."—Philippians 4:12, 13.

Never should life's problems weaken our resolve to be zealous ministers of the true God! When an unexpected trial arises, we throw our burden on Jehovah. (Psalm 55:22) Then, we wait patiently to see how he makes it possible for us to endure the test. Meanwhile, we continue serving him faithfully, confident that he cares for us. (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 5:7) By remaining steadfast, come what may, we—like Paul—can triumph over adversity.

A VICTORY Over Evil

“WHY should this dead dog call down evil upon my lord the king? Let me go over, please, and take off his head.” This request came from Abishai, an Israelite army chief. It was his angry response when he heard his lord, King David, being hatefully abused by a Benjamite named Shimei.—2 Samuel 16:5-9.

Abishai was yielding to a philosophy commonly espoused today—the principle of fighting fire with fire. Yes, Abishai wanted to make Shimei suffer for the insults that he had heaped upon David.

What, though, was David’s reaction? David restrained Abishai, saying: “Let him alone.” Although innocent of Shimei’s charges, David humbly resisted the temptation to retaliate. Instead, he left the matter in Jehovah’s hands.—2 Samuel 16:10-13.

When David returned to the throne after fleeing from an unsuccessful revolt by his son, among the first to greet him and ask for forgiveness was Shimei. Again



Abishai wanted to kill him, but again David did not allow it.—2 Samuel 19:15-23.

In this instance, David proved to be a worthy picture of Jesus Christ, of whom the apostle Peter wrote: “When he was being reviled, he did not go reviling in return . . . but kept on committing himself to the one who judges righteously.”—1 Peter 2:23.

Today, Christians are admonished to be “humble in mind, not paying back injury for injury.” (1 Peter 3:8, 9) By following the course set by David and Jesus Christ, we too can “keep conquering the evil with the good.”—Romans 12:17-21.

WOULD YOU WELCOME A VISIT?