

THE WATCHTOWER ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

JANUARY 15, 1993

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Will You Be Caught Away to Heaven?

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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Will You Be Caught Away to Heaven?

MANY people believe that they will go to heaven when they die. But some think that they will be caught away to heaven in what is called the rapture. Is that your expectation?

The rapture is "the sudden disappearance of millions and millions of people without so much as a trace of where they went!" So said one Protestant evangelist. According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, the term "rapture" refers to "the church being united with Christ at his second coming."

Some find it disturbing to think of leaving friends and family members behind to meet Jesus Christ. Yet, many believe that the rapture must occur. Will it take place? If so, when?

Varied Views of the Rapture

The Bible shows that before the start of Christ's promised Thousand Year Reign, there will be a period called the "great tribulation." Said Jesus: "Then there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again." (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 20:6) Some place the rapture ahead of the great tribulation. Others expect it during that time. Still others think that the rapture will come after that unparalleled distress.

The posttribulation view was predominant until the early 19th century. Then, in England there developed a movement headed by a former Church of Ireland

clergyman, John Nelson Darby. He and like-minded Anglicans became known as the Brethren. From his Plymouth base, Darby traveled to preach in Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe. He asserted that Christ's return would occur in two stages. It would begin with a secret rapture, in which the "saints" would be caught away before a seven-year period of tribulation devastated the earth. Then Christ would appear visibly, accompanied by these "saints," and together they would rule on earth for a thousand years.

Darby stressed the need to be separate from the world, and those sharing his views eventually became known as the Exclusive Brethren. B. W. Newton headed a different faction that believed in the rapture but not in a pretribulation one. Posttribulation advocate Alexander Reese maintained that "the Secret-Rapture theories are a menace to the hope of Christ's Coming."

Pretribulationists believe that this difference in viewpoint is serious enough to affect

"the nature of [their] hope in relation to the coming of Christ." Others place confidence in a "partial rapture theory," believing that those who are most loyal to Christ will be raptured first and the more worldly will be taken later.

Many evangelical groups herald an imminent rapture of faithful Christians. In view of differing opinions, however, a booklet published by Britain's Elim Pentecostal Church says: "Whilst we subscribe to a broad outline of events related to the return of the Lord Jesus . . . , freedom is allowed in the interpreting of prophecy according to the conviction of the individual. Many accept a non-dogmatic position, patiently waiting for the events themselves to unfold the prophetic programme."

God's inspired Word, the Bible, is the standard by which we need to measure the truthfulness of all beliefs. (2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16, 17) Therefore, what does it say about the rapture?

'Caught Away to Meet the Lord'—How?

THE countdown to the end of the present wicked system continues irrevocably. With the passing of every hour, every minute, every second, we approach striking events prophesied long ago. Is the rapture one of these? If it is, when and how will it occur?

The word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible. But those who believe in it cite the apostle Paul's words at 1 Thessalonians

4:17 as the basis for their belief. Let us examine this scripture in its context. Paul wrote:

"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant concerning those who are sleeping in death; that you may not sorrow just as the rest also do who have no hope. For if our faith is that Jesus died and rose again, so, too, those who have fallen asleep in death through Jesus God will bring with him. For

this is what we tell you by Jehovah's word, that we the living who survive to the presence of the Lord shall in no way precede those who have fallen asleep in death; because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangel's voice and with God's trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first. *Afterward we the living who are surviving will, together with them, be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall always be with the Lord.* Consequently keep comforting one another with these words." —1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

The congregation in Thessalonica was relatively new when Paul addressed his first letter to Christians there in about 50 C.E. Members of the congregation were distressed that some of their number were "sleeping in death." However, what Paul wrote comforted the Thessalonians with the resurrection hope.

Christ's "Presence"

While confirming that faithful Christians then dead would be resurrected, Paul also said: "The living who survive to the presence of the Lord shall in no way precede those who have fallen asleep in death." (Verse 15) Noteworthy, indeed, is the apostle's reference to the Lord's "presence." Here the original-language text uses the Greek word *pa·rou·si'an*, which literally means "being alongside."

When a foreign head of State visits a country, the dates of his presence there are generally announced. This has been true of the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. *The Watchtower* has consistently presented evidence to honesthearted students of Bible prophecy that Jesus' presence in heavenly Kingdom power began in 1914. Events since that year testify to Jesus' *invisible* presence.

(Matthew 24:3-14) So by saying that certain Christians living during the Lord's presence would be "caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in the air," Paul meant that those survivors would be meeting Christ, not in earth's atmosphere, but in the invisible heavenly realm where Jesus sits at God's right hand. (Hebrews 1:1-3) But who are they?

"The Israel of God"

The Scriptures say much about fleshly Israelites and also speak of the spiritual "Israel of God." Jewish and Gentile believers were to make up the full number of this group anointed by God's holy spirit, or active force. (Galatians 6:16; Romans 11:25, 26; 1 John 2:20, 27) The book of Revelation shows that the total number of spiritual Israel is 144,000, all of whom are depicted with the Lamb, Jesus Christ, on heavenly Mount Zion. Along with Christ, they would be kings and priests in heaven. (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-4; 20:6) Included among them would be individuals who had been associated with the congregations in Thessalonica and elsewhere, whatever their racial or national background.—Acts 10:34, 35.

Before any faithful members of spiritual Israel could receive a heavenly reward, they would have to share a certain experience. Just as Jesus' death on the torture stake preceded his resurrection to life in the heavens, so Christians with the heavenly hope must die before receiving their reward. (1 Corinthians 15:35, 36) That would be true of members of spiritual Israel living in the first century C.E. and of such individuals alive today.

After mentioning "the presence of the Lord," Paul pointed to the time when faithful spiritual Israelites who had died would receive their heavenly reward. He wrote: "The Lord himself will descend from heaven

with a commanding call, with an archangel's voice and with God's trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first." (Verse 16) Therefore, once Jesus' presence as King began, we would expect the heavenly resurrection to start, commencing with those of spiritual Israel who had already died as integrity keepers. (1 Corinthians 15:23) They now serve alongside Jesus in heaven. But what of the comparatively few anointed Christians still living on the earth? Do they await the rapture?

"Caught Away"—How?

After referring to anointed Christians who had died, Paul added: "Afterward we the living who are surviving will, together with them, be caught away in clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we shall always be with the Lord." (Verse 17) "The living" would be those alive during Christ's presence. They would be "caught away" to meet the Lord Jesus. As in the case of faithful early Christians, death as a human is necessary for them to be united with Christ in heaven.—Romans 8:17, 35-39.

In writing to Christians in Corinth, Paul stated: "This I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom, neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Look! I tell you a sacred secret: We shall not all fall asleep in death, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, during the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised up incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:50-52) Upon dying in faithfulness during Christ's presence, each one of the remnant of spiritual Israel instantaneously receives his heavenly reward. "In the twinkling of an eye," he is resurrected as a spirit creature and "caught away" to meet Jesus and to serve as a counselor in the Kingdom of the heavens. But what

about all others worshiping Jehovah? As the end of this wicked system approaches, will they also be caught away to heaven?

Survival—But Not by Rapture

Inasmuch as Jesus' royal presence began in 1914, we are now deep into this world's "time of the end." (Daniel 12:4) Paul warned: "As for the times and the seasons, brothers, you need nothing to be written to you. For you yourselves know quite well that Jehovah's day is coming exactly as a thief in the night. Whenever it is that they are saying: 'Peace and security!' then sudden destruction is to be instantly upon them just as the pang of distress upon a pregnant woman; and they will by no means escape." (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3) But alert Christians will escape. How?

The cry "Peace and security!" is a precursor of the period Jesus called the "great tribulation." Describing "a great crowd" of faithful ones who have the hope of living eternally in an earthly paradise, the book of Revelation says: "These are the ones that come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9, 14; Luke 23:43) No, theirs is not the prospect of a rapture. Rather, they have the hope of survival right here on the earth. To prepare for it, they must remain spiritually awake. How can you do this and survive the end of this system?

You need to 'keep your senses and have on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation.' (1 Thessalonians 5:6-8) Now is the time to pay attention to God's prophetic Word, the Bible. As the seconds tick away until the end of this system, heed Paul's counsel: "Do not treat prophesying with contempt. Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine." (1 Thessalonians 5:20, 21) Thus Jehovah's



Survivors of the great tribulation will welcome resurrected ones to life on a paradise earth under the rule of Jesus and those "caught away" to heaven

Witnesses welcome you to their Kingdom Halls, where you can share with them in the study of Bible prophecies and other features of God's inspired Word.

As you grow in accurate knowledge and faith, you will discern the outworking of Jehovah God's purpose to rid the universe of his foes and restore the earth to a para-

dise. By exercising faith, you may also be among the survivors of the great tribulation, privileged to welcome back the millions who will be resurrected to life on earth. And what a joy it will be to live under God's Kingdom in the hands of Jesus Christ and his rulers, who will have been 'caught away to meet the Lord' by being resurrected to life in the heavenly realm!

