

# THE WATCHTOWER

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ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



## Ethnic Harmony IS IT POSSIBLE?



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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 fellow men 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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# What Is the Solution to Ethnic Intolerance?

**I**N Spain a referee interrupts a football match. Why? Because so many spectators hurl insults at a player from Cameroon that he threatens to leave the field. In Russia violent attacks against Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans have become common; during 2004, racist attacks there rose by 55 percent to reach 394 incidents in 2005. In Britain a third of Asian and black respondents to a survey thought that they had lost a job because of racial discrimination. These examples reflect a worldwide trend.

Ethnic intolerance varies in seriousness—from offensive or thoughtless remarks to efforts to exterminate an ethnic group as a national policy.\* What is the root cause of ethnic intolerance? How can we avoid showing it? Is it reasonable to hope that one day all the families of mankind will live together peacefully? The Bible provides interesting insight into these matters.

## Oppression and Hatred

"The inclination of the heart of man is bad from his youth up," says the Bible. (Genesis 8:21) Thus, some get enjoyment from oppressing others. The Bible further states: "Look! the tears of those being oppressed, but they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power."—Ecclesiastes 4:1.

The Bible also shows that ethnic hatred goes back a long way. For example, in the 18th century before our Common Era, an Egyptian Pharaoh invited the Hebrew Jacob

\* The word "ethnic" describes something related to a population distinguished from others by race, nationality, religion, language, or culture.

and his large family to settle in Egypt. Later, however, another Pharaoh felt threatened by this large group of immigrants. As a result, the record says: "He proceeded to say to his people: 'Look! The people of the sons of Israel are more numerous and mightier than we are. Come on! Let us deal shrewdly with them, for fear they may multiply.' ... So they set over them chiefs of forced labor for the purpose of oppressing them in their burden-bearing." (Exodus 1:9-11) The Egyptians even ordered all newborn boys of the descendants of Jacob to be killed.—Exodus 1:15, 16.

## What Is the Root Cause?

The world's religions have rarely been helpful in opposing ethnic intolerance. While it is true that some individuals have heroically opposed oppression, religion as a whole has all too frequently sided with the oppressors. That was the case in the United States, where the subjugation of black people was enforced by law and by lynching and statutes banning mixed marriages continued until 1967. It was also true in South Africa under apartheid, when a minority protected their dominant position by laws that included a ban on interracial marriage. In each case, some belonging to the ethnic group that promoted intolerance were deeply religious.

However, the Bible reveals a deeper reason for ethnic intolerance. It explains *why* some ethnic groups oppress others. It says: "He that does not love has not come to know God, because God is love. If anyone makes the statement: 'I love God,' and yet is hating

his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot be loving God, whom he has not seen." (1 John 4:8, 20) This statement identifies the root cause of ethnic intolerance. People practice it—whether they claim to be religious or not—because they have not come to know or to love God.

### Knowledge of God —The Basis for Ethnic Harmony

How does knowing and loving God produce ethnic harmony? What knowledge does God's Word reveal that restrains people from harming those who seem to be different? The Bible reveals that Jehovah is the Father of all men. It says: "There is actually to us one God the Father, out of whom all things are." (1 Corinthians 8:6) Further, it says: "He made out of one man every nation of men." (Acts 17:26) Thus, all men are, in effect, brothers.

All ethnic groups can be proud to have received life from God, but all have something to regret about their ancestry. Bible writer Paul noted: "Through one man sin entered into the world." Thus, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23; 5:12) Jehovah is a God of diversi-

ty—no two creatures are exactly alike. Yet, he has given no ethnic group the basis for feeling superior. The widespread feeling that one's own ethnic group is better than that of others runs counter to the facts set out in the Scriptures. Clearly, the knowledge we receive from God promotes ethnic harmony.

### God's Concern for All Nations

Some have wondered if God promoted ethnic bias by favoring the Israelites and teaching them to keep separate from other nations. (Exodus 34:12) At one time, God chose the nation of Israel as his special possession because of the outstanding faith of Israel's forefather Abraham. God himself governed ancient Israel, choosing their rulers and providing them with a code of laws. During the time Israel accepted this arrangement, other peoples could see the results of government by God in contrast with the results of government by men elsewhere. Jehovah also taught Israel back then about the need for a sacrifice to restore mankind to a good relationship with God. So Jehovah's dealings with Israel benefited *all* nations. That was consistent with what he had said to Abraham: "By means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact

*God's Law taught the Israelites to love alien residents*

that you have listened to my voice.”—Genesis 22:18.

In addition, the Jews were privileged to receive the sacred pronouncements of God and to be the nation into which the Messiah was born. But this too was so that all nations might benefit. The Hebrew Scriptures given to the Jews contain a heartwarming description of the time when all ethnic groups would receive great blessings: “Many nations will certainly go and say: ‘Come, you people, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will instruct us about his ways’ . . . They will not lift up sword, nation against nation, neither will they learn war anymore. And they will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble.”—Micah 4:2-4.

Although Jesus Christ himself preached to the Jews, he also said: “This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations.” (Matthew 24:14) No nation would miss out on hearing the good news. Jehovah therefore set a perfect example in dealing in an even-handed way with all ethnic groups. “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34, 35.

The laws that God gave to the ancient nation of Israel also reveal that he cares for all nations. Notice how the Law asked for more than mere tolerance of non-Israelites residing in the land, when it said: “The alien resident who resides as an alien with you should become to you like a native of yours; and *you must love him as yourself*, for you became alien residents in the land of Egypt.” (Leviticus 19:34) Many of God’s laws taught the Israelites to be kind to immigrants. Thus, when Boaz, a forefather of Jesus, saw a needy foreign woman gleaning, he was acting in harmony with what he had learned from

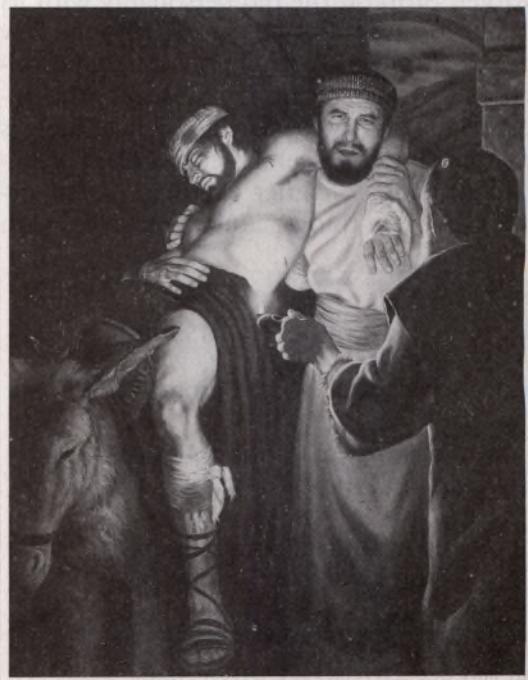
God when he made sure that his harvesters left plenty of grain for her to collect.—Ruth 2: 1, 10, 16.

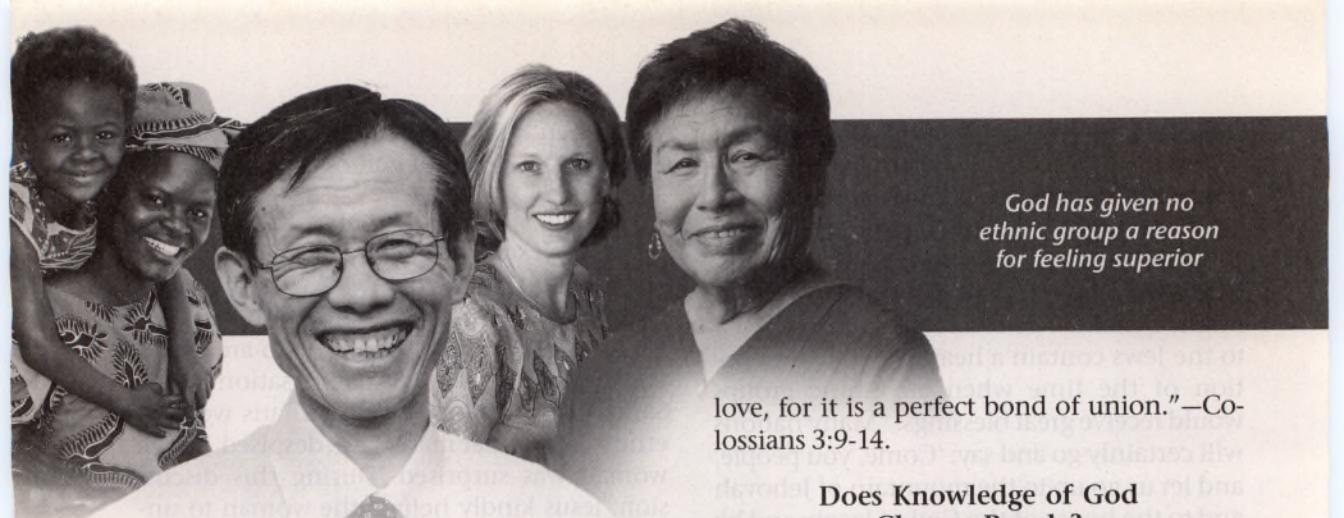
### Jesus Teaches Kindness

Jesus revealed the knowledge of God more than anyone else did. He showed his followers how to be kind to people who are different. He once struck up a conversation with a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were an ethnic group that many Jews despised, so the woman was surprised. During this discussion, Jesus kindly helped the woman to understand how she could gain everlasting life.  
—John 4:7-14.

Jesus also taught us how to treat people from other ethnic groups when he gave an illustration about a neighborly Samaritan. This man came across a badly injured Jew who had been attacked by robbers. The Samaritan could easily have reasoned: ‘Why should I help a Jew? The Jews despise my

*What can we learn from the parable of the neighborly Samaritan?*





*God has given no ethnic group a reason for feeling superior*

people.' But Jesus presented the Samaritan as having a different view of strangers. Even though other travelers had passed by the wounded man, the Samaritan "was moved with pity" and provided extensive help. Jesus concluded this parable by saying that anyone desiring God's favor should do likewise. —Luke 10:30-37.

The apostle Paul taught those who wish to please God to change their personality and to imitate the way God treats people. Paul wrote: "Strip off the old personality with its practices, and clothe yourselves with the new personality, which through accurate knowledge is being made new according to the image of the One who created it, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, foreigner, Scythian . . . But, besides all these things, clothe yourselves with

love, for it is a perfect bond of union."—Colossians 3:9-14.

### **Does Knowledge of God Change People?**

Does knowing Jehovah God really change the way people deal with those from other ethnic groups? Consider the experience of an Asian immigrant in Canada who was disappointed when she experienced discrimination there. She met Jehovah's Witnesses, and they began studying the Bible with her. Later, she wrote them a letter of appreciation, in which she said: 'You were very nice and kind white people. When I realized you were really different from other whites, I wondered why. I thought and thought and concluded that you were God's Witnesses. There must be something in the Bible. I saw at your meetings crowds of whites, blacks, browns, and yellows whose hearts were the same color—transparent—because they were brothers and sisters. Now I know who made them so. It's your God.'

God's Word foretells a time when "the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah." (Isaiah 11:9) Even now, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy, a great crowd amounting to millions "out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues" are being united in true worship. (Revelation 7:9) They look forward to seeing hatred replaced by love in a worldwide society that will soon fulfill Jehovah's purpose expressed to Abraham: "All the families of the earth will be blessed."—Acts 3:25.

