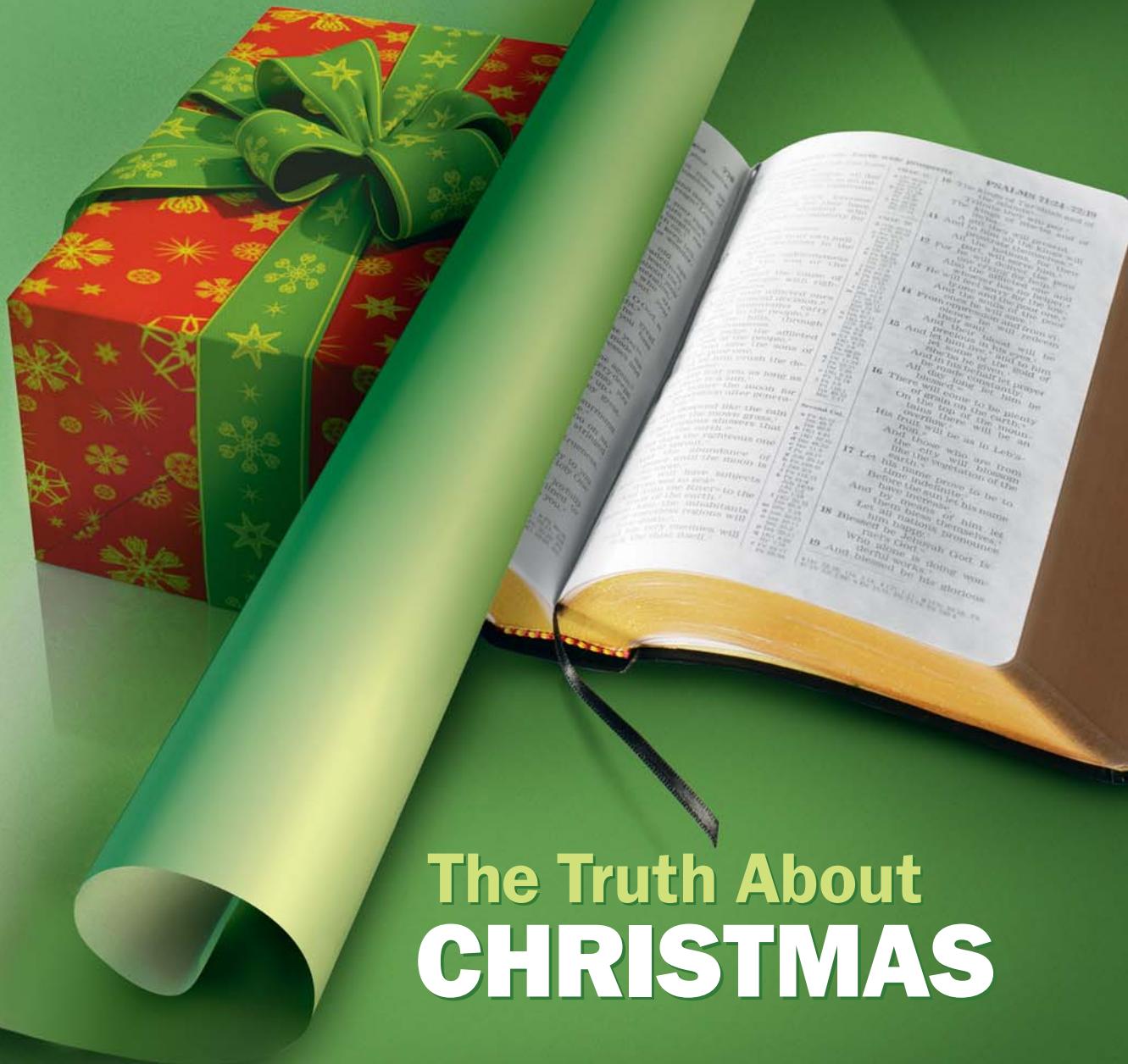


# Awake!

DECEMBER 2010



# The Truth About **CHRISTMAS**

# Awake!

AVERAGE PRINTING 38,451,000  
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# The Christmas Spirit Is Spreading WHY?

**D**O YOU look forward to Christmas? Or does its approach fill you with nervous apprehension? Millions of people ask: ‘Whom will I get gifts for? What should I buy? Can I afford it? For how long will I be paying off my debt?’