For obedient mankind in general, then, what is the true Scriptural hope? It is not a rapture. Instead, it is eternal life on earth under the rule of God's Kingdom.



LIGHT BEARERS —FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

"I have appointed you as a light of nations."—ACTS 13:47.

JEHOVAH has laid commandment upon us in these words, 'I have appointed you as a light of nations, for you to be a salvation to the extremity of the earth,'" said the apostle Paul. (Acts 13:47) Not only did he say that but he also recognized the seriousness of it. After becoming a Christian, Paul devoted his life to the carrying out of that commandment. (Acts 26:14-20) Has that commandment also been laid upon us? If so, why is it important in our day?

When 'the Lights Went Out' for Humankind

² Before most people who are alive today

1. How was the apostle Paul influenced by the commandment referred to at Acts 13:47?
2. (a) As the world entered its time of the end, what occurred that profoundly affected its spiritual and moral climate? (b) How did a British statesman react to what he saw occurring in August 1914?

were born, this world entered its time of the end. Major events occurred in rapid succession. Satan the Devil, the chief promoter of spiritual and moral darkness, was hurled down to the earth. (Ephesians 6:12; Revelation 12:7-12) Mankind had already been plunged into its first world war. Early in August 1914, when war seemed certain, Sir Edward Grey, the British secretary of state for foreign affairs, stood at his office window in London and said: "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

³ In an effort to make those lights come back on, the League of Nations was put into operation in 1920. But the lights scarcely flickered. At the end of the second world war, world leaders tried again, this time with the United Nations organization. Once more, the lights did not burn brightly. In

3. What success have world leaders had in trying to brighten the outlook for mankind?

view of more recent events, however, world leaders have been talking about “a new world order.” But it can hardly be said that any “new world” of their making has provided true peace and security. On the contrary, armed conflict, ethnic strife, crime, unemployment, poverty, pollution of the environment, and illnesses all continue to mar people’s enjoyment of life.

⁴ In reality, it was long before 1914 that the lights went out for humankind. That occurred some 6,000 years ago in Eden, when our first human parents chose to make their own decisions without regard for the expressed will of God. The grievous

4, 5. (a) When and how did darkness settle over the human family? (b) What is necessary in order to provide relief?

An event in Eden helps us to understand mankind's grievous problems today



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experiences of the human race since then are simply episodes under what the Bible refers to as “the authority of the darkness.” (Colossians 1:13) It was under the influence of Satan the Devil that the first man, Adam, plunged the world into sin; and from Adam sin and death spread to all mankind. (Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 5:12) Humankind thus lost the approval of Jehovah, the Source of light and of life.—Psalm 36:9.

⁵ The only way that the light could again be brought to shine for any of humankind would be if they gained the approval of Jehovah God, mankind’s Creator. Then, “the envelopment that is enveloping over all the peoples,” the condemnation because of sin, could be lifted. How would this be possible? —Isaiah 25:7.



The One Given “as a Light of the Nations”

⁶ Even before Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, Jehovah foretold a “seed” that would be the deliverer of lovers of righteousness. (Genesis 3:15) Following the human birth of that promised Seed, Jehovah caused aged Simeon, at the temple in Jerusalem, to identify that one as “a light for removing the veil from the nations.” (Luke 2:29-32) Through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus’ perfect human life, humans could be relieved of the condemnation resulting from inborn sin. (John 3:36) In harmony with Jehovah’s will, they could now look forward to eternal life in perfection as part of the heavenly Kingdom or as its subjects on a paradise earth. What a marvelous provision that is!

⁷ Jesus Christ is himself the guarantee of fulfillment of these grand prospects. In connection with Jesus’ healing of afflicted people, the apostle Matthew applied to him what is written at Isaiah 42:1-4. That scripture says, in part: “Look! My servant, on whom I keep fast hold! My chosen one, whom my soul has approved! I have put my spirit in him. Justice to the nations is what he will bring forth.” And is this not what people of all nations need? The prophecy continues: “He will not cry out or raise his voice, and in the street he will not let his voice be heard. No crushed reed will he break; and as for a dim flaxen wick, he will not extinguish it.” In harmony with this, Jesus did not treat harshly people who were already afflicted. He showed pity for them, taught them about Jehovah’s purposes, and healed them.—Matthew 12:15-21.

6. What grand prospects has Jehovah made possible for us through Jesus Christ?

7. Why do both the promises at Isaiah 42:1-4 and their first-century fulfillment fill us with hope?

⁸ The Giver of this prophecy addresses himself to his Servant, to Jesus, and says: “I myself, Jehovah, have called you in righteousness, and I proceeded to take hold of your hand. And I shall safeguard you and give you as a covenant of the people, as a light of the nations, for you to open the blind eyes, to bring forth out of the dungeon the prisoner, out of the house of detention those sitting in darkness.” (Isaiah 42:6, 7) Yes, Jehovah has given Jesus Christ as a covenant, as a solemn promissory guarantee. How encouraging that is! Jesus showed true concern for humankind when he was on earth; he even gave his life for mankind. This is the one to whom Jehovah has entrusted rulership over all nations. No wonder Jehovah referred to him as a light of the nations. Jesus himself said: “I am the light of the world.”—John 8:12.

⁹ For what purpose did Jesus serve as the light of the world? It certainly was not for any secular or materialistic purpose. He refused to try to straighten out the then existing political system and would not accept kingship either from Satan, the ruler of the world, or from the people. (Luke 4:5-8; John 6:15; 14:30) Jesus showed great compassion for those who were afflicted and brought them relief in ways that others could not. But he knew that permanent relief could not be had within the framework of a human society that was under divine condemnation because of inborn sin and that was being manipulated by unseen wicked spirit forces. With godly insight, Jesus centered his entire life on the doing of God’s will.—Hebrews 10:7.

8. In what sense has Jesus been given by Jehovah “as a covenant of the people” and “as a light of the nations”?

9. Why did Jesus not devote himself to improving the then existing system of things?

¹⁰ In what ways and for what purpose, then, did Jesus serve as the light of the world? He devoted himself to *preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God.* (Luke 4:43; John 18:37) By bearing witness to the truth about Jehovah's purpose, Jesus also *glorified the name of his heavenly Father.* (John 17:4, 6) Additionally, as the light of the world, Jesus *laid bare religious falsehoods* and thus provided spiritual freedom for those held in religious bondage. He *exposed Satan* as the unseen manipulator of those who allow themselves to be used by him. Jesus also *clearly identified works that belong to darkness.* (Matthew 15:3-9; John 3:19-21; 8:44) Outstandingly, he proved to be the light of the world by *laying down his perfect human life as a ransom*, thus opening the way for those who exercise faith in this provision to have forgiveness of sins, an approved relationship with God, and the prospect of eternal life as part of Jehovah's universal family. (Matthew 20:28; John 3:16) And finally, by maintaining perfect godly devotion throughout his life, Jesus *upheld Jehovah's sovereignty and proved the Devil a liar*, thus making eternal benefits possible for lovers of righteousness. But was Jesus to be the only light bearer?

"You Are the Light of the World"

¹¹ At Matthew 5:14, Jesus told his disciples: "You are the light of the world." They were to follow in his footsteps. Both by their way of life and by their preaching, they were to direct others to Jehovah as the Source of true enlightenment. In imitation of Jesus, they were to make known Jehovah's name and to uphold His sovereignty. As Jesus did, so they were to proclaim the

10. In what ways and for what purpose did Jesus serve as the light of the world?

11. For them to be light bearers, what did Jesus' disciples have to do?

Kingdom of God as mankind's only hope. They also were to expose religious falsehoods, works that belong to darkness, and the wicked one that is behind these things. Followers of Christ were to tell people everywhere about Jehovah's loving provision for salvation through Jesus Christ. With what zeal the early Christians carried out that assignment, starting first in Jerusalem and Judea and then moving into Samaria, as Jesus had commanded!—Acts 1:8.

¹² However, preaching the good news was not to be limited to that field. Jesus instructed his followers to "make disciples of people of *all the nations.*" (Matthew 28:19) At the time of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, the Lord specifically indicated that Saul (who became the apostle Paul) was to preach not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. (Acts 9:15) With the help of holy spirit, Paul came to appreciate what that involved. Thus, he discerned that the prophecy at Isaiah 42:6, which is directly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, is also an implied command to all who exercise faith in Christ. So, at Acts 13:47, when he quoted from Isaiah, Paul said: "Jehovah has laid commandment upon us in these words, 'I have appointed you as a light of nations, for you to be a salvation to the extremity of the earth.'" What about you? Have you taken to heart that obligation to be a light bearer? Like Jesus and Paul, do you center your life on the doing of God's will?

Light and Truth From God to Lead Us

¹³ If by our own devices we were to try to

12. (a) How far was the spiritual light to extend? (b) What did Jehovah's spirit enable Paul to discern about Isaiah 42:6, and how should that prophecy affect our lives?