#### **IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

"Wisdom Is for a Protection"

Have You Sinned Against  
the Holy Spirit?

Awaiting Jehovah's Day  
With Endurance

# "Divided by Language but United by Love"

Deliverance. Liberation. Salvation. For centuries, people have longed for relief from burdens and cares. How can we cope with life's problems? Will there ever be a deliverance? And if so, how?

**T**HAT was the subject of a series of three-day district conventions, organized by Jehovah's Witnesses, that began in May 2006. The theme was "Deliverance at Hand!"

Nine of these conventions were attended by thousands of delegates from different countries. They were held during July and August 2006, in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic; in Bratislava, capital of Slovakia; in Chorzow and Poznan, Poland,\* and in five German cities—Dortmund, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Leipzig, and Munich. The combined attendance of these conventions exceeded 313,000.

What kind of spirit pervaded the conventions? What sort of publicity did they receive? And how did conventioners feel after attending them?

## Preparations

There was keen anticipation among visitors and local Witnesses alike

\* Six other convention sites throughout Poland and one in Slovakia were tied in electronically for the international parts of the program.

for what they knew would be memorable spiritual occasions. Arranging for adequate accommodations for the delegates was a big job. For the Chorzow convention, for example, Polish Witnesses offered to open their homes to almost 13,000 guests from Eastern Europe. Delegations came to that convention from Armenia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United States, and Uzbekistan.

Many delegates had to begin preparations for their trip months in advance. Tatiana, a full-time evangelizer in Kamchatka, a Russian peninsula located northeast of Japan, began saving for the trip a year in advance. She had to travel some 6,500 miles. First, she flew 5 hours by plane, then she traveled for nearly three days by train, and finally she spent 30 hours on a bus to reach Chorzow.

Thousands volunteered for pre-convention work, making the stadiums and their surroundings fit locations for worship. (Deuteronomy



23:14) To cite just one example, in Leipzig the local Witnesses did a fine job cleaning up the stadium, and they promised to do so again after the convention. As a result, stadium officials canceled a clause of the rental contract that called for a substantial payment to cover cleaning costs.

### Invitations

Congregations worldwide gave extensive publicity to the "Deliverance at Hand!" Conventions. Those individuals who were to attend special conventions shared in this campaign with great enthusiasm. They continued publicizing the convention until late into the evening of the day before the convention began. Did their zeal produce any good results?

A Polish Witness named Bogdan met an elderly man who wanted to attend the convention but who said that his small pension would not allow him to travel the 75 miles to Chorzow. It turned out that there was going to be an empty seat on the bus hired by the local congregation. Bogdan relates: "We told the man that he could go with us free of charge if he came to the place of departure at 5:30 in the morning." The man accepted the invitation and attended the convention. Later he wrote to the brothers, saying: "After attending this convention, I am determined to be a better man."

In Prague a man who was staying at one of the hotels used by delegates from Britain told conventioners one evening that he too had attended the sessions that day. What had moved him to be there? The man said that after receiving invitations from ten different publishers on the streets of the city, he just had to go! He was most impressed and was eager to learn more.—1 Timothy 2:3, 4.

### Solid Spiritual Program

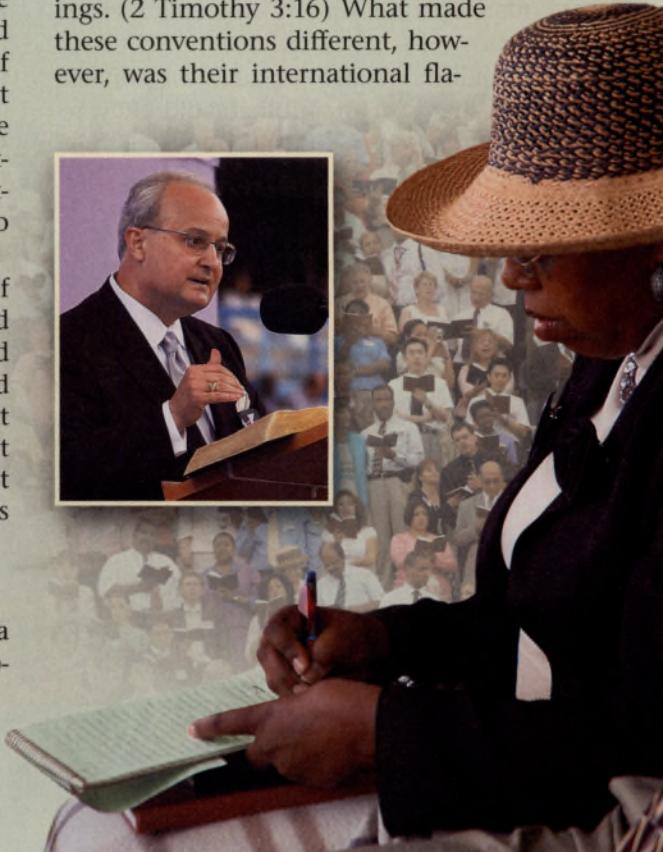
The program discussed how to handle a variety of problems. Straightforward Scrip-

tural counsel explained how these problems can be solved or endured.

Individuals troubled by old age, poor health, loss of loved ones in death, or other personal problems received encouragement from the Bible to help them brighten their outlook on life. (Psalm 72:12-14) Married couples and parents heard Bible counsel on how to enjoy a happy marriage and how to rear their children successfully. (Ecclesiastes 4:12; Ephesians 5:22, 25; Colossians 3:21) Young Christians—who are exposed to unhealthy peer pressure at school but to wise counsel from God's Word at home and in the congregation—received practical counsel on how to deal with social pressures and how to "flee from the desires incidental to youth."—2 Timothy 2:22.

### A Truly International Brotherhood

Jehovah's Witnesses always receive good Scriptural guidance at their gatherings. (2 Timothy 3:16) What made these conventions different, however, was their international fla-



vor. All the special conventions presented the same spiritual program in a number of tongues. Each day, members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses delivered talks, and reports from other lands added special interest. These talks and reports were interpreted for the benefit of the different language groups present.

Delegates were eager to meet their brothers and sisters from other lands. "Language differences did not present any real problems," said one delegate. "On the contrary, it added to the spirit of the event. The guests came from a number of cultural backgrounds, but they were all united by the same faith." Attendees at the Munich convention put it this way: "Divided by language but united by love." Whatever their homeland and tongue, those in attendance sensed that they were among real friends—spiritual brothers and sisters.—Zechariah 8:23.

### Expressions of Gratitude

The weather during the conventions in Poland tested the spirit and endurance of the delegates. Not only did it rain most of the time but it was also quite chilly—about 57 degrees Fahrenheit. A brother from the United States observed: "It was the worst weather and the lowest temperature I

have ever experienced at a convention, and I understood little of the program. But the incredible international at-

*Croatian delegates in Frankfurt were delighted to receive the "New World Translation" in their own language*



mosphere, the wonderful spirit, and the unique hospitality made up for all of that. This convention was unforgettable!"

Something that was unforgettable for Polish-speaking conventioners was the announcement of the release of *Insight on the Scriptures* in Polish—a wonderful reward for their endurance of the cold and rain. The release of the new publication *Live With Jehovah's Day in Mind* was also met with joy at all the "Deliverance at Hand!" Conventions.

Many of those present will remember the convention for other reasons. Kristina, a Czech sister who volunteered to accompany a bus group of delegates from overseas, recalls: "During our farewell a sister took me to one side, hugged me, and said: 'I felt so well cared for! You brought food right to our seats and even provided us with water to drink. Many thanks for your self-sacrificing love.'" What she referred to was the provision of lunch for overseas delegates. "It was a kind of work for which we had no previous experience," explained one brother. "The task involved the delivering of nearly 6,500 lunches each day. It was touching to see how many, including children, volunteered to help."

A sister who traveled to Chorzow from Ukraine for the convention said: "We are deeply moved by the love, care, and generosity shown by our fellow believers. We cannot find the words to express our gratitude." And eight-year-old Annika from Finland wrote to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Poland: "The convention was even more wonderful than I could have imagined. It is excellent to belong to Jehovah's organization, since one has friends all over the world!"—Psalm 133:1.

### Comments From Onlookers

Before the conventions, sightseeing tours were arranged for some of the delegates.

In the Bavarian countryside, the visitors stopped at Kingdom Halls, where local Witnesses welcomed them. One tour group's non-Witness guide was most impressed with this expression of brotherly affection. "On the bus back to our hotel," a delegate reports, "the tour guide said that we were very different from other tour groups. We were nicely dressed, and all cooperated with those taking the lead in the group. There was no cursing and no confusion. She was amazed at how strangers could instantly become such good friends."

A brother who worked at the News Service Department at the Prague convention relates: "On Sunday morning, the officer in charge of the policemen assigned to the convention visited us. He noted that peace reigned and said that he had nothing to do. He also mentioned that some local residents in the area around the stadium had inquired regarding the nature of the program. When he mentioned Jehovah's Witnesses, they usually shuddered, at which the officer would tell them: 'If people behaved half as well as Jehovah's Witnesses do, the police wouldn't even have to exist.'"

### Many Already Delivered!

God's Word, the Bible, serves as a bridge between cultures, bringing Christians together in peace and unity. (Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 4:7) The "Deliverance at Hand!" special conventions proved this. Jehovah's Witnesses have already been delivered from many of the plagues that afflict this world. Intolerance, aggression, and racism—to name but a few of society's ills—have all but been eliminated among them, and they look forward to the time when the whole world will be free of such problems.

Those who attended these conventions experienced firsthand the unity that exists among Witnesses from different lands and cultures. This was very evident at the conclusion of the conventions. All were applauding, hugging new friends, and taking the last photos. (1 Corinthians 1:10; 1 Peter 2:17) Happy and convinced that deliverance from all troubles and cares is at hand, the delegates returned to their homes and congregations with renewed determination to keep a very tight grip on God's "word of life."—Philippians 2:15, 16.

## Twenty-Five Languages Speaking as One

At all nine conventions, the program was presented in the local language. During the conventions in Germany, the discourses were also delivered in 18 other languages. In Dortmund talks were presented in Arabic, Farsi, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian; at Frankfurt in English, French,



and Serbian/Croatian; at Hamburg in Danish, Dutch, Swedish, and Tamil; at Leipzig in Chinese, Polish, and Turkish; and at Munich in Greek, Italian, and German Sign Language. The Prague convention

had all the discourses in Czech, English, and Russian. At Bratislava the program was in English, Hungarian, Slovak, and Slovakian Sign Language. At Chorzow the languages were Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish Sign Language. And in Poznan, they were Polish and Finnish.

Twenty-five languages in all! Truly, the conventioners were divided by language, but they were united by their love.

# Jehovah's Word Is Alive

## Highlights From the Book of Ezekiel—I

THE year is 613 B.C.E. The prophet Jeremiah is in Judah, fearlessly proclaiming the impending destruction of Jerusalem and the desolation of the land of Judah. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has already taken many Jews into captivity. Among them are young Daniel and his three companions, who are serving in the Chaldean court. Most of the Jewish exiles are by the river Chebar in "the land of the Chaldeans." (Ezekiel 1:1-3) Jehovah does not leave those captives without a messenger. He appoints 30-year-old Ezekiel as prophet.

Completed in 591 B.C.E., the book of Ezekiel covers a period of 22 years. Ezekiel is meticulous in his writing. He dates his prophecies, specifying even the day and the month along with the year. The first part of Ezekiel's message centers on the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. The second part contains pronouncements against surrounding nations, and the final part has to do with the restoration of Jehovah's worship. This article discusses highlights from Ezekiel 1:1-24:27, covering visions, prophecies, and enactments concerning what was to befall Jerusalem.

**"A WATCHMAN IS WHAT  
I HAVE MADE YOU"  
(Ezekiel 1:1-19:14)**

After being given an awe-inspiring vision of Jehovah's throne, Ezekiel receives his commission. "A watchman is what I have made you to the house of Israel," Jehovah tells him, "and you must hear from my mouth speech and you must warn them from me." (Ezekiel 3:17) To prophesy the siege of Jerusalem and

its effects, Ezekiel is commanded to act out two pantomimes. Referring to the land of Judah, Jehovah says through Ezekiel: "Here I am! I am bringing upon you a sword, and I shall certainly destroy your high places." (Ezekiel 6:3) To the inhabitant of the land, he says: "The garland [of calamity] must come to you."—Ezekiel 7:7.

In 612 B.C.E., a vision transports Ezekiel to Jerusalem. What detestable things he sees happening in God's temple! When Jehovah sends his heavenly executional forces (represented by "six men") to express his anger at the apostates, only those who have received 'a mark on the forehead' will be spared. (Ezekiel 9:2-6) First, though, "coals of fire"—God's fiery message of destruction—must be tossed over the city. (Ezekiel 10:2) While 'Jehovah will bring upon the head of the wicked their own way,' he promises to regather the scattered ones of Israel.—Ezekiel 11:17-21.

God's spirit brings Ezekiel back to Chaldea. An enactment portrays the flight from Jerusalem of King Zedekiah and the people. False prophets and prophetesses are denounced. Idolaters are rejected. Judah is likened to a worthless vine. An eagle-vine riddle shows the bitter consequences of Jerusalem's turning to Egypt for help. The riddle concludes with the promise that 'Jehovah will transplant a tender twig upon a high mountain.' (Ezekiel 17:22) In Judah, however, there will be "no scepter for ruling."—Ezekiel 19:14.

### *Scriptural Questions Answered:*

**1:4-28—What does the celestial chariot picture?** The chariot represents the heavenly

part of Jehovah's organization made up of faithful spirit creatures. Its source of power is Jehovah's holy spirit. The Rider of the chariot, who represents Jehovah, is indescribably glorious. His calmness is illustrated by a lovely rainbow.

**1:5-11—Who are the four living creatures?** In his second vision of the chariot, Ezekiel identifies the four living creatures as cherubs. (Ezekiel 10:1-11; 11:22) In this later description, he calls the bull's face "the face of the cherub." (Ezekiel 10:14) This is appropriate because the bull is a symbol of power and strength, and cherubs are powerful spirit creatures.

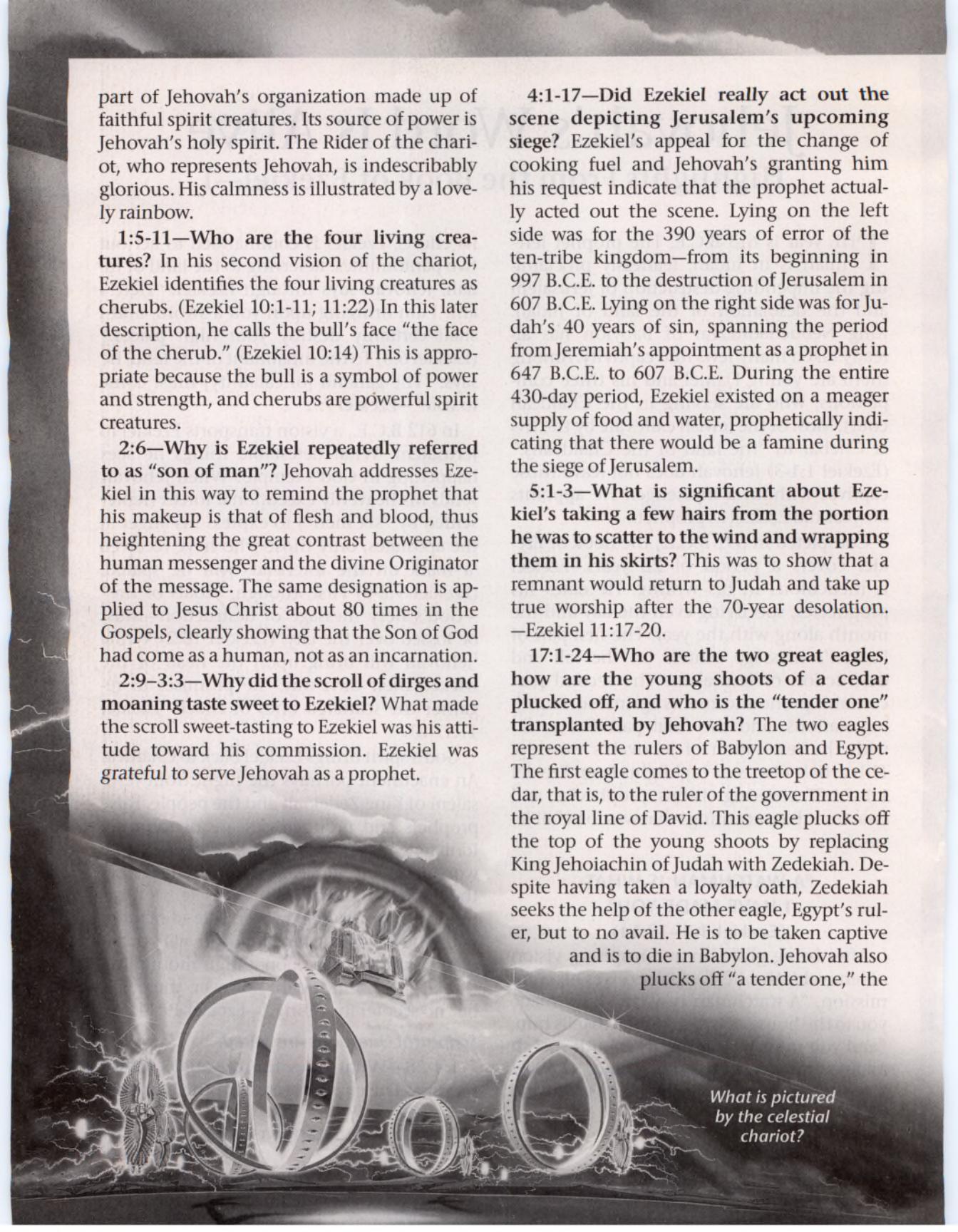
**2:6—Why is Ezekiel repeatedly referred to as "son of man"?** Jehovah addresses Ezekiel in this way to remind the prophet that his makeup is that of flesh and blood, thus heightening the great contrast between the human messenger and the divine Originator of the message. The same designation is applied to Jesus Christ about 80 times in the Gospels, clearly showing that the Son of God had come as a human, not as an incarnation.

**2:9-3:3—Why did the scroll of dirges and moaning taste sweet to Ezekiel?** What made the scroll sweet-tasting to Ezekiel was his attitude toward his commission. Ezekiel was grateful to serve Jehovah as a prophet.

**4:1-17—Did Ezekiel really act out the scene depicting Jerusalem's upcoming siege?** Ezekiel's appeal for the change of cooking fuel and Jehovah's granting him his request indicate that the prophet actually acted out the scene. Lying on the left side was for the 390 years of error of the ten-tribe kingdom—from its beginning in 997 B.C.E. to the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. Lying on the right side was for Judah's 40 years of sin, spanning the period from Jeremiah's appointment as a prophet in 647 B.C.E. to 607 B.C.E. During the entire 430-day period, Ezekiel existed on a meager supply of food and water, prophetically indicating that there would be a famine during the siege of Jerusalem.

**5:1-3—What is significant about Ezekiel's taking a few hairs from the portion he was to scatter to the wind and wrapping them in his skirts?** This was to show that a remnant would return to Judah and take up true worship after the 70-year desolation.—Ezekiel 11:17-20.

**17:1-24—Who are the two great eagles, how are the young shoots of a cedar plucked off, and who is the "tender one" transplanted by Jehovah?** The two eagles represent the rulers of Babylon and Egypt. The first eagle comes to the treetop of the cedar, that is, to the ruler of the government in the royal line of David. This eagle plucks off the top of the young shoots by replacing King Jehoiachin of Judah with Zedekiah. Despite having taken a loyalty oath, Zedekiah seeks the help of the other eagle, Egypt's ruler, but to no avail. He is to be taken captive and is to die in Babylon. Jehovah also plucks off "a tender one," the



What is pictured  
by the celestial  
chariot?

Messianic King. This One is transplanted upon "a high and lofty mountain," upon heavenly Mount Zion, where he will become "a majestic cedar," a source of real blessings for the earth.—Revelation 14:1.

### **Lessons for Us:**

**2:6-8; 3:8, 9, 18-21.** We should neither be intimidated by the wicked nor hold back from proclaiming God's message, which includes a warning to them. When facing indifference or opposition, we need to be as hard as a diamond. However, we should be careful not to become tough, insensitive, or ruthless. Jesus felt compassion for the people he preached to, and we should likewise be moved by compassion to preach to others.  
—Matthew 9:36.

**3:15.** After receiving his commission, Ezekiel dwelled at Tel-abib, 'stunned for seven days,' digesting the message he was to declare. Should we not take time to study diligently and meditate in order to understand deep spiritual truths?

**4:1-5:4.** It took humility and courage on the part of Ezekiel to act out the two prophetic pantomimes. We too ought to be humble and courageous in carrying out any God-given assignment.

**7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5, 10.** We do not need to let our eye feel sorry for those who receive God's adverse judgment or feel compassion for them.

**7:19.** When Jehovah executes his judgment upon this system of things, money will have no value whatsoever.

**8:5-18.** Apostasy is spiritually deadly. "By his mouth the one who is an apostate brings his fellowman to ruin." (Proverbs 11:9) We are wise to turn away from even the thought of giving a listening ear to apostates.

**9:3-6.** Acquiring the mark—the evidence that we are dedicated, baptized servants of God and that we have the Christian personal-

ity—is essential for surviving the "great tribulation." (Matthew 24:21) Anointed Christians, represented by the man with the secretary's inkhorn, are taking the lead in doing the marking work, that is, the Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making work. If we want to retain our mark, we must zealously help them in this work.

**12:26-28.** Even to those scoffing at his message, Ezekiel was to say: "There will be no postponement anymore as to any words of [Jehovah]." We must do all we can to help others put their confidence in Jehovah before he brings an end to this system of things.