13. In harmony with Psalm 43:3, what is our earnest prayer, and against what does this safeguard us?

'make the lights come back on,' to brighten the future for mankind, we would seriously be missing the point of God's inspired Word. Regardless of what the world in general does, however, genuine Christians look to Jehovah as the true Source of light. Their prayer is like that recorded at Psalm 43:3, which says: "Send out your light and your truth. May these themselves lead me. May they bring me to your holy mountain and to your grand tabernacle."

¹⁴ Jehovah continues to answer that prayer of his loyal servants. He sends out light by declaring his purpose, by enabling his servants to understand it, and then by bringing to fulfillment what he has declared. When we pray to God, it is not a mere formality, done simply to give an appearance of holiness. Our earnest desire is that the light that comes from Jehovah will lead us, as the psalm says. We accept the responsibility that goes with receiving the light that God provides. Like the apostle Paul, we discern that the fulfillment of Jehovah's Word carries with it an implied command to all who exercise faith in it. We feel like debtors to other people until we have given them the good news that God entrusted to us for that purpose.—Romans 1:14, 15.

¹⁵ The light and truth that Jehovah has sent forth in our day make manifest that Jesus Christ is actively ruling from his heavenly throne. (Psalm 2:6-8; Revelation 11:15) Jesus foretold that during his royal presence, this good news of the Kingdom would be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness. (Matthew 24:3, 14) That work is being done now, and intensely so, around the globe. If we are making that work the

14, 15. (a) In what ways is Jehovah now sending out his light and truth? (b) How can we show that God's light and truth really lead us?

most important thing in our life, then God's light and truth are leading us, as the psalmist said.

The Very Glory of Jehovah Has Shone Forth

¹⁶ In soul-stirring language, the Scriptures describe the manner in which divine light is being diffused to people everywhere. Isaiah 60:1-3, which is addressed to Jehovah's "woman," or his heavenly organization of loyal servants, says: "Arise, O woman, shed forth light, for your light has come and upon you the very glory of Jehovah has shone forth. For, look! darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups; but upon you Jehovah will shine forth, and upon you his own glory will be seen. And nations will certainly go to your light, and kings to the brightness of your shining forth."

¹⁷ The glory of Jehovah shone forth upon his heavenly womanlike organization in the year 1914 when, after a long period of waiting, she gave birth to the Messianic Kingdom, with Jesus Christ as King. (Revelation 12:1-5) Jehovah's glorious light shines with approval upon that government as the rightful one for all the earth.

¹⁸ In contrast, darkness covers the earth and thick gloom the national groups. Why? Because the nations reject the government of God's dear Son in favor of human rule. They think that by getting rid of one form of human government and adopting another, they will solve their problems. But this does not bring the relief they hope for. They fail to see who is behind the scenes maneu-

16, 17. How did Jehovah make his glory shine forth upon his womanlike organization in 1914, and what command did he give her?

18. (a) Why does darkness cover the earth, as foretold at Isaiah 60:2? (b) How can individuals be delivered from earth's darkness?

vering the nations from the spirit realm. (2 Corinthians 4:4) They reject the Source of true light and are therefore in darkness. (Ephesians 6:12) Regardless of what the nations do, however, individuals can be delivered from that darkness. In what way? By putting full faith in the Kingdom of God and submitting to it.

¹⁹ Christendom has not put faith in God's Kingdom and has not submitted to it. But the spirit-anointed followers of Jesus Christ have. As a result, Jehovah's light of divine approval has shone upon these visible representatives of his heavenly woman, and his glory has been manifest upon them. (Isaiah 60:19-21) They enjoy spiritual light that no change in the world's political or economic scene can take away. They have experienced Jehovah's deliverance from Babylon the Great. (Revelation 18:4) They enjoy his smile of approval because they have accepted his discipline and have loyally upheld his sovereignty. They have bright prospects for the future, and they rejoice in the hope he has set before them.

²⁰ But for what purpose has Jehovah dealt with them in this way? As he himself said at Isaiah 60:21, it is so that he might "be beautified," so that his name might be honored and others might be drawn to him as the only true God—and that with lasting benefit to themselves. Consistent with this, in 1931 these worshipers of the true God adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result of their witnessing, were "kings" drawn to the light they reflected, as Isaiah foretold? Yes! Not the political rulers of the earth, but the remaining number of those who are in line to rule as kings with Christ

19, 20. (a) Why and how has Jehovah's glory shone upon Jesus' anointed followers? (b) For what reason has Jehovah made his anointed ones light bearers? (c) As foretold, how have "kings" and "nations" been drawn to God-given light?

in his heavenly Kingdom. (Revelation 1:5, 6; 21:24) And what about "nations"? Have they been attracted to this light? Definitely so! No individual political nation has been attracted, but a great crowd of people out of all nations have taken their stand on the side of God's Kingdom, and they eagerly anticipate deliverance into God's new world. It will be a truly new world in which righteousness will prevail.—2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 7:9, 10.

²¹ Are you one of that growing throng of light bearers? Jehovah has granted us an understanding of his will so that we, like Jesus, can be light bearers. By demonstrating zeal in the work that Jehovah has entrusted to his servants in our day, may all of us show that we have not missed the purpose of the undeserved kindness that God has extended to us. (2 Corinthians 6:1, 2) There is no work that is more important in our day. And there is no greater privilege that can be ours than to glorify Jehovah by reflecting to others the glorious light that comes from him.

21. How can we show that we have not missed the purpose of Jehovah's undeserved kindness in granting us an understanding of his will?

How Would You Answer?

- What are the root causes of mankind's grievous problems?
- In what ways are both Jesus and his followers "the light of the world"?
- How are Jehovah's light and truth leading us?
- How has Jehovah caused his glory to shine upon his organization?
- For what purpose has Jehovah made his people light bearers?

Rich Blessings at the “LIGHT BEARERS” District Conventions

SOME 2,700 years ago, the prophet Isaiah wrote: “Look! darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups.” (Isaiah 60:2) How true those words have proved to be! However, there is hope, for Jehovah has caused light to shine forth. Last year, those who love God’s light were warmly invited to attend the “Light Bearers” District Convention.

The convention program was first presented in June in North America. During the months that followed, it has been presented in Eastern and Western Europe, Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and the isles of the seas. Those who have attended number into the millions. And what a rich spiritual feast they have enjoyed!

“Welcome, All You Light Bearers!”

In most places the convention started on Friday and concluded on Sunday afternoon. As the conventioners settled into their seats on Friday morning, they were treated to a brief overview of the way Jehovah’s light has shone ever brighter during these last days. Then the convention chairman took the rostrum. He emphasized that true Christians should be bearers of light and warmly said: “Welcome, all you light bearers!” The convention program would help delegates to continue to reflect Jehovah’s light.

The keynote address set the tone for the whole convention. This speaker reminded

conventioners that the lights went out for mankind way back in the garden of Eden. Since then, Satan has blinded humans to the light of truth. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Nevertheless, Jesus came as “a light of the nations.” (Isaiah 42:1-6) He exposed religious falsehoods, identified wrong works belonging to darkness, upheld Jehovah’s sovereignty, and preached the good news of the Kingdom. Jesus’ followers did the same—and they still do! (Matthew 28:19, 20) The speaker stirringly said: ‘We, like Jesus, can be light bearers. There is no work that is more important in our day. And there is no greater privilege.’

Just as the first convention session was drawing to a close, there was a surprise. The convention chairman returned to the platform and announced the release of the first of a series of four new tracts. Enthusiastic applause greeted this development, and one copy of this tract was made available to every delegate present.

On Friday afternoon, the convention program got down to basic counsel for light-bearing Christians. The first two talks provided fine advice on how to avoid being contaminated by the world’s darkness. Since Satan can appear to be an angel of light, it is vital to maintain a spiritual outlook so that the unclean things of the world do not seduce us. (2 Corinthians 11:14) Paul counseled: “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) Convention delegates heard that the transforming of a Christian is a continuing process. Our minds are constantly purified and molded as we study God's Word and apply what we learn. Thus, we become more and more like Jesus, who was "full of undeserved kindness and truth."—John 1:14.

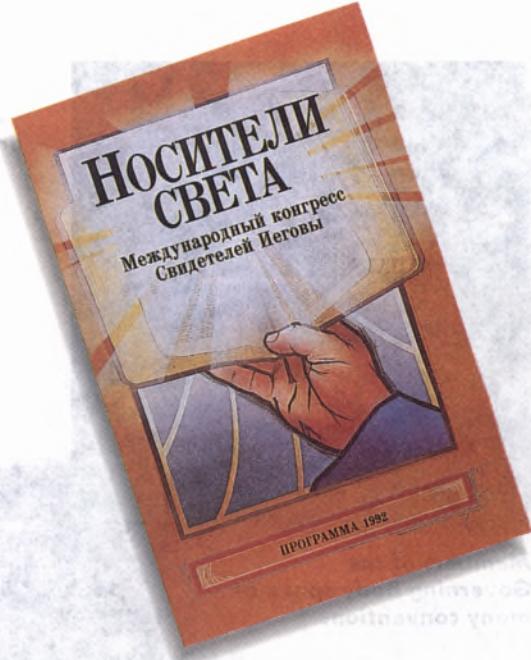
Young Light Bearers

The second half of Friday afternoon was directed to youths. The first talk ("Youths—What Are You Pursuing?") commended young Christians who are such a good example of faithfulness. But it reminded them that they are a particular target of Satan. Even a well-trained athlete needs a coach. In the same way, young people need the help of their parents and of the congregation in order to keep walking in the light.