**14:12-23.** Gaining salvation is our personal responsibility. No one can do it for us.—Romans 14:12.

**18:1-29.** We are responsible for the consequences of our own actions.

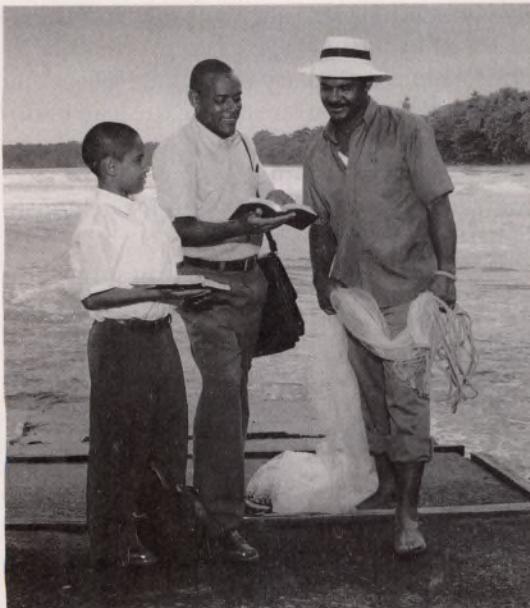
### **"A RUIN, A RUIN, A RUIN**

#### **I SHALL MAKE IT"**

**(Ezekiel 20:1-24:27)**

In the seventh year of exile, 611 B.C.E., the elderly ones of Israel come to Ezekiel "to inquire of Jehovah." They hear a long history of Israel's rebellion and a warning that 'Jehovah will bring forth his sword' against them. (Ezekiel 20:1; 21:3) Addressing the chieftain of Israel (Zedekiah), Jehovah says: "Remove the turban, and lift off the crown. This will not be the same. Put on high even what is low, and bring low even the high one. A ruin, a ruin, a ruin I shall make it. As for this also, it will certainly become no one's until he comes who has the legal right [Jesus Christ], and I must give it to him."—Ezekiel 21:26, 27.

Jerusalem is arraigned. The guilt of Oholah (Israel) and of Oholibah (Judah) is exposed. Oholah has already been given "into the hand of those passionately loving her, into the hand of the sons of Assyria." (Ezekiel 23:9) The desolation of Oholibah is in the offing. In 609 B.C.E., the 18-month siege of



*Having a zealous share in the preaching work helps us to retain our "mark"*

Jerusalem begins. When the city finally falls, the Jews will be too stunned to express their grief. Ezekiel must not speak God's message to the exiles until he receives a report of the destruction of the city from "the escaped one."—Ezekiel 24:26, 27.

#### *Scriptural Questions Answered:*

**21:3—What is the “sword” that Jehovah brings forth out of its sheath?** The “sword” that Jehovah uses to execute his judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah proves to be Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and his army. It could also include the heavenly part of God's organization consisting of mighty spirit creatures.

**24:6-14—What does the rust of the cooking pot represent?** Jerusalem under siege is likened to a widemouthed cooking pot. Its rust represents the moral filth of the city—the uncleanness, loose conduct, and bloodshed for which she is responsible. So great is her uncleanness that even standing

the pot empty upon its coals and making it very hot fails to remove the rust.

#### **Lessons for Us:**

**20:1, 49.** The response of the older men of Israel shows that they were skeptical about what Ezekiel had said. May we never develop a doubting attitude toward divine warnings.

**21:18-22.** Even though Nebuchadnezzar used divination, it was Jehovah who made certain that the pagan ruler would come against Jerusalem. This shows that even demons cannot turn aside Jehovah's executive agents from accomplishing his purpose.

**22:6-16.** Jehovah detests slander, loose conduct, the abuse of power, and the taking of bribes. We should be firm in our determination to avoid such wrongdoings.

**23:5-49.** Making political alliances led Israel and Judah to adopt the false worship of their allies. Let us guard against forming worldly ties that can destroy our faith.—James 4:4.

#### **A Message That Is Alive and Exerts Power**

What beautiful lessons we learn from the first 24 chapters of the Bible book of Ezekiel! The principles set out there show what leads to God's disfavor, how we may receive his mercy, and why we should warn the wicked. The prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem clearly portrays Jehovah as a God who 'causes his people to know new things before they begin to spring up.'—Isaiah 42:9.

Such prophecies as those recorded at Ezekiel 17:22-24 and 21:26, 27 pointed to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in heaven. Very soon, that rulership will result in God's will being done on earth. (Matthew 6:9, 10) With strong faith and conviction, we can look forward to Kingdom blessings. Yes, "the word of God is alive and exerts power."—Hebrews 4:12.

# Bible Education Builds Faith

"WHAT an inestimable privilege it has been to spend the past five months giving attention to the thoughts of our Creator and learning to see things as he does!" remarked a representative of the 122nd class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead on graduation day. March 10, 2007, will be a day long-remembered by the 56 members of the class, who were now about to begin their missionary service in the 26 lands to which they had been assigned.

After extending a warm welcome to the audience of 6,205, Theodore Jaracz, a member of the Governing Body, stated: "We feel confident that you are going to be strengthened spiritually and built up in your faith as a result of attending this graduation program." He successively introduced four speakers who would provide the students with timely Bible-based encouragement and counsel to help them be successful in their missionary assignments.

## Words of Encouragement to Build Faith in Others

Leon Weaver, a member of the United States Branch Committee, spoke on the theme "Keep Doing What Is Fine." He reminded the students that they had each spent on average 13 years in full-time service, promoting Bible education that builds faith. He said: "It is a fine work because it involves saving the lives of people, and more important, it is a fine work because it magnifies our heavenly Father, Jehovah." Brother Weaver then encouraged the students to continue "sowing with a view to the spirit" and not to "give up in doing what is fine."—Galatians 6:8, 9.

David Splane, a member of the Governing Body, provided practical reminders as he developed the



## CLASS STATISTICS

Number of countries represented: 9

Number of countries assigned to: 26

Total number of students: 56

Average age: 33.4

Average years in truth: 16.8

Average years in full-time ministry: 13

theme "Be Sure to Put Your Best Foot Forward." Brother Splane encouraged the new missionaries to get off to a good start in their assignments by doing the following: "Maintain a positive attitude. Do not jump to conclusions. Smile. Do not be critical. Be humble, and respect the local brothers." He then added: "When you step off the plane, put your best foot forward, and may Jehovah bless those beautiful feet of yours as they bring the 'good news of something better' to the people." —Isaiah 52:7.



### 122nd Graduating Class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead

In the list below, rows are numbered from front to back, and names are listed from left to right in each row.

- (1) Howitt, R.; Smith, P.; Martinez, A.; Pozzobon, S.; Kitamura, Y.; Laud, C. (2) Fiedler, I.; Beasley, K.; Matkovich, C.; Bell, D.; Lippincott, W. (3) Sites, W.; Andersen, A.; Toevs, L.; Fusano, G.; Rodriguez, C.; Yoo, J. (4) Sobomehin, M.; Thomas, L.; Gasson, S.; Dauba, V.; Bertaude, A.; Winn, C.; Dobrowolski, M. (5) Yoo, J.; Dauba, J.; Mixer, H.; Newton, M.; Rodriguez, F.; Mixer, N. (6) Laud, M.; Lippincott, K.; Martinez, R.; Haub, A.; Schamp, R.; Pozzobon, L.; Toevs, S. (7) Howitt, S.; Kitamura, U.; Newton, D.; Haub, J.; Sites, J.; Thomas, D. (8) Sobomehin, L.; Matkovich, J.; Fusano, B.; Winn, J.; Schamp, J.; Andersen, D.; Dobrowolski, J. (9) Fiedler, P.; Bell, E.; Beasley, B.; Smith, B.; Bertaude, P.; Gasson, M.

"An Inheritance That Is Beyond All Shadow of Doubt" was the theme considered by Gilead instructor Lawrence Bowen. Brother Bowen reminded the students that the founding of Gilead School during World War II was grounded in complete trust in the fulfillment of Jehovah's prophetic Word. (Hebrews 11:1; Revelation 17:8) Since then, Gilead has afforded stu-

dents an opportunity to strengthen their faith. Strong faith impels graduates to go forth, zealously proclaiming the truth.

Mark Noumair, another Gilead instructor, spoke on the intriguing theme "You Remind Me of Someone." He drew attention to the example of the prophet Elisha, who demonstrated faith and courage in his assignment. Basing his comments on

1 Kings 19:21, Brother Noumair said: "Elisha was willing to make adjustments in life, put his personal interests in the background, and champion Jehovah's cause." He commended the graduates for having demonstrated the same spirit and encouraged them to continue to do so in their new assignments.

### **Faith Promotes Freeness of Speech**

While the future missionaries were building up their faith during the school term, they took advantage of weekends to preach the good news to others. This resulted in fine experiences that were related and reenacted in a program part conducted by Wallace Liverance, another Gilead instructor. The theme of his part, "We Exercise Faith and Therefore We Speak," called to mind the apostle Paul's words found at 2 Corinthians 4:13.

Following this part, Daniel Barnes and Charles Woody, members of the Bethel family, conducted interviews with present and former missionaries. These highlighted Jehovah's care for and blessing upon those who serve him faithfully. (Proverbs 10:22; 1 Peter 5:7) One missionary commented: "My wife and I definitely saw Jehovah's care through the education that we received at Gilead. It really built up our faith. Faith is important because all of God's servants, including missionaries, are going to have trials, problems, and anxieties."

### **Continue Promoting Bible Education That Builds Faith**

As a fitting climax to the graduation program, Samuel Herd, a member of the Governing Body, addressed the audience on the subject "Keep Building Up Your Broth-

ers." What was the purpose of the education that the students had received? "Its purpose has been to teach you how to use your tongue to praise Jehovah, to teach his truths to others in your newly assigned territory, and to build up one another in the faith," Brother Herd said. However, he reminded the students that the tongue can also promote what is not upbuilding. (Proverbs 18:21; James 3:8-10) He encouraged the students to imitate Jesus' example in the use of their tongue. On one occasion, after listening to Jesus, his disciples responded: "Were not our hearts burning . . . as he was fully opening up the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32) Brother Herd said: "If your words are positive, they will touch the hearts of your brothers and sisters in your assignment."

**"If your words are positive,  
they will touch the hearts of  
your brothers and sisters in  
your assignment"**

Next, the graduates received their diplomas. Then a letter of appreciation from the class was read. It said: "We feel a deep sense of responsibility to use what we have learned to carry out faithfully our assignments as missionaries. As we stand ready to go to the ends of the earth, we pray that our efforts will result in a great shout of praise to our Grand Instructor, Jehovah God." The audience responded with heartfelt applause. Indeed, the graduation program had built up the faith of all in attendance.



# The First Bible in Portuguese

## A STORY OF PERSEVERANCE

**H**E WHO perseveres will succeed." This motto appears on the title page of a 17th-century religious pamphlet written by João Ferreira de Almeida. It is hard to imagine a more fitting description of a man who dedicated his life to the translation and publication of the Bible into Portuguese.

Almeida was born in 1628 in Torre de Tavares, a village in northern Portugal. Orphaned as a child, he was raised in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, by an uncle who was a member of a religious order. Tradition has it that in preparation for the priesthood, Almeida received an excellent education, which helped him at an early age to develop his exceptional ability for languages.

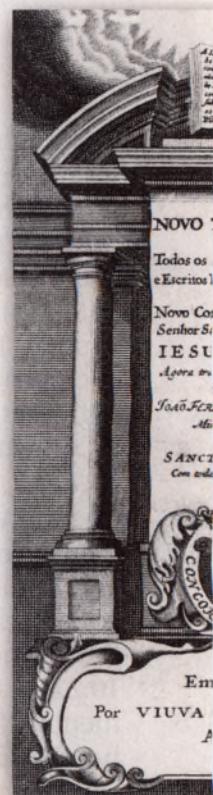
It is unlikely, however, that Almeida would have used his talents in the service of Bible translation had he remained in Portugal. While the Reformation

flooded northern and central Europe with vernacular Bibles, Portugal remained firmly under the influence of the Catholic Inquisition. The mere possession of a Bible in the common tongue could result in a person's being haled before an Inquisitional court.\*

Possibly motivated by the desire to escape this repressive atmosphere, Almeida moved to the Netherlands while in his early teens. Shortly thereafter, when just 14 years of age, he embarked on a journey to Asia, via Batavia (now Jakarta), Indonesia, at that time the administrative center of the Dutch East India Company in Southeast Asia.