This was emphasized by the excellent drama *Doing What Is Right in Jehovah's Eyes*, which concluded the Friday program. Highlighted was the example of King Josiah. Even as a young boy, he was determined to serve Jehovah. There were bad influences around him, but with the guidance of high priest Hilkiah and because of his own love for God's Law, Josiah did what was right in Jehovah's eyes. May young Christians today act in a similar way.

Let the Light Shine

After a night's rest, the delegates came to the convention on Saturday morning ready for further upbuilding Scriptural counsel. They were not disappointed. Following a discussion of the day's text, the program continued with a symposium outlining different ways that a Christian can let his light shine. (Matthew 5:14-16) Preaching is one vital way, and good con-



Convention program in Russian

duct also plays an important part. As the speaker said, "preaching tells others what we believe, but practicing love demonstrates it."

A vital preaching aid was then drawn to the conventioners' attention—tracts. With the announcement of the previous day still fresh in mind, delegates heard experiences proving how powerful these little instruments are. The delegates were encouraged to have a supply of tracts with them at all times, ready for every occasion.

Attention was next drawn to the pioneers, those full-time Kingdom proclaimers who work hard in bearing light. How we appreciate our hardworking pioneers! And their number is increasing. Even in lands where freedom of worship has just recently been granted, the pioneer ranks are swelling. Pioneers were encouraged to treasure their privilege. Those not yet pioneering were urged to consider their situation. Perhaps they too could arrange their affairs to let their light shine in the full-time service.



Members of the Governing Body spoke at many conventions

Japanese delegates were among those assembled in St. Petersburg, Russia



Being a light bearer often involves sacrifices, and this was highlighted in the following talk, "Serving Jehovah With a Self-Sacrificing Spirit." Paul entreated: "Present your bodies a sacrifice living, holy, acceptable to God." (Romans 12:1) A self-sacrificing spirit is displayed by those who endure persecution. Pioneers make sacrifices every day in order to stay in the full-time service. Indeed, all true Christians make sacrifices, occupying themselves in

A stirring Bible drama emphasized the need to do what is right in Jehovah's eyes



Jehovah's service rather than in the selfish, materialistic pursuits of this world. Such a course results in rich blessings from Jehovah. That discourse served as a fitting introduction to what followed—the baptism talk. Those who were baptized at the "Light Bearers" District Convention surely will not forget this talk. Their baptism will always be a highlight of their life. They were reminded that they were following the ex-

**New light bearers
symbolized their
dedication to Jehovah
by being baptized**



**Conventioners engrossed in the
program in St. Petersburg**

ample of Jesus Christ, who was baptized at 30 years of age. Moreover, the baptism candidates were happy to recall that they had "put off the works belonging to darkness" and had made the decision to "slave for Jehovah." (Romans 12:11; 13:12) Joyfully they stood before the convention crowd and made an audible public declaration before going off to the baptism. (Romans 10:10) We pray Jehovah's blessing on all of those who symbolized their dedication to him by

undergoing water baptism during the "Light Bearers" District Conventions.

Saturday afternoon was time for some frank warnings. These came in the form of talks entitled "Avoid the Snares of Greed," "Is Someone Spoiling Your Useful Habits?" and "Guard Against Idolatry of Every Sort." These three talks identified some of the tactics used by Satan to weaken a Christian. Judas Iscariot was an apostle, but he betrayed Jesus for money. Young Samuel

grew up right at the national center of Jehovah's worship, but he was inescapably exposed to some very bad association. (1 Samuel 2:12, 18-20) Idolatry can include things like sexual immorality and covetousness. (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5) Yes, greed, bad associations, and idolatry are dangerous and must be avoided.

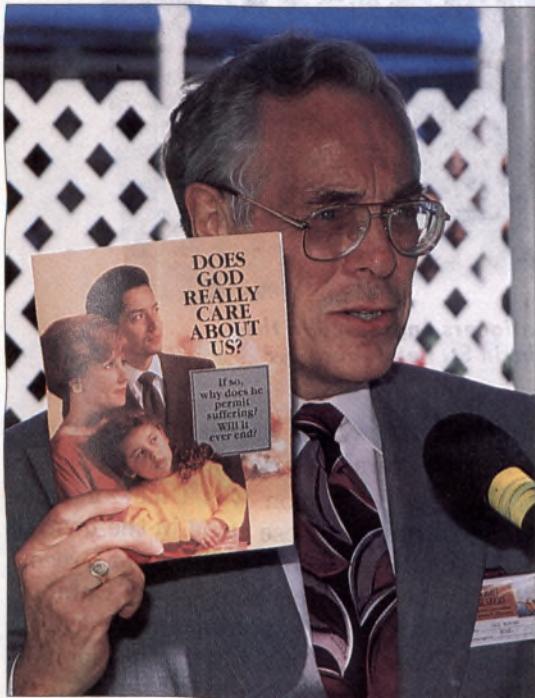
The convention program then changed gears, as it were. The next talk raised a number of interesting Bible questions and answered them. For example, can you explain whether people who do not accept the truth and die before the great tribulation will be resurrected? What can a Christian do when he or she is unable to find a suitable marriage partner? To deepen their Bible knowledge, delegates were encouraged to make full use of the *Watch Tower Publ-*

cations Index, particularly under the heading "Questions From Readers."

Christ's Presence and Revelation

The concluding portion of Saturday's program turned to prophecy with the symposium entitled "Shedding Light on Christ's Presence and Revelation." Features of "the sign" proving the presence of Jesus Christ were reviewed. (Matthew 24:3) In the second part, the modern-day activities of "the faithful and discreet slave" were discussed. (Matthew 24:45-47) It was pointed out that since 1919 the slave class has faithfully spearheaded the work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom. Then a great crowd was gathered out of all nations to share with anointed Christians in reflecting Jehovah's light. The speaker concluded: "Let all zealously continue to support the faithful and discreet slave. It is only by doing this that someday very soon all sheep-like ones will be able to hear the happy words: 'Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world.' —Matthew 25:34.

The final speaker discussed the meaning and the implications of the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:7) What an experience that revelation will be! Babylon the Great will be destroyed. The great battle between Satan's world and Jesus and his angels will end in the destruction of this system. Finally, Satan himself will be abysmed and put out of action. But there will be relief for God's people, with the marriage of the Lamb in heaven and the bringing forth of a new earth. The speaker delighted his audience by releasing the new brochure *Does God Really Care About Us?* What a fine help that will be for humble individuals who need to know about our caring Creator and his purposes for us!



Delegates were thrilled to receive the new brochure "Does God Really Care About Us?"

Christian Households

Sunday, the final day of the convention, had now arrived. However, much was yet to be presented. After the discussion of the day's text, attention was given to the Christian family with the symposium "Caring for One Another in the Christian Household." The first part helped conventioners to realize the secret of having a successful Christian family: putting spiritual things first. The second part encouraged families to do things together, whether that involves meeting attendance, field service, family study, or recreation. And the third part of the symposium reminded delegates of their privilege and responsibility to care for the elderly. "Our older brothers and sisters are an asset to the congregation," said the speaker. Let us treasure their experience and imitate their integrity.

The meaning of the expression "sound in mind" was examined next. (1 Peter 4:7) One who is sound in mind is balanced, sensible, reasonable, humble, and rational. He can distinguish between right and wrong, true and false. Moreover, he strives to maintain good spiritual health.

The final talk on the Sunday morning program discussed our subjection to God and Christ. "The importance of being in loyal subjection to Jehovah God and to his Son, Jesus Christ, cannot be overemphasized," said the speaker. He went on to show how this affects every aspect of our lives. What will help us to remain in subjection? Four qualities: love, godly fear, faith, and humility.

Sunday Afternoon

All of a sudden, it was Sunday afternoon and time for the final session of the convention. To many, it seemed that the convention had just started, and already it was approaching its conclusion.

The public talk was entitled "Follow the Light of the World." Those present were treated to a fascinating explanation of the role of physical light in maintaining life. Then the speaker showed the greater importance of spiritual light. Physical light keeps us alive for a few decades, but spiritual light can keep us living for all eternity. A highlight of the talk was a verse-by-verse discussion of John 1:1-16, where Jesus is identified as the light of the world. Today, in the final years of this evil system, it is more urgent than ever to follow Jesus in this role.