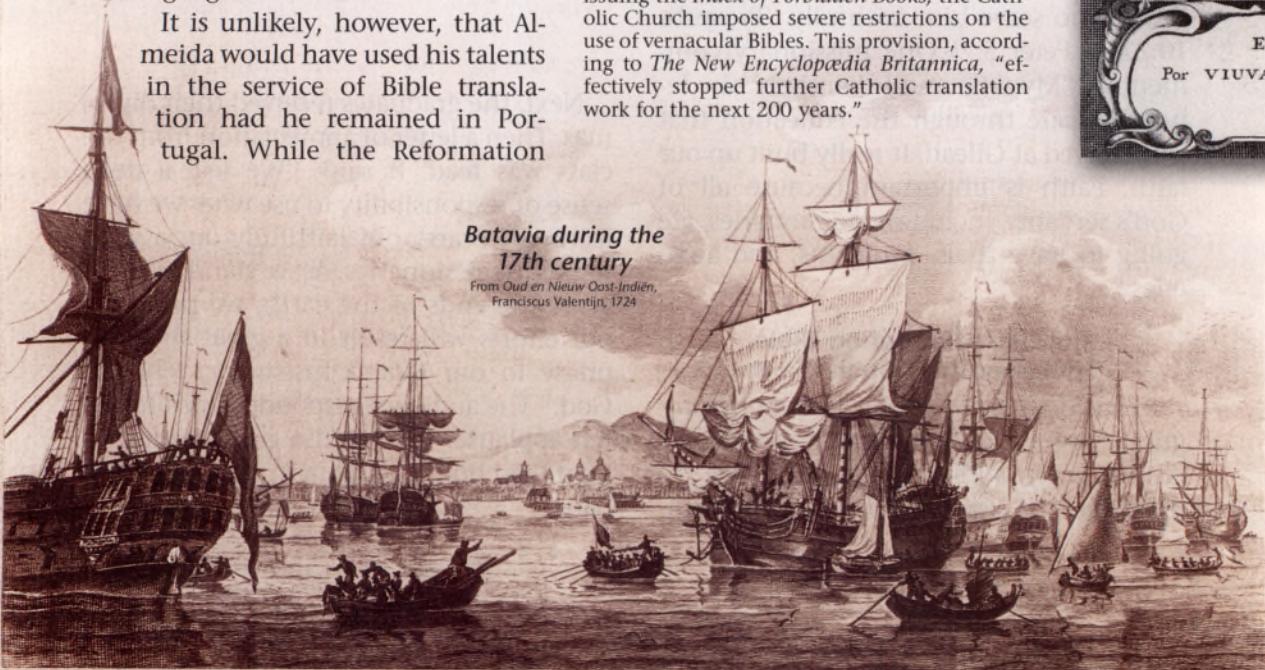
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\* In the second half of the 16th century, by issuing the *Index of Forbidden Books*, the Catholic Church imposed severe restrictions on the use of vernacular Bibles. This provision, according to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "effectively stopped further Catholic translation work for the next 200 years."



### Batavia during the 17th century

From *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indië*,  
Franciscus Valentijn, 1724



## A Teenage Translator

On the final leg of his journey to Asia, Almeida reached a turning point in his life. Sailing between Batavia and Malacca (now Melaka), in western Malaysia, he chanced upon a Protestant pamphlet in Spanish entitled *Diferencias de la Cristiandad* (The Differences in Christendom). In addition to attacks on false religious doctrines, the pamphlet contained a statement that particularly impressed young Almeida: "The use of an unknown language in church, even for the glory of God, is of no benefit to the uncomprehending listener."—1 Corinthians 14:9.

*Title page of the first Portuguese New Testament, published in 1681*

The conclusion was obvious to Almeida: The key to unmasking religious error was to make the Bible understandable to all. On arrival in Malacca, he converted to the Dutch Reformed religion and immediately began to translate portions of the Gospels from Spanish into Portuguese, distributing them among "those who showed a sincere desire to know the truth."\*

Two years later, Almeida was ready for a more ambitious undertaking—the translation of the complete Christian Greek Scriptures from the Latin *Vulgate*. This he com-

\* Older editions of the Almeida Bible refer to him as Padre (Father) Almeida, leading some to believe that he had served as a Catholic priest. However, the Dutch editors of Almeida's Bible used this term mistakenly, imagining it to be the title used by a pastor or a minister.

pleted in less than a year, a remarkable achievement for a 16-year-old! Courageously, he sent a copy of his translation to the Dutch governor-general in Batavia to have it published. Apparently, the Reformed Church in Batavia forwarded his manuscript to Amsterdam, but the elderly minister to whom it was entrusted died, and Almeida's work disappeared.

When asked to make a copy of his translation for the Reformed congregation in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1651, Almeida discovered that the original had vanished from the church archives. Undeterred, he somehow located a copy—perhaps an early draft—and the following year completed a revised version of the Gospels and the book of Acts. The consistory\* in Batavia rewarded him with 30 guilders. It was "a paltry sum for the huge task he had performed," wrote one of Almeida's colleagues.

Despite this lack of recognition, Almeida pressed on, submitting a revision of his complete New Testament in 1654. Once again, the possibility of publication was raised, but nothing concrete was done beyond the preparation of a few handwritten copies for use in some churches.

### Condemned by the Inquisition

For the next decade, Almeida was busy in pastoral and missionary work for the Reformed Church. He was ordained in 1656 and served first in Ceylon, where he narrowly escaped being trampled on by an elephant, and later in India, as one of the first Protestant missionaries to visit that country.

Almeida was a Protestant convert in the service of a foreign power. Therefore, many in the Portuguese-speaking communities he visited viewed him as an apostate and a traitor. His forthright condemnation of moral

\* The ruling body in the Reformed Church.



Courtesy Biblioteca Nacional, Portugal

corruption among the clergy and his exposure of church doctrine also resulted in frequent clashes with Catholic missionaries. These conflicts reached a climax in 1661 when an Inquisitional court at Goa, India, sentenced Almeida to death for heresy. In his absence, an effigy was burned. Perhaps alarmed at Almeida's combative style, the Dutch governor-general recalled him to Batavia soon afterward.

Almeida was a zealous missionary, but he never lost sight of the need for a Portuguese Bible. Rather, the results of Bible illiteracy—all too evident among both clergy and laity—only served to strengthen his resolve. In the foreword to a religious tract dated 1668, Almeida announced to his readers: "I hope . . . soon to honor you with the complete Bible in your own tongue, the greatest gift and most precious treasure that anyone has yet to give you."

### Almeida Versus the Revision Committee

In 1676, Almeida presented a final draft of his New Testament to the church consistory in Batavia for revision. From the outset, relations between translator and revisers were strained. Biographer J. L. Swellengrebel explains that Almeida's Dutch-speaking colleagues may have had difficulty understanding some nuances of meaning and style. There was also controversy about the choice of language. Should the Bible use the Portuguese spoken locally or a more refined Portuguese that many would find hard to understand? Finally, Almeida's zeal to see the work completed was a constant source of friction.

The work progressed very slowly, possibly because of squabbling or the lack of interest on the part of the revisers. Four years later, the revisers were still wrestling with the opening chapters of Luke. Frustrated with this delay, Almeida sent a copy of his manu-

script to the Netherlands to be published without the revisers' knowledge.

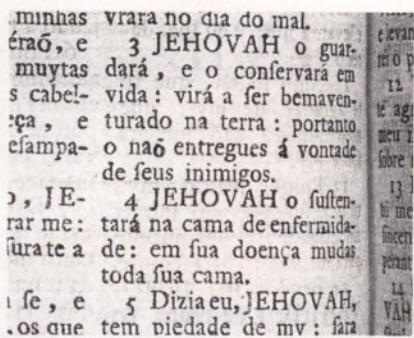
Despite the consistory's attempts to prevent publication, his New Testament went to press in Amsterdam in 1681, and the first copies reached Batavia the following year. Imagine how disappointed Almeida must have been to find that his translation had suffered alterations at the hands of revisers in the Netherlands! Because the revisers were unfamiliar with Portuguese, Almeida observed that they had introduced "clumsy and contradictory translations that obscured the meaning of the Holy Spirit."

The Dutch government was also dissatisfied, and they ordered the whole edition to be destroyed. Even so, Almeida convinced the authorities to spare a few copies on the condition that the most serious errors be corrected by hand. These copies would be used until a revision could be prepared.

The revisers in Batavia reconvened to continue their work on the Christian Greek Scriptures and began to prepare the books of the Hebrew Scriptures as Almeida completed them. Fearing that the translator's impatience would get the better of him, the consistory decided to keep the signed pages of final copy in the church safe. Needless to say, Almeida contested their decision.

By this time, decades of hard work and the rigors of life in a tropical climate had taken their toll. In 1689, in view of his deteriorating health, Almeida retired from church activities to dedicate himself to the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Sadly, he died in 1691 while working on the final chapter of Ezekiel.

The second edition of the New Testament, concluded shortly before his death, went to press in 1693. Yet again, it seems that his work suffered at the hands of incompetent revisers. In his book *A Biblia em Portugal* (The Bible in Portugal), G. L. Santos Ferreira states: "The revisers . . . made significant



Cortesia da Biblioteca da Igreja de Santa Catarina (Igreja dos Paulistas)

changes to Almeida's excellent work, disfiguring and corrupting what beauty of the original had escaped the revisers of the first edition."

### The Portuguese Bible Concluded

With the death of Almeida, the driving force behind the revision and publication of the Portuguese Bible in Batavia disappeared. It was the London-based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge that financed a third edition of Almeida's New Testament in 1711 at the request of Danish missionaries working in Tranquebar, southern India.

That society decided to set up a printing operation in Tranquebar. However, en route to India, the ship transporting the printing materials and a consignment of Portuguese Bibles was captured by French pirates and eventually abandoned in the port of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Santos Ferreira writes: "For some inexplicable reason and in circumstances which many viewed as miraculous, the boxes containing the printing materials were found intact in the bottom of the hold and continued their journey in the same vessel to Tranquebar." The Danish missionaries carefully revised and published Almeida's version of the remaining books of the Bible. The final volume of the Bible in Portuguese came out in 1751, almost 110 years after Almeida embarked on his career as a Bible translator.

## THE DIVINE NAME

A noteworthy example of Almeida's integrity as a translator is his use of the divine name to render the Hebrew Tetragrammaton.

### An Enduring Legacy

From an early age, Almeida understood the need for a Bible in Portuguese so that the common people could discern the truth in their own language. He doggedly pursued that goal throughout his life, despite Catholic Church opposition, the indifference of his peers, seemingly endless revision problems, and his own worsening health. His perseverance was rewarded.

Many of the Portuguese-speaking communities where Almeida preached have dwindled and disappeared, yet his Bible has survived. During the 19th century, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the American Bible Society distributed thousands of copies of the Almeida version in Portugal and in the coastal cities of Brazil. As a result, Bibles derived from his original text are to this day among the most popular and widely distributed in the Portuguese-speaking world.

Without a doubt, many owe a debt of gratitude to early Bible translators like Almeida. But we should be even more thankful to Jehovah, the communicative God, whose "will is that *all sorts of men* should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:3, 4) Ultimately, he is the One who has preserved his Word and made it available for our benefit. May we always cherish and diligently study this "most precious treasure" from our heavenly Father.