After a summary of the *Watchtower* Study material assigned for that week, it was time for the concluding talk. Happily, the speaker showed that there were many things to look forward to in the days ahead. For example, he announced a new audiocassette, the drama *Doing God's Will With Zeal*. And that was not all. There was to be a new series of videocassettes entitled *The Bible—A Book of Fact and Prophecy*, the first on the subject *The Bible—Accurate History, Reliable Prophecy*.

Finally, the speaker announced that in 1993 there would be four-day district conventions, including special international gatherings in Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America. Even though the "Light Bearers" District Convention was ending, delegates could start to make plans for the following year.

Then it was time for convention delegates to go home. Surely, they were more determined than ever to keep on reflecting light in this bedarkened world. After three days packed with spiritual good things, the words of the last scripture quoted in the final talk had taken on great significance: "Jehovah is the Divine One, and he gives us light. . . . Give thanks to Jehovah, you people, for he is good; for his loving-kindness is to time indefinite."—Psalm 118:27, 29.

WHY GUARD AGAINST IDOLATRY?

"Little children, guard yourselves from idols."—1 JOHN 5:21.

JEHOVAH is no idol of metal, wood, or stone. He cannot be housed in an earthly temple. Since he is the almighty Spirit, invisible to humans, it is impossible to make an image of him. Hence, the pure worship of Jehovah must be totally free of idolatry.—Exodus 33:20; Acts 17:24; 2 Corinthians 3:17.

² If you are a worshiper of Jehovah, then, you might well ask, ‘What is idolatry? How have Jehovah’s servants been able to avoid it in the past? And why guard against idolatry today?’

What Idolatry Is

³ Generally, idolatry involves a ceremony or a ritual. Idolatry is the veneration, love, worship, or adoration of an idol. And what is an idol? It is an image, a representation of something, or a symbol, that is an object of devotion. Usually, idolatry is directed toward a real or supposed higher power believed to have animate existence (a human, an animal, or an organization). But idolatry can also be practiced with regard to things inanimate (a force or a lifeless object of nature).

⁴ In the Scriptures, Hebrew words referring to idols often stress worthlessness, or they are terms of contempt. Among these

1. Why is the worship of Jehovah free of idolatry?
2. What questions merit our consideration?
- 3, 4. How may idolatry be defined?

are words rendered “carved or graven image” (literally, something carved out); “molten statue, image, or idol” (something cast or poured out); “horrible idol”; “vain idol” (literally, vanity); and “dungy idol.” The Greek word *ei'do-lon* is rendered “idol.”

⁵ Not all images are idols. God himself told the Israelites to make two golden cherubs for the ark of the covenant and to embroider representations of such spirit creatures on the inner covering of ten tent cloths for the tabernacle and on the curtain separating the Holy from the Most Holy. (Exodus 25:1, 18; 26:1, 31-33) Only officiating priests saw these representations that served primarily as a picture of the heavenly cherubs. (Compare Hebrews 9:24, 25.) It is evident that the tabernacle representations of cherubs were not to be venerated, since righteous angels themselves would not accept worship.—Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8, 9.

Jehovah’s View of Idolatry

⁶ Servants of Jehovah guard against idolatry because he is against all idolatrous practices. God commanded the Israelites not to form images as objects of veneration and worship them. Among the Ten Commandments are found these words: “You must not make for yourself a carved image

5. Why can it be said that not all images are idols?
6. What is Jehovah’s view of idolatry?

or a form like anything that is in the heavens above or that is on the earth underneath or that is in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them nor be induced to serve them, because I Jehovah your God am a God exacting exclusive devotion, bringing punishment for the error of fathers upon sons, upon the third generation and upon the fourth generation, in the case of those who hate me; but exercising loving-kindness toward the thousandth generation in the case of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

—Exodus 20:4-6.

⁷ Why is Jehovah opposed to all idolatry? Principally because he exacts exclusive devotion, as shown above in the second of the Ten Commandments. Moreover, he said through his prophet Isaiah: “I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory, neither my praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:8) At one time, idolatry ensnared the Israelites to such an extent that “they would sacrifice their sons and their daughters to demons.” (Psalm 106:36, 37) Idolaters not only deny that Jehovah is the true God but also serve the interests of his chief Adversary, Satan, together with the demons.

Loyal Under Test

⁸ Loyalty to Jehovah also makes us guard against idolatry. This is illustrated by the incident recorded at Daniel chapter 3. To inaugurate a great golden image that he had set up, Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar assembled officials of his empire. His order included Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—three Hebrew administrators over the jurisdictional district of Babylon. All present were to bow down before the

7. Why is Jehovah opposed to all idolatry?
8. What test was faced by the three Hebrews Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

image at the sound of certain musical instruments. This was an attempt by Babylon's real god, Satan, to make the three Hebrews bow before an image representing the Babylonian Empire. Imagine that you are on the scene.

⁹ Look! The three Hebrews are standing. They recall God's law against making and serving idols or carved images. Nebuchadnezzar gives them an ultimatum—bow down or die! But in loyalty to Jehovah, they say: “If it is to be, our God whom we are serving is able to rescue us. Out of the burning fiery furnace and out of your hand, O king, he will rescue us. But if not, let it become known to you, O king, that your gods are not the ones we are serving, and the image of gold that you have set up we will not worship.”—Daniel 3:16-18.

¹⁰ These loyal servants of God are cast into the superheated furnace. Amazed to see four individuals walking in the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar calls the three Hebrews out, and they emerge unharmed. At that the king exclaims: “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent his angel [the fourth person in the furnace] and rescued his servants that trusted in him and that changed the very word of the king and gave over their bodies, because they would not serve and would not worship any god at all except their own God. . . . There does not exist another god that is able to deliver like this one.” (Daniel 3:28, 29) The integrity keeping of those three Hebrews provides encouragement for Jehovah's present-day Witnesses to be loyal to God, maintain neutrality toward the world, and avoid idolatry.—John 17:16.

- 9, 10. (a) The three Hebrews took what position, and how were they rewarded? (b) What encouragement can Jehovah's Witnesses derive from the course of the three Hebrews?

Idols Lose in Court

¹¹ Another reason to guard against idolatry is that veneration of idols is useless. Though some man-made idols may seem lifelike—often with a mouth, eyes, and ears—they cannot speak, see, or hear, and they can do nothing for their devotees. (Psalm 135:15-18) This was shown in the eighth century B.C.E., when God's prophet recorded at Isaiah 43:8-28 what is, in effect, a court case between Jehovah and idol-gods. In it God's people Israel were on one side, and the worldly nations on the other. Jehovah challenged the false gods of the nations to tell “the first things,” to prophesy accurately. Not one could do so. Turning to his people, Jehovah said: “You are my witnesses . . . and I am God.” The nations could not prove that their gods existed ahead of Jehovah or that they could prophesy. But Jehovah foretold Babylon's ruin and the release of his captive people.

¹² Further, God's delivered servants would say, as described at Isaiah 44:1-8, that they “belong to Jehovah.” He himself said: “I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.” There is no rebuttal from the idol-gods. “You are my witnesses,” Jehovah again said of his people, adding: “Does there exist a God besides me? No, there is no Rock.”

¹³ We also guard against idolatry because engaging in it betrays a lack of wisdom. With part of a tree that he chooses, an idolater makes a god to worship, and with another part he lights a fire to cook his food. (Isaiah 44:9-17) How foolish! A maker and devotee of idol-gods suffers shame also because of being unable to give a convincing witness proving their godship. But Jehovah's God-

11, 12. (a) What record involving Jehovah and idol-gods was made by Isaiah? (b) How did the gods of the nations fare when challenged by Jehovah?

13. What does idolatry reveal about an idolater?

ship is unquestionable, for he not only foretold the liberation of his people from Babylon but also caused this to occur. Jerusalem was rehabinited, the cities of Judah were rebuilt, and Babylon's “watery deep”—the Euphrates River—evaporated as a source of protection. (Isaiah 44:18-27) As God also foretold, Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon.—Isaiah 44:28-45:6.

¹⁴ The idol-deities lost that legal case regarding godship. And what befell Babylon is sure to befall her modern counterpart, Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. She and all her gods, religious paraphernalia, and objects of idolatry will soon be gone forever. (Revelation 17:12-18:8) In the Universal Supreme Court, it will then be permanently proved that Jehovah alone is the living and true God and that he fulfills his prophetic Word.

Sacrifices to Demons

¹⁵ Jehovah's people also guard against idolatry because they are guided by God's spirit and organization. The first-century governing body of Jehovah's servants told fellow Christians: “The holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you, except these necessary things, to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication. If you carefully keep yourselves from these things, you will prosper. Good health to you!”—Acts 15:28, 29.

¹⁶ Another reason to guard against idolatry is to avoid demonism. Regarding the Lord's Evening Meal, the apostle Paul told

14. In the Universal Supreme Court, what will be proved permanently?

15. What did the holy spirit and the first-century governing body indicate regarding Jehovah's people and idolatry?

16. In your own words, how would you express what Paul said about things sacrificed to idols?

Though their lives were threatened, the three Hebrews would not engage in idolatry

Corinthian Christians: "Flee from idolatry. . . . The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of the Christ? The loaf which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of the Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, although many, are one body, for we are all partaking of that one loaf. Look at that which is Israel in a fleshly way: Are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers with the altar? What, then, am I to say? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No; but I say that the things which the nations sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers with the demons. You cannot be drinking the cup of Jehovah and the cup of demons; you cannot be partaking of 'the table of Jehovah' and the table of demons. Or 'are we inciting Jehovah to jealousy'? We are not stronger than he is, are we?"—1 Corinthians 10:14-22.

¹⁷ Part of an animal was sacrificed to an idol, a portion went to priests, and the worshiper got some for a feast. However, part of the flesh might be sold in a market. It was inadvisable for a Christian to go to an idol temple to eat meat even though he did not eat as part of a rite, for this could stumble others or draw him into false worship. (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Revelation 2:12, 14,

17. In the first century C.E., under what circumstances could a Christian eat meat sacrificed to idols, and why?



18, 20) Offering an animal to an idol did not change the flesh, so a Christian could buy some at a market. He also did not have to ask about the source of meat served in a home. But if someone said it had been "offered in sacrifice," he would not eat it, to avoid stumbling anyone.—1 Corinthians 10:25-29.

¹⁸ It was often thought that after the sacrificial rite, the god was in the meat and entered the body of those eating it at the worshipers' feast. As people who ate together forged a bond between themselves, so those partaking of the sacrificial animals were sharers in the altar and had

18. How could those eating something sacrificed to an idol get involved with the demons?

communion with the demon-god represented by the idol. Through such idolatry, demons kept people from worshiping the only true God. (Jeremiah 10:1-15) No wonder Jehovah's people were to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols! Loyalty to God, acceptance of guidance by his holy spirit and organization, and determination to avoid involvement with demonism also prove to be powerful incentives to guard against idolatry today.

Why a Need to Be on Guard?

¹⁹ Christians diligently guard against idolatry because it has many forms, and even one idolatrous act can compromise their faith. The apostle John told fellow believers: "Guard yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:21) This counsel was needed because many forms of idolatry surrounded them. John wrote from Ephesus, a city steeped in magical practices and myths about false deities. Ephesus had one of the seven wonders of the world—the temple of Artemis, a place of asylum for criminals and a center of immoral rites. The philosopher Heracleitus of Ephesus likened the dark approach to that temple's altar to the darkness of vileness, and he considered temple morals worse than those of beasts. Thus, Ephesian Christians had to stand firm against demonism, immorality, and idolatry.

²⁰ Christians need strong determination to avoid even the slightest idolatry because just one act of worship to the Devil would lend support to his challenge that humans would not remain faithful to God under test. (Job 1:8-12) When showing Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," Satan said: "All these things I will give you if you fall down and do an act of worship to

19. What kind of idolatry existed in ancient Ephesus?

20. Why was it necessary to avoid even the slightest idolatry?

me." Christ's refusal upheld Jehovah's side of the issue of universal sovereignty and proved the Devil a liar.—Matthew 4:8-11; Proverbs 27:11.

²¹ Neither would Jesus' early followers do an act of worship supporting Satan's side of the issue. Though they had proper regard for governmental "superior authorities," they would not burn incense in honor of the Roman emperor, even if it cost them their lives. (Romans 13:1-7) In this regard Daniel P. Mannix wrote: "Very few of the Christians recanted, although an altar with a fire burning on it was generally kept in the arena for their convenience. All a prisoner had to do was scatter a pinch of incense on the flame and he was given a Certificate of Sacrifice and turned free. It was also carefully explained to him that he was not worshiping the emperor; merely acknowledging the divine character of the emperor as head of the Roman state. Still, almost no Christians availed themselves of the chance to escape." (*Those About to Die*, page 137) If similarly tested, would you completely resist all idolatry?

21. With regard to the Roman emperor, what did faithful Christians refuse to do?

What Are Your Thoughts?

- What is idolatry?
- Why is Jehovah opposed to all idolatry?
- What position did the three Hebrews take regarding idolatry?
- How could those eating things sacrificed to idols get involved with the demons?
- Why should we guard against idolatry?

Will You Guard Against Idolatry?

²² Clearly, Christians must guard against all forms of idolatry. Jehovah demands exclusive devotion. The three faithful Hebrews provided a fine example in refusing to idolize the great image set up by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. In the universal court case recorded by the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah alone was shown to be the true and living God. His early Christian witnesses had to keep abstaining from things sacri-

22, 23. Why should you guard against idolatry?

ficed to idols. The many loyal ones among them did not succumb to pressure to perform even a single idolatrous act that would constitute denial of Jehovah.

²³ So, then, are you personally guarding against idolatry? Are you giving God exclusive devotion? Do you support Jehovah's sovereignty and extol him as the true and living God? If so, it should be your determination to continue standing firm against idolatrous practices. But what further Scriptural points can help you to guard against idolatry of every sort?

GUARD AGAINST IDOLATRY OF EVERY SORT

"What agreement does God's temple have with idols?"—2 CORINTHIANS 6:16.

JEHOVAH has a temple that does not house idols. It was typified by Israel's tabernacle constructed by Moses and by the temples later built in Jerusalem. Those structures represented "the true tent," Jehovah's great spiritual temple. (Hebrews 8:1-5) That temple is the arrangement for approaching God in worship on the basis of Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice.—Hebrews 9:2-10, 23.

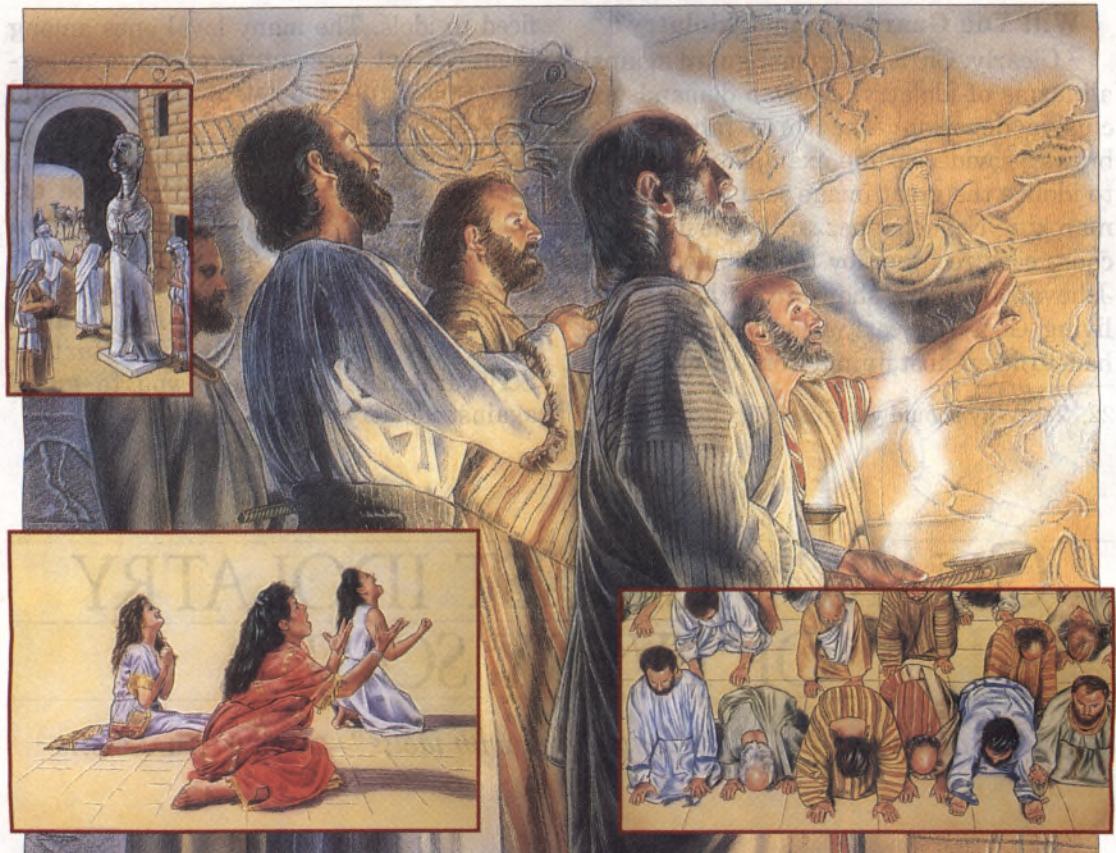
² Each anointed Christian becomes "a pillar in [God's] temple," receiving a place in heaven. "A great crowd" of Jehovah's other

1. What was typified by Israel's tabernacle and temples?
2. Who become pillars in God's great spiritual temple, and what position is enjoyed by the great crowd?

worshipers is "rendering [God] sacred service" in what was represented by the courtyard of the Gentiles at the temple rebuilt by Herod. Because of faith in Jesus' sacrifice, they have a righteous standing that results in preservation through "the great tribulation."—Revelation 3:12; 7:9-15.