# "RETURN EVIL FOR EVIL TO NO ONE"

*"Return evil for evil to no one.*

*Provide fine things in the sight of all men."—ROMANS 12:17.*

WHEN a child is shoved by a sibling, usually the child's first reaction is to shove back. Sadly, such tit-for-tat behavior is not limited to children. Many adults act similarly. When offended by someone, they want to get even. Granted, most adults will not give a literal shove, but many will push back in subtle ways. Perhaps they spread harmful gossip about the offender or find ways to prevent him from succeeding. Whatever method is used, the intent is the same—to repay in kind, to retaliate.

<sup>2</sup> Although the urge to get even is deep-seated, true Christians resist giving in to it. Instead, they strive to follow the apostle Paul's admonition: "Return evil for evil to no one." (Romans 12:17) What will motivate us to live according to that high standard? Whom in particular should we not repay with evil? What benefits will be reaped if we refrain from getting even? To answer those questions, let us study the context of Paul's words and see how Romans chapter 12 shows that refraining from retaliation is the right, the loving, and the modest course to follow. We will consider these three aspects, one at a time.

1. What type of behavior is not uncommon?  
2. (a) Why do true Christians resist the urge to retaliate? (b) What questions and which Bible chapter will we consider?

## Romans chapter 12 describes a Christian's relationship with

- Jehovah
- fellow believers
- unbelievers

### "Consequently I Entreat You"

<sup>3</sup> Beginning in chapter 12, Paul considers four related subjects that affect a Christian's life. He describes our relationship with Jehovah, with fellow believers, with nonbelievers, and with governmental authorities. Paul indicates that there is a fundamental reason to resist wrong inclinations, includ-

ing the urge to retaliate, when he states: "*Consequently I entreat you by the compassions of God, brothers.*" (Romans 12:1) Note the word "consequently," which means "in view of the foregoing." Paul in effect says, 'In view of what I

just explained to you, I entreat you to do what I will tell you next.' What had Paul explained to those Christians in Rome?

<sup>4</sup> In the first 11 chapters of his letter, Paul discussed the wonderful opportunity open to both Jews and Gentiles to become rulers with Christ in God's Kingdom, a hope that natural Israel failed to accept. (Romans 11:13-36) That precious privilege became possible only "by the compassions of God." How should Christians respond to this great undeserved kindness on God's part? Their

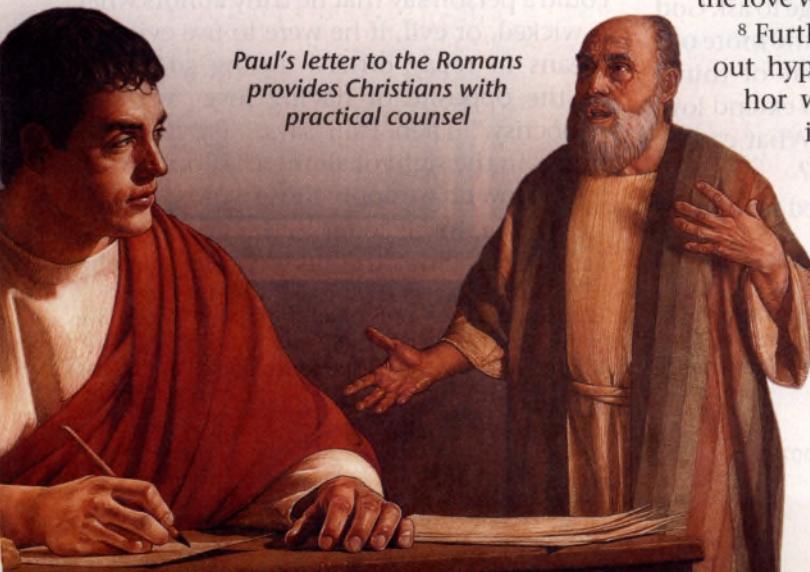
3, 4. (a) Beginning with Romans chapter 12, what does Paul discuss, and what is the significance of his use of the word "consequently"? (b) What effect should God's compassion have had on the Christians in Rome?

hearts should be filled with such deeply felt gratitude that they would be moved to do what Paul states next: "Present your bodies a sacrifice living, holy, acceptable to God, a sacred service with your power of reason." (Romans 12:1) How, though, could those Christians actually present themselves "a sacrifice" to God?

<sup>5</sup> Paul goes on to explain: "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2) Instead of allowing the spirit of the world to shape their thinking, they needed to make their minds over to Christ's way of thinking. (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5) That principle should influence the day-to-day behavior of all genuine Christians, including us today.

<sup>6</sup> How does Paul's reasoning at Romans 12:1, 2 help us? Like those spirit-anointed Christians in Rome, we are deeply grateful for the continuing and manifold expressions of compassion that God has given us and continues to give us every day of our life.

5. (a) How can a person offer himself "a sacrifice" to God? (b) What principle should influence a Christian's behavior?
6. Based on Paul's reasoning found at Romans 12:1, 2, what moves us to avoid retaliating?



*Paul's letter to the Romans provides Christians with practical counsel*

Consequently, a heart filled with gratitude moves us to serve God with all our strength, means, and abilities. That heartfelt desire also moves us to do our utmost to think, not like the world, but like Christ. And having the mind of Christ affects how we treat others—both fellow believers and nonbelievers. (Galatians 5:25) A case in point: If we think like Christ, we are compelled to resist the urge to retaliate.—1 Peter 2:21-23.

### **"Let Your Love Be Without Hypocrisy"**

<sup>7</sup> We refrain from returning evil for evil not only because it is the right course but also because it is the loving course. Note how the apostle Paul next considers the motive of love. In the book of Romans, Paul uses the word "love" (*a·ga'pe* in Greek) several times when referring to God's love and that of Christ. (Romans 5:5, 8; 8:35, 39) However, in chapter 12, Paul uses *a·ga'pe* in a different way—in speaking about love shown to fellow humans. After noting that spiritual gifts vary and are present among some believers, Paul mentions a quality that should be cultivated by all Christians. He states: "Let your love be without hypocrisy." (Romans 12:4-9) Showing love to others is a basic mark of true Christians. (Mark 12:28-31) Paul exhorts us to make sure that the love we show as Christians is sincere.

<sup>8</sup> Further, Paul notes how love without hypocrisy is shown, stating: "Abhor what is wicked, cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9) "Abhor" and "cling" are strong words. "Abhor" can be translated "hate exceedingly." We must hate not merely the

7. What type of love is considered in Romans chapter 12?
8. How can we show unhypocritical love?

consequences of evil but also the evil itself. (Psalm 97:10) The word “cling” is a translation of a Greek verb that literally means “to glue.” A Christian who has genuine love is so firmly glued, or attached, to the quality of goodness that it becomes an inseparable part of his personality.

<sup>9</sup> One particular manifestation of love is mentioned by Paul again and again. He states: “Keep on blessing those who persecute; be blessing and do not be cursing.” “Return evil for evil to no one.” “Do not avenge yourselves, beloved.” “Do not let yourself be conquered by the evil, but keep conquering the evil with the good.” (Romans 12:14, 17-19, 21) Paul’s words leave no doubt about how we should treat non-believers, even those who oppose us.

### **“Keep On Blessing Those Who Persecute”**

<sup>10</sup> How do we carry out Paul’s exhortation: “Keep on blessing those who persecute”? (Romans 12:14) Jesus told his followers: “Continue to love your enemies and to pray for those persecuting you.” (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27, 28) Hence, one way in which we bless persecutors is by praying for them, petitioning God that if any are opposing us because of ignorance, Jehovah may open their eyes to the truth. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Granted, it may seem strange to ask God to bless a persecutor. However, the more our mind-set resembles Christ’s way of thinking, the more we will be able to extend love to our enemies. (Luke 23:34) What can be the result of showing such love?

<sup>11</sup> Stephen was one who prayed for his per-

9. What admonition does Paul give again and again?
10. In what way can we bless our persecutors?
11. (a) What can we learn from the example of Stephen? (b) As illustrated by Paul’s life, what change may occur in some persecutors?

secutors, and his prayer was not in vain. Not long after Pentecost 33 C.E., Stephen was arrested by opposers of the Christian congregation, dragged outside Jerusalem, and stoned. Before he died, he cried out: “Jehovah, do not charge this sin against them.” (Acts 7:58-8:1) One of the men for whom Stephen prayed that day was Saul, who witnessed and approved of Stephen’s murder. Later, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Saul. That former persecutor became a follower of Christ and went on to become the apostle Paul, the writer of the letter to the Romans. (Acts 26:12-18) In line with Stephen’s prayer, Jehovah evidently forgave Paul for the sin of being a persecutor. (1 Timothy 1:12-16) No wonder that Paul exhorted Christians: “Keep on blessing those who persecute”! He knew from experience that some persecutors may eventually become servants of God. In our day, some persecutors have likewise become believers because of the peaceable conduct of Jehovah’s servants.

### **“Be Peaceable With All Men”**

<sup>12</sup> Paul’s next admonition on how to treat believers and unbelievers is: “Return evil for evil to no one.” That statement is a logical consequence of what he said earlier, namely: “Abhor what is wicked.” After all, how could a person say that he truly abhors what is wicked, or evil, if he were to use evil as a means to repay others? Doing so would be the opposite of having love “without hypocrisy.” Then Paul says: “Provide fine things in the sight of all men.” (Romans 12:9, 17) How do we apply those words?

<sup>13</sup> Earlier, in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote about the persecution that the

12. How are the words of admonition found at Romans 12:9, 17 related?
13. In what way do we conduct ourselves “in the sight of all men”?



*What can we learn from the example of the disciple Stephen?*

<sup>14</sup> How far, though, should we go in order to promote peace? We should go as far as possible. Paul tells his Christian brothers: “If possible, as far as it depends upon you, be peaceable with all men.” (Romans 12:18) “If possible” and “as far as it depends upon you” are qualifying expressions indicating that making peace with others may not always be possible. For instance, we will not disobey a command of God just to keep peace with man. (Matthew 10:34-36; Hebrews 12:14) Still, we do everything we reasonably can—without compromising righteous principles—to make peace “with all men.”

**“Do Not Avenge Yourselves”**

apostles faced. He said: “We have become a theatrical spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men. . . . When being reviled, we bless; when being persecuted, we bear up; when being defamed, we entreat.” (1 Corinthians 4:9-13) Similarly, true Christians today are being watched by the people of this world. When those around us observe the fine things we do even while we are being treated unjustly, they may be inclined to look more favorably upon our Christian message.—1 Peter 2:12.

<sup>15</sup> Paul gives another compelling reason why we should not retaliate; it is the modest course to follow. He states: “Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but yield place to the wrath; for it is written: ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says Jehovah.’” (Romans 12:19) A Christian who tries to take revenge is presumptuous. He claims for himself a role that belongs to God. (Matthew 7:1) Moreover,

14. How far should we go in order to make peace?
15. What reason to forgo retaliation is found at Romans 12:19?

by taking matters into his own hands, he shows a lack of faith in Jehovah's assurance: "I will repay." In contrast, true Christians trust that Jehovah will "cause justice to be done for his chosen ones." (Luke 18:7, 8; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8) They modestly leave the avenging of wrong in God's hands.—Jeremiah 30:23, 24; Romans 1:18.

<sup>16</sup> Taking vengeance on an enemy would likely harden his spirit, but treating him with kindness may soften his heart. Why? Note Paul's words to the Christians in Rome. He says: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by doing this you will heap fiery coals upon his head." (Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21, 22) What does this mean?