³ The congregation of anointed Christians on earth is also figuratively likened to another temple free of idolatry. To such ones 'sealed with the holy spirit,' the apostle Paul said: "You have been built up upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ Jesus himself is the foundation cornerstone. In union with him the whole

^{3, 4}. To what is the congregation of anointed Christians on earth likened, and of what defilement must it be free?



Artwork (upper left) based on photo by Ralph Crane/Bardo Museum

Do you know how the detestable things seen in Ezekiel's vision foreshadowed Christendom's idolatry?

building, being harmoniously joined together, is growing into a holy temple for Jehovah. In union with him you, too, are being built up together into a place for God to inhabit by spirit." (Ephesians 1:13; 2:20-22) These 144,000 sealed ones are "living stones" being "built up a spiritual house for the purpose of a holy priesthood."—1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 7:4; 14:1.

⁴ Since these underpriests are "God's building," he does not allow this temple to be defiled. (1 Corinthians 3:9, 16, 17) "Do not become unevenly yoked with unbeliev-

ers," warned Paul. "For what fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness? Further, what harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what portion does a faithful person have with an unbeliever? And what agreement does God's temple have with idols?" Anointed Christians, who belong to "Jehovah the Almighty," must be free of idolatry. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18) Those of the great crowd must also avoid idolatry of every sort.

⁵ There are both outright and subtle forms of idolatry. No, idolatry is not limited to the worship of false gods. (See page 15.)

5. Aware that Jehovah deserves exclusive devotion, true Christians do what?

to the worship of false gods and goddesses. It is the worship of anything or anyone other than Jehovah. As the Universal Sovereign, he rightly requires and deserves exclusive devotion. (Deuteronomy 4:24) Aware of this, true Christians heed Scriptural warnings against all idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:7) Let us consider certain forms of idolatry to be avoided by Jehovah's servants.

Christendom's Idolatry Foreshadowed

⁶ While in Babylonian exile in 612 B.C.E., the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of detestable things practiced by apostate Jews at Jehovah's temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel saw a "symbol of jealousy." Seventy elders were observed offering incense in the temple. Women were seen weeping over a false god. And 25 men were worshiping the sun. Of what significance were these apostate acts?

⁷ The idolatry of Christendom was foreshadowed by the detestable things that Ezekiel saw in vision. For instance, he said: "Look! to the north of the gate of the altar there was this symbol of jealousy in the entranceway. And [Jehovah God] went on to say to me: 'Son of man, are you seeing what great detestable things they are doing, the things that the house of Israel are doing here for me to become far off from my sanctuary?'"—Ezekiel 8:1-6.

⁸ The idolatrous symbol of jealousy may have been a sacred pole representing the false goddess that the Canaanites viewed as the wife of their god Baal. Whatever the symbol was, it incited Jehovah to jealousy because it divided Israel's exclusive devotion to him in violation of his commandments: "I am Jehovah your God . . . You must not have any other gods against my

6. What detestable things did Ezekiel see in vision?

7, 8. The "symbol of jealousy" may have been what, and why did it incite Jehovah to jealousy?

face. You must not make for yourself a carved image or a form like anything that is in the heavens above or that is on the earth underneath or that is in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them nor be induced to serve them, because I Jehovah your God am a God exacting exclusive devotion."—Exodus 20:2-5.

⁹ Worshiping the symbol of jealousy in God's temple was one of the great detestable things being done by apostate Israelites. Similarly, Christendom's churches are defiled with God-dishonoring symbols and images that divide the exclusive devotion they claim to give to the One they profess to serve. God is also provoked to jealousy because the clergy reject his Kingdom as mankind's only hope and idolize the United Nations—"the disgusting thing . . . standing in a holy place," where it should not stand.—Matthew 24:15, 16; Mark 13:14.

¹⁰ Entering the temple, Ezekiel reports: "Look! there was every representation of creeping things and loathsome beasts, and all the dungy idols of the house of Israel, the carving being upon the wall all round about. And seventy men of the elderly ones of the house of Israel . . . were standing before them, each one with his censer in his hand, and the perfume of the cloud of the incense was ascending." Just think! Israelite elders in Jehovah's temple, offering up incense to false gods, represented by detestable wall carvings. (Ezekiel 8:10-12) Comparably, birds and wild animals are used to symbolize Christendom's countries, to which people give devotion. Moreover, many of the clergy are guilty of helping to mislead the masses by advocating the erroneous theory

9. How has Christendom provoked God to jealousy?

10. What did Ezekiel see inside the temple, and how does this compare with what is noted in Christendom?

of man's evolution from subhuman, animal life-forms instead of upholding the true Bible account of creation by Jehovah God.—Acts 17:24-28.

¹¹ At the entrance of the gate of Jehovah's house, Ezekiel saw apostate Israelite women weeping over Tammuz. (Ezekiel 8:13, 14) Babylonians and Syrians viewed Tammuz as the god of vegetation that grows in the rainy season and dies during the dry period. Its death pictured that of Tammuz, annually bewailed by his worshipers at the time of the greatest heat. With the reappearance of vegetation during the rainy season, Tammuz supposedly returned from the underworld. He was represented by the first letter of his name, the ancient *tau* that was a form of the cross. This may well remind us of Christendom's idolatrous reverence for the cross.

¹² In the temple's inner courtyard, Ezekiel next saw 25 apostate Israelite men worshiping the sun—a violation of Jehovah's command against such idolatry. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19) Those idolaters also held out to God's nose an obscene twig, perhaps representing the human male organ. No wonder God would not answer their prayers, even as Christendom will seek his help during the "great tribulation," but in vain. (Matthew 24:21) As those apostate Israelites worshiped the light-giving sun with their backs to Jehovah's temple, so Christendom turns her back on light from God, teaches false doctrines, idolizes worldly wisdom, and winks at immorality.—Ezekiel 8:15-18.

¹³ Jehovah's Witnesses avoid the forms of idolatry practiced in Christendom, or anti-

11. Why were apostate Israelite women weeping over Tammuz?
12. What did Ezekiel see 25 apostate Israelite men doing, and what similar action takes place in Christendom?
13. In what ways do Jehovah's Witnesses avoid the forms of idolatry seen in Ezekiel's vision?

typical Jerusalem, as foreseen by Ezekiel. We do not idolize God-dishonoring symbols. Though we show respect for governmental "superior authorities," our subjection to them is relative. (Romans 13:1-7; Mark 12:17; Acts 5:29) Our heart devotion is given to God and his Kingdom. We do not substitute the evolution theory for the Creator and his creation. (Revelation 4:11) Never do we adore the cross or idolize intellectualism, philosophy, or other kinds of worldly wisdom. (1 Timothy 6:20, 21) We also guard against all other forms of idolatry. What are some of these?

Other Sorts of Idolatry

¹⁴ Christians do not share with mankind in idolizing a symbolic "wild beast." Said the apostle John: "I saw a wild beast ascending out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, and upon its horns ten diadems . . . All those who dwell on the earth will worship it." (Revelation 13:1, 8) Beasts can symbolize "kings," or political powers. (Daniel 7:17; 8:3-8, 20-25) So the seven heads of the symbolic wild beast stand for world powers—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Anglo-American combine of Britain and the United States of America. Christendom's clergy show great disrespect for God and Christ by leading mankind in idolizing the political system of Satan, "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31) As Christian neutrals and Kingdom advocates, however, Jehovah's servants reject such idolatry.—James 1:27.

¹⁵ God's people also refrain from idolizing the world's stars of entertainment and sports. After becoming a Witness of Jehovah,

14. What position do Jehovah's servants take with regard to the "wild beast" of Revelation 13:1?
15. How do Jehovah's people view worldly stars, and what did one Witness say in this regard?

vah, one musician said: "Music for entertainment and for dancing can arouse wrong desires . . . The performer sings about happiness and tenderness that many listeners may feel is missing in their partner. The artist often comes to be identified with what he is singing about. Some professionals I know are for this reason real favorites with women. Once someone is submerged in this world of fantasy, it can lead to his idolizing the performer. It may begin quite harmlessly by a person's asking for an autograph as a souvenir. But some come to view the artist as their ideal, and by putting him on a pedestal, they make him into an idol. They may hang the star's picture on the wall and begin to dress and groom themselves as he does. Christians need to keep in mind that adoration belongs only to God."

¹⁶ Yes, only God deserves adoration or worship. When John "fell down to worship before the feet of the angel" that showed him amazing things, that spirit creature refused to be idolized in any way but said: "Be careful! Do not do that! All I am is a fellow slave of you and of your brothers who are prophets and of those who are observing the words of this scroll. Worship God." (Revelation 22:8, 9) Fear of Jehovah, or deep reverence for him, makes us worship him alone. (Revelation 14:7) Thus, true godly devotion safeguards us from idolatry.—1 Timothy 4:8.

¹⁷ Sexual immorality is another form of idolatry rejected by Jehovah's servants. They know that "no fornicator or unclean person or greedy person—which means being an *idolater*—has any inheritance in the kingdom of the Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5) Idolatry is involved because the

16. What shows that righteous angels reject idolatry?
17. How can we guard against idolatrous sexual immorality?

craving for illicit pleasure becomes an object of devotion. Godly qualities are imperiled by improper sexual desires. By inclining his eyes and ears to pornography, a person jeopardizes any relationship he might have with the holy God, Jehovah. (Isaiah 6:3) To guard against such idolatry, then, God's servants must avoid pornography and corrupting music. They need to cling to strong spiritual values based on the Scriptures, and they must keep on "the new personality which was created according to God's will in true righteousness and loyalty."—Ephesians 4:22-24.

Avoid Greed and Covetousness

¹⁸ Christians also guard against greed and covetousness, which are closely related forms of idolatry. Greed is inordinate or rapacious desire, and covetousness is greediness for anything belonging to someone else. Jesus warned against covetousness and spoke of a covetous rich man who could not benefit from his wealth at death and was in the sad state of not being "rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21) Paul appropriately counseled fellow believers: "Deaden . . . your body members that are upon the

- 18, 19. (a) What are greed and covetousness?
- (b) How can we guard against idolatrous greed and covetousness?

In Our Next Issue

Will Good Ever Conquer Evil?

What Godly Subjection
Requires of Us

Relief Provisions
Reflect Christian Love

earth as respects . . . covetousness, which is idolatry.”—Colossians 3:5.

¹⁹ Those obsessed with love for money, with voraciousness for food and drink, or with ambition for power make such desires their idols. As Paul pointed out, a greedy person is an idolater and will not inherit God’s Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Ephesians 5:5) Hence, baptized individuals who practice idolatry as greedy persons could be disfellowshipped from the Christian congregation. By applying the Scriptures and praying earnestly, however, we can avoid greediness. Says Proverbs 30:7-9: “Two things I have asked of you [Jehovah God]. Do not withhold them from me before I die. Untruth and the lying word put far away from me. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Let me devour the food prescribed for me, that I may not become satisfied and I actually deny you and say: ‘Who is Jehovah?’ and that I may not come to poverty and I actually steal and assail the name of my God.” Such a spirit can help us to guard against idolatrous greed and covetousness.

Guard Against Self-Idolatry

²⁰ Jehovah’s people also guard against self-idolatry. In this world it is common to idolize oneself and one’s own will. Desire for fame and glory causes many to act in devious ways. They want their will done, not God’s. But we could have no relationship with God if we yielded to self-idolatry by deviously seeking to get our own way and trying to lord it over others. (Proverbs 3:32; Matthew 20:20-28; 1 Peter 5:2, 3) As Jesus’ followers, we have renounced the world’s underhanded things.—2 Corinthians 4:1, 2.

²¹ Instead of seeking fame, God’s people comply with Paul’s admonition: “Whether you are eating or drinking or doing any-

20, 21. How do Jehovah’s people guard against self-idolatry?

thing else, do all things for God’s glory.” (1 Corinthians 10:31) Being Jehovah’s servants, we do not idolatrously insist on our own way but joyfully do the divine will, accepting direction from “the faithful and discreet slave” and cooperating fully with Jehovah’s organization.—Matthew 24:45-47.

Keep on Guard!

²² As Jehovah’s people, we do not bow down before material idols. We also guard against subtle forms of idolatry. In fact, we must continue to avoid idolatry of every sort. We therefore comply with John’s counsel: “Guard yourselves from idols.”—1 John 5:21.

²³ If you are one of Jehovah’s servants, always exercise your Bible-trained conscience and perceptive powers. (Hebrews 5:14) Then you will not be contaminated by the world’s idolatrous spirit but will be like the three faithful Hebrews and loyal early Christians. You will give Jehovah exclusive devotion, and he will help you to keep on guard against idolatry of every sort.

22, 23. In what way can we keep on guard against idolatry of every sort?

What Are Your Thoughts?

- How do Jehovah’s Witnesses avoid forms of idolatry seen in Ezekiel’s vision?
- What is the “wild beast” of Revelation 13:1, and what position do Jehovah’s servants take regarding it?
- Why guard against idolizing entertainment and sports stars?
- How can we guard against self-idolatry?
- Why keep on guard against idolatry of every sort?

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

What can a Christian do when he or she is unable to find a suitable marriage partner?

Though being devoted Christians, we may still become distressed when we earnestly hope for something that does not materialize. Our feelings are well expressed at Proverbs 13:12, which says: "Expectation postponed is making the heart sick." This is how some Christians have felt when they have desired to marry but could not find a suitable partner. This is particularly so of those whom the apostle Paul described as "inflamed with passion."—1 Corinthians 7:9.

Jehovah put in humans the desire to find a true complement in someone of the opposite sex. Hence, it is not surprising that such emotions well up in many single Christians. (Genesis 2:18) These normal feelings may be accentuated in cultures that put great emphasis on marrying (or marrying by a certain age) or when single Christians are surrounded by happily married couples in the congregation. However, it is not good to allow anxiety to extend over a long period of time. So how can sincere Christians come to grips with the situation without becoming overly disturbed?

It is not easy, and others should not treat this concern as if it were simply an exaggeration or a mere trivial inconvenience. But to a large extent, the ability to cope with or resolve the situation centers on steps the single person can take.

We find a key in this practical Bible principle: "There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving." (Acts 20:35) That was said by the single man Jesus Christ, and he knew of what he spoke. Doing things for others with an unselfish motive is a fine recipe to help any of us to overcome feelings resulting from expectation postponed. What does this mean as far as the single Christian is concerned?

Reach out to do acts of kindness for your own family and for others in the congregation, and increase your activity in the ministry. This advice

is not just a way of saying, 'Keep busy, and you will forget about wanting to get married.' No. Being occupied in these productive Christian pursuits, you may find that you become 'settled in your heart, having authority over your own will' and can use your present circumstances in a beneficial way.—1 Corinthians 7:37.

Some who have greatly desired to marry have allowed this to become a consuming preoccupation. They have even gone so far as to advertise for mates in newspapers. How much better, though, to put more emphasis on appreciating the benefits that can be derived from the time of singleness.—Please see the articles "Unmarried but Complete for God's Service" and "Singleness—A Rewarding Way of Life" in *The Watchtower* of November 15, 1987, and "Is Marriage the Only Key to Happiness?" in *The Watchtower* of May 15, 1992.

Pray to Jehovah for help to persevere in the single state. (Philippians 4:6, 7, 13) Many unmarried Christians have found that by using their time to study and meditate on the Word of God and to attend and share in Christian meetings, they have enjoyed added 'refreshment for their soul,' as Jesus promised to those following him. (Matthew 11:28-30) This has helped them to develop spirituality, so that they will be better husbands or wives if they do in time find a suitable mate.

Never forget that Jehovah understands the situation of all single people serving him. He knows that you may not feel that your present circumstances are what you would prefer. Our loving heavenly Father is also aware of what is in your best interests in the long term, both spiritually and emotionally. In turn you can know this with certainty: By patiently waiting on Jehovah and by applying the principles of his Word in daily life, you can be sure that he will satisfy your most important needs in a way that is for your everlasting good.—Compare Psalm 145:16.



Garo Nalbandian

Are You Like One of These?

IT'S better to be a lion for a day than a lamb for a hundred years.' Those words have been ascribed to Benito Mussolini, one-time dictator of Italy.

Like Mussolini many people would object to being classed as lambs and sheep. However, ancient Israel's psalmist-king David declared: "Jehovah is my Shepherd. . . . By well-watered resting-places he conducts me." (Psalm 23: 1, 2) Yes, Jehovah God is the Great Shepherd, who gives his people tender care as though they were harmless sheep.

God's people are spoken of as figurative sheep at Psalm 95:7, where we read: "For [Jehovah] is our God, and we are the people of his pasturage and the sheep of his hand." Some might have expected the psalmist to speak of "the sheep of his pasturage" and "the people of his hand." But here matters are reversed, and Jehovah's people themselves are thus identified as his sheep. They enjoy the benefits of

God's pasturage and are led by his loving hand.

Jehovah's Son, Jesus Christ, is the Fine Shepherd. He often referred to people as sheep. For instance, Jesus spoke of a "little flock" and of his "other sheep." (Luke 12:32; John 10: 14-16) Regarding his humble sheeplike disciples, Jesus said: "My sheep listen to my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them everlasting life, and they will by no means ever be destroyed, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10: 27, 28) In the hand of a benevolent ruler, subjects benefit from his power, favor, guidance, and protection.—Revelation 1:16, 20; 2:1.

Nobody can snatch truly sheeplike people out of Jesus' protective hand. Today, he is separating people either as "goats" lacking his favor or as "sheep" who will enjoy life eternal under the rule of God's heavenly Kingdom. (Matthew 25:31-46) Will you prove to be one of those blessed sheep?