<sup>17</sup> To "heap fiery coals upon his head" is a figure of speech drawn from the method of smelting metals in Bible times. Ore was put into a furnace, and a layer of coals was put not only underneath the ore but also on top of it. Fiery coals heaped on top increased the heat so that the hard metal melted and separated from the impurities in the ore. Similarly, by doing kind deeds to an opposer, we may "melt" his hardness and bring out his

16, 17. (a) What does it mean to "heap fiery coals" upon someone's head? (b) Have you personally observed how kindness softened the heart of an unbeliever? If so, give an example.

### Can You Explain?

- In Romans chapter 12, what admonition is found again and again?
- What will motivate us not to retaliate?
- What benefits will be reaped by us and others if we do not "return evil for evil"?

better qualities. (2 Kings 6:14-23) In fact, numerous members of the Christian congregation were first attracted to true worship by the kind deeds that Jehovah's servants performed in their behalf.

### Why We Do Not Retaliate

<sup>18</sup> In this brief consideration of Romans chapter 12, we have seen several important reasons why we "return evil for evil to no one." First, holding back from retaliating is the *right* course to follow. In view of God's compassion shown toward us, it is right and reasonable that we offer ourselves to Jehovah and willingly obey his commandments—including the command to love our enemies. Second, refusing to return evil for evil is the *loving* course to follow. By forgoing retaliation and promoting peace, we lovingly hope to help even some fierce opposers to become worshippers of Jehovah. Third, refraining from repaying with evil is the *modest* course to follow. Avenging ourselves would be presumptuous, for Jehovah states: "Vengeance is mine." God's Word also warns: "Has presumption come? Then dishonor will come; but wisdom is with the modest ones." (Proverbs 11:2) Wisely leaving the avenging of wrong in God's hands shows modesty on our part.

<sup>19</sup> Paul sums up his discussion of how we should treat others. He exhorts Christians: "Do not let yourself be conquered by the evil, but keep conquering the evil with the good." (Romans 12:21) What evil forces are we facing today? How can we conquer them? The answers to these and related questions will be considered in the following article.

18. Why is it right, loving, and modest not to retaliate?
19. What will we consider in the following article?

# "KEEP CONQUERING THE EVIL WITH THE GOOD"

*"Do not let yourself be conquered by the evil, but keep conquering the evil with the good." —ROMANS 12:21.*

IS IT possible to stand firm against those who fiercely oppose true worship? Is it possible to defeat the forces that try to pull us back into the ungodly world? The answer to both questions is yes! Why do we say so? Because of what the apostle Paul states in his letter to the Romans. He writes: "Do not let yourself be conquered by the evil, but keep conquering the evil with the good." (Romans 12:21) If we trust in Jehovah and are determined not to let the world conquer us, its evil will not overcome us. Further, the expression "keep conquering the evil" shows that we can defeat evil if we keep up our spiritual fight against it. Only those who let their guard down and cease fighting will be overcome by this wicked world and its evil ruler, Satan the Devil.—1 John 5:19.

<sup>2</sup> Some 500 years before Paul's time, a servant of God living in Jerusalem demonstrat-

1. Why can we be sure that we can conquer evil?
2. Why will we consider some events in the life of Nehemiah?

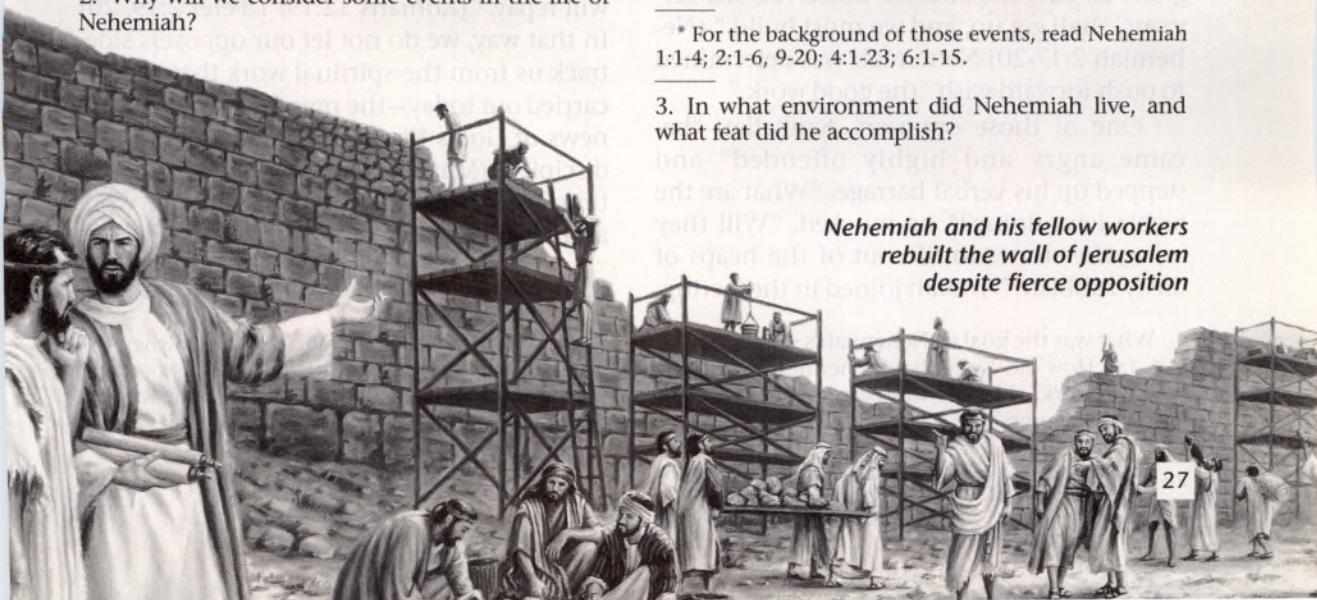
ed the truth of Paul's words about the fight against evil. That man of God, Nehemiah, not only withstood opposition from ungodly people but also conquered evil with good. What challenges did he face? What enabled him to succeed? How can we imitate his example? To answer those questions, let us consider some events in the life of Nehemiah.\*

<sup>3</sup> Nehemiah served at the court of King Artaxerxes of Persia. Although Nehemiah lived among unbelievers, he did not become "fashioned after" the "system of things" of those days. (Romans 12:2) When a need arose in Judah, he sacrificed his comfortable lifestyle, made the arduous journey to Jerusalem, and took on the huge task of rebuilding the city wall. (Romans 12:1) Even though he was governor of Jerusalem, Nehemiah daily toiled alongside his fellow Israelites "from the ascending of the dawn until the stars came out." As a result, within only two

\* For the background of those events, read Nehemiah 1:1-4; 2:1-6, 9-20; 4:1-23; 6:1-15.

3. In what environment did Nehemiah live, and what feat did he accomplish?

**Nehemiah and his fellow workers rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem despite fierce opposition**



months, the project was completed! (Nehemiah 4:21; 6:15) That was an amazing feat, for during the construction work, the Israelites faced various forms of opposition. Who were Nehemiah's opposers, and what was their goal?

<sup>4</sup> The main opposers were Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, influential men living near Judah. Since they were enemies of God's people, "it seemed to them something very bad that [Nehemiah] had come to seek something good for the sons of Israel." (Nehemiah 2:10, 19) Nehemiah's enemies were bent on stopping Nehemiah's building plans, even resorting to evil schemes. Would Nehemiah let himself be conquered by evil?

### "Angry and Highly Offended"

<sup>5</sup> Nehemiah courageously exhorted his people: "Let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem." They replied: "We must build." Nehemiah notes: "They strengthened their hands for the good work," but opposers "began to deride us and look on us despisingly and say: 'What is this thing that you are doing? Is it against the king that you are rebelling?'" Nehemiah was not intimidated by their taunts and false accusations. He told the opposers: "The God of the heavens is the One that will grant us success, and we ourselves, his servants, shall get up, and we must build." (Nehemiah 2:17-20) Nehemiah was determined to push forward with "the good work."

<sup>6</sup> One of those opposers, Sanballat, "became angry and highly offended" and stepped up his verbal barrage. "What are the feeble Jews doing?" he mocked. "Will they bring the stones to life out of the heaps of dusty rubbish?" Tobiah joined in the jeering,

4. What was the goal of Nehemiah's opposers?

5, 6. (a) How did Nehemiah's enemies react to the building work? (b) Why was Nehemiah not intimidated by opposers?

saying: "If a fox went up against it, he would certainly break down their wall of stones." (Nehemiah 4:1-3) How did Nehemiah react?

<sup>7</sup> Nehemiah simply ignored the mockery. He followed God's command and did not seek to retaliate. (Leviticus 19:18) Rather, he left the matter in Jehovah's hands and prayed: "Hear, O our God, for we have become an object of contempt; and make their reproach return upon their own head." (Nehemiah 4:4) Nehemiah trusted in Jehovah's assurance: "Vengeance is mine, and retribution." (Deuteronomy 32:35) Further, Nehemiah and his people "kept building the wall." They did not let themselves become sidetracked. In fact, "the entire wall came to be joined together clear to half its height, and the people continued to have a heart for working." (Nehemiah 4:6) The enemies of true worship had failed to halt the building work! How can we imitate Nehemiah?

<sup>8</sup> Today, opposers at school, at work, or even at home may hurl taunts and accusations at us. However, often such false charges are best handled by applying the Scriptural principle: "There is . . . a time to keep quiet." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7) Hence, like Nehemiah, we refrain from retaliating with cutting words. (Romans 12:17) We turn to God in prayer, trusting the one who assures us: "I will repay." (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:19, 20) In that way, we do not let our opposers sidetrack us from the spiritual work that is to be carried out today—the preaching of the good news of God's Kingdom and the making of disciples. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) Each time we participate in the preaching work and refuse to be deterred by opposition, we

7. In what ways did Nehemiah react to the accusations of his opposers?

8. (a) How might we imitate Nehemiah when opposers falsely accuse us? (b) Relate an experience you have had or heard about that shows the wisdom of not retaliating.

show the same faithful spirit that Nehemiah did.

### 'We Shall Certainly Kill You'

<sup>9</sup> When opposers of true worship in Nehemiah's time heard that "the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem had gone forward," they took up their swords to "fight against Jerusalem." For the Jews the situation looked gloomy. There were Samaritans in the north, Ammonites in the east, Arabs in the south, and Ashdodites in the west. Jerusalem was surrounded; the builders appeared to be trapped! What were they to do? "We prayed to our God," says Nehemiah. The enemies threatened: "We shall certainly kill them and put a stop to the work." Nehemiah responded by assigning the builders the task of defending the city "with their swords, their lances and their bows." True, humanly speaking, the small band of Jews did not stand a chance against the overwhelming enemy forces, but Nehemiah urged them: "Do not be afraid . . . Jehovah the great and the fear-inspiring One keep in your mind."—Nehemiah 4:7-9, 11, 13, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Now there was a sudden turn of events. The enemies called off the attack. Why? "The true God had frustrated their counsel," reports Nehemiah. However, Nehemiah realized that the enemies remained a threat. Therefore, he prudently adjusted the work method of the builders. From then on, "each one was active in the work with his one hand while the other hand was holding the missile." Nehemiah also assigned a man who in case of an enemy attack would "blow the horn" to warn the builders. Above all, Nehemiah reassured the people: "Our God him-

9. What form of opposition did Nehemiah's enemies unleash, and how did Nehemiah respond?

10. (a) What caused a sudden turn of events among Nehemiah's enemies? (b) What measures did Nehemiah take?

## Lessons Found in the Book of Nehemiah

### Servants of God face

- ridicule
- threats
- deception

### Deception is employed by

- false friends
- false accusers
- false brothers

### God's servants conquer evil by

- sticking to their God-given task

self will fight for us." (Nehemiah 4:15-20) Encouraged and prepared to deal with aggression, the builders kept working. What lessons can we draw from this account?

<sup>11</sup> At times, true Christians face violent opposition. In fact, in some lands vicious opposers of true worship form an overwhelming enemy force. Humanly speaking, our fellow believers in those lands do not stand a chance. Nevertheless, those Witnesses are confident that 'God will fight for them.' Indeed, those who are persecuted for their beliefs have time and again experienced that Jehovah answers their prayers and 'frustrates the counsel' of powerful enemies. Even in countries where the Kingdom work is banned, Christians find ways to keep on preaching the good news. Just as the builders

11. What enables true Christians to withstand evil in lands where the Kingdom work is banned, and how do they conquer evil with good?

in Jerusalem adjusted their work method, so Jehovah's Witnesses today prudently adjust their preaching methods when under attack. Of course, they refrain from using physical weapons. (2 Corinthians 10:4) Even the threat of physical violence does not make them halt their preaching activities. (1 Peter 4:16) On the contrary, those courageous brothers and sisters "keep conquering the evil with the good."

### "Come, and Let Us Meet"

<sup>12</sup> After Nehemiah's enemies realized that their open assaults had failed, they turned to more subtle forms of opposition. In fact, they tried three schemes. What were they?

<sup>13</sup> First, Nehemiah's enemies tried to deceive him. They told him: "Come, and let us meet together by appointment in the villages of the valley plain of Ono." Ono lay between Jerusalem and Samaria. So the enemies proposed that Nehemiah meet them halfway to resolve the differences. Nehemiah could have thought: 'That sounds reasonable. It is better to talk than to fight.' But Nehemiah refused. He explained why: "They were scheming to do me harm." He saw through their scheme and was not deceived. Four times he told his opposers: "I am not able to go down. Why should the work cease while I take off from it and have to go down to you?" The enemies' attempts to get Nehemiah to compromise failed. He kept his eye focused on the building work.—Nehemiah 6:1-4.

<sup>14</sup> Second, Nehemiah's enemies resorted to spreading false rumors, accusing Nehemiah of "scheming to rebel" against King Artaxerxes. Once more, Nehemiah was told: "Let us consult together." Again Nehemiah re-

fused, for he discerned the enemies' intention. Nehemiah explained: "All of them were trying to make us afraid, saying: 'Their hands will drop down from the work so that it will not be done.'" This time, however, Nehemiah did rebut his enemies' accusation, stating: "Things such as you are saying have not been brought about, but it is out of your own heart that you are inventing them." Moreover, Nehemiah turned to Jehovah for support, praying: "Strengthen my hands." He trusted that with Jehovah's help, he would be able to foil this evil plot and push forward with the building project.—Nehemiah 6:5-9.

<sup>15</sup> Third, Nehemiah's enemies used a traitor, the Israelite Shemaiah, to try to make Nehemiah break God's Law. Shemaiah said to Nehemiah: "Let us meet by appointment at the house of the true God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple; for they are coming in to kill you." Shemaiah said that Nehemiah was about to be assassinated but that he could save his life by hiding in the temple. However, Nehemiah was not a priest. He would commit a sin by hiding in the house of God. Would he break God's Law in an attempt to save his life? Nehemiah responded: "Who is there like me that could enter into the temple and live? I shall not enter!" Why did Nehemiah not fall into the trap that had been set for him? Because he knew that although Shemaiah was a fellow Israelite, "it was not God that had sent him." After all, a true prophet would never advise him to break God's Law. Again, Nehemiah did not let himself be conquered by evil opposers. Shortly thereafter he could report: "At length the wall came to completion on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-

12, 13. (a) What strategy did Nehemiah's opposers employ? (b) Why did Nehemiah turn down the invitation to meet his opposers?

14. How did Nehemiah react to his false accusers?

15. What recommendation did a false prophet make, and why did Nehemiah not accept the recommendation?



two days.”—Nehemiah 6:10-15; Numbers 1: 51; 18:7.

<sup>16</sup> Like Nehemiah, we too might face opposers in the form of false friends, false accusers, and false brothers. Some individuals may invite us to meet them halfway, so to speak. They may try to convince us that if we serve Jehovah with a little less zeal, we could pursue worldly goals at the same time. However, because God’s Kingdom comes first in our lives, we refuse to compromise. (Matthew 6:33; Luke 9:57-62) Opposers also spread false accusations against us. In some lands we are accused of posing a threat to the State, just as Nehemiah was accused of rebelling against the king. Some accusations have been successfully rebutted in judicial courts. But whatever the outcome in individual situations, we confidently pray that Jehovah will direct matters according to his will. (Philippians 1:7) Opposition may also come from those who pretend to serve Jehovah. Just as a fellow Jew tried to persuade Nehemiah to break God’s Law to save his life, so apostate former Witnesses may try to influence us to compromise in one way or another. However, we reject apostates because we know that our lives are saved, not by

16. (a) How should we deal with false friends, false accusers, and false brothers? (b) How do you show that you refuse to compromise your beliefs at home, at school, or at work?

### *True Christians fearlessly preach the good news*

breaking God’s laws, but by keeping them! (1 John 4:1) Yes, with Jehovah’s help we can conquer any form of evil.

### **Sharing Good News Despite Facing Evil**

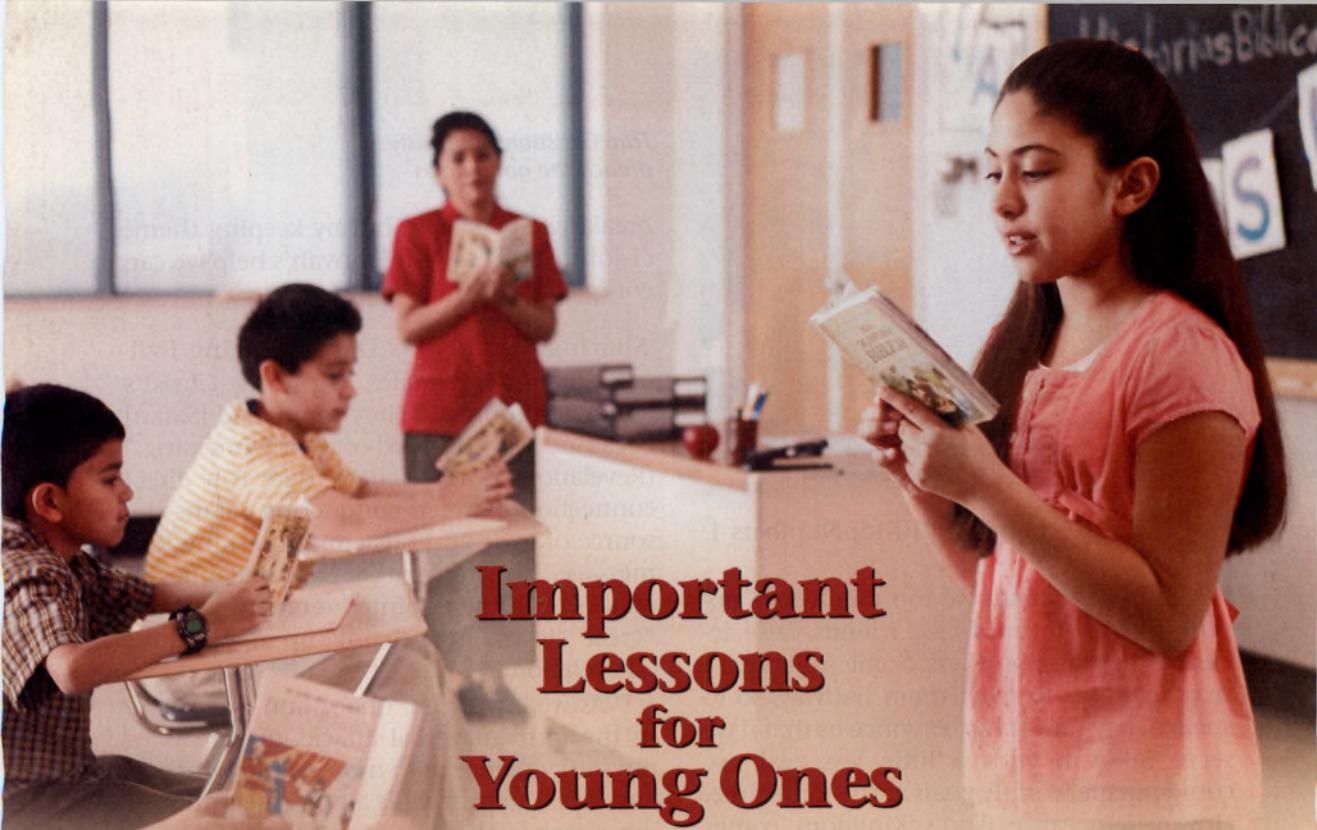
<sup>17</sup> God’s Word states regarding Christ’s anointed brothers: “They conquered [Satan] because . . . of the word of their witnessing.” (Revelation 12:11) Hence, there is a direct connection between conquering Satan—the source of evil—and preaching the Kingdom message. No wonder that Satan relentlessly attacks both the anointed remnant and the “great crowd” by stirring up opposition!—Revelation 7:9; 12:17.

<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, opposition may come in the form of verbal attacks or threats of physical violence or in more subtle forms. In any case, Satan’s goal is always the same—to put a stop to the preaching work. However, he will fail miserably because in imitation of Nehemiah of old, God’s people are determined to “keep conquering the evil with the good.” They will do so by keeping up the preaching of the good news until Jehovah says that the work is done!—Mark 13:10; Romans 8:31; Philippians 1:27, 28.

17, 18. (a) What do Satan and his agents endeavor to achieve? (b) What are you determined to do, and why?

### **Do You Recall?**

- What opposition was faced by God’s servants in the past and is faced by Christians today?
- What was the main objective of Nehemiah’s enemies, and what is the objective of God’s enemies today?
- How do we today keep on conquering evil with good?



## Important Lessons for Young Ones

**G**LADYS works at a school in Mendoza, Argentina. One day she walked by a classroom and noticed a teacher reading to her fourth-grade students from *My Book of Bible Stories*.\* Gladys introduced herself to the teacher as one of Jehovah's Witnesses and offered to show her how to get the most out of the publication. Impressed by what Gladys explained to her, the teacher wanted to make the book a regular part of the curriculum. However, she needed permission from the school administration. To her delight, permission was granted.

Later, at a school Book Day program, the teacher assigned her students to read a chapter of the book in front of their schoolmates. As a result of the good response to this pro-

gram, the teacher was invited to appear as a guest on a local television show. When the conduct of schoolchildren was brought up, the show's host asked her, "How do you keep the children in your classroom under control?" The teacher explained that she was using a publication entitled *My Book of Bible Stories*. She explained that although she was not teaching religion in her classroom, by means of this book, she was inculcating such moral values as respect, tolerance, unity, cooperation, obedience, and love. All agreed that these were important lessons for young ones to learn.

Would you like to inculcate such values in your children? You may ask one of Jehovah's Witnesses for a copy of the fascinating publication *My Book of Bible Stories*.

\* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.