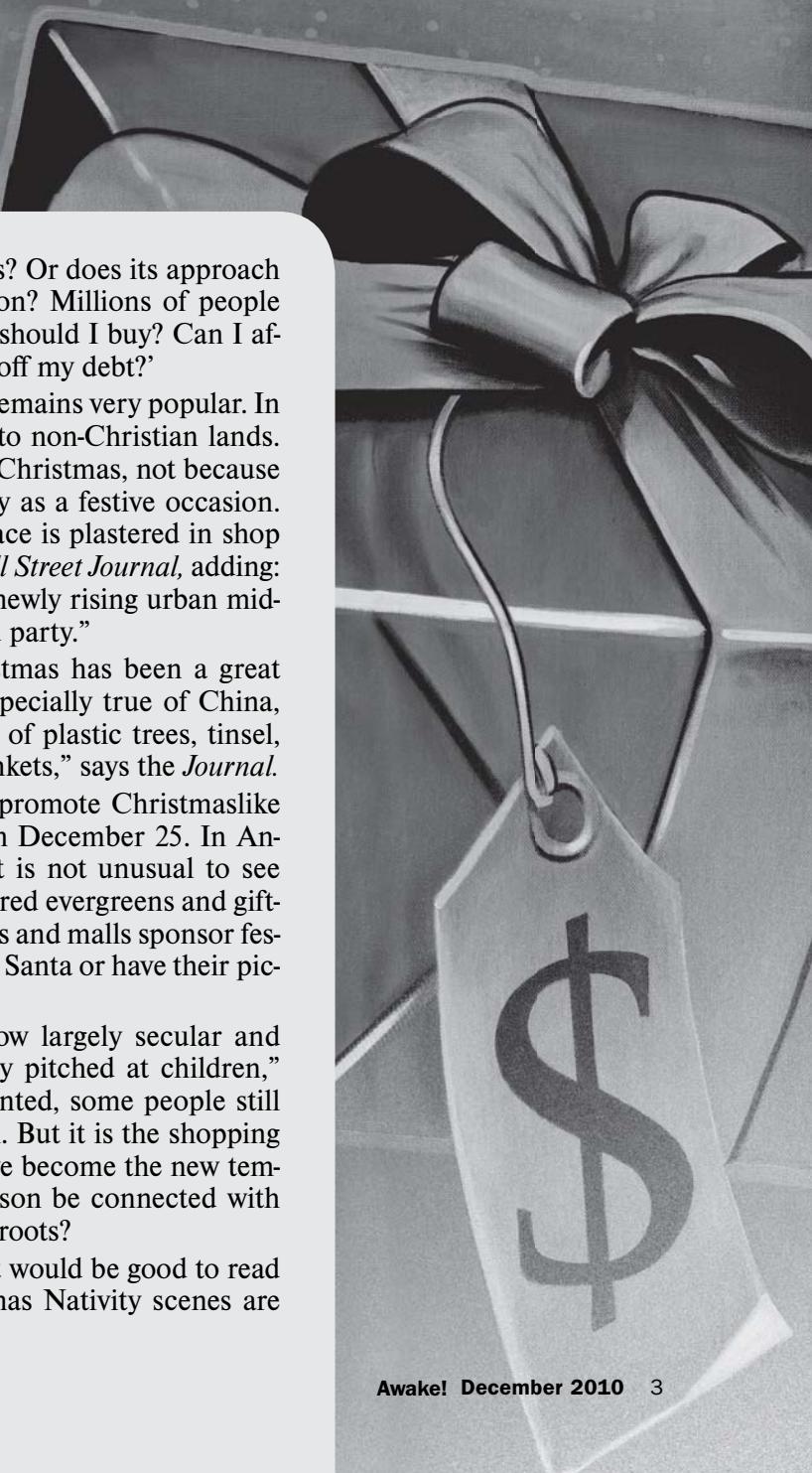
Despite such concerns, Christmas remains very popular. In fact, the celebration has even spread to non-Christian lands. In Japan most families now celebrate Christmas, not because of its religious significance, but purely as a festive occasion. In China “Santa Claus’s cheery red face is plastered in shop windows in major cities,” says *The Wall Street Journal*, adding: “Christmas fever is gripping China’s newly rising urban middle class as an excuse to shop, eat and party.”

In many parts of the world, Christmas has been a great boost for local economies. That is especially true of China, which is now “an export powerhouse of plastic trees, tinsel, twinkling lights and other yuletide trinkets,” says the *Journal*.

Predominantly Muslim lands also promote Christmaslike festivities, although not necessarily on December 25. In Ankara, Turkey, and Beirut, Lebanon, it is not unusual to see shop windows dressed with tinsel-covered evergreens and gift-wrapped packages. In Indonesia, hotels and malls sponsor festive events, and children can dine with Santa or have their picture taken with him.

In Western lands, Christmas is now largely secular and commercial, with many ads “blatantly pitched at children,” said Canada’s *Royal Bank Letter*. Granted, some people still attend Christmas services at a church. But it is the shopping malls, resonating with carols, that have become the new temples. Why the change? Could the reason be connected with the origin of Christmas? What are its roots?

Before discussing such questions, it would be good to read the Bible accounts on which Christmas Nativity scenes are supposedly based.



# WHAT THE GOSPEL WRITERS SAY

**The apostle Matthew:** “After Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, look! astrologers from eastern parts came to Jerusalem, saying: ‘Where is the one born King of the Jews? For we saw his star when we were in the east, and we have come to do him obeisance.’ At hearing this King Herod was agitated.” So Herod asked “the chief priests . . . where the Christ was to be born.” On learning that it was “in Bethlehem,” Herod told the astrologers: “Go make a careful search for the young child, and when you have found it report back to me.”

“They went their way; and, look! the star they had seen when they were in the east went ahead of them, until it came to a stop above where the young child was. . . . When they went into the house they saw the young child with Mary its mother.” After presenting Jesus with gifts, “they were given divine warning in a dream not to return to Herod, [so] they withdrew to their country by another way.”

“After they had withdrawn, look! Jehovah’s angel appeared in a dream to Joseph, saying: ‘Get up, take the young child and its mother and flee into Egypt . . .’ So he got up and took along the young child and its mother by night and withdrew . . . Then Herod, seeing he had been outwitted by the astrologers, fell into a great rage, and he sent out and had all the boys in Bethlehem and in all its districts done



away with, from two years of age and under.”  
—Matthew 2:1-16.

**The disciple Luke:** Joseph “went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to David’s city, which is called Bethlehem, . . . to get registered with Mary . . . While they were there, . . . she gave birth to her son, the first-born, and she bound him with cloth bands and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the lodging room.”

“There were also in that same country shepherds living out of doors and keeping watches in the night over their flocks. And suddenly Jehovah’s angel stood by them, . . . and they became very fearful. But the angel said to them: ‘Have no fear, for, look! I am declaring to you good news of a great joy that all the people will have, because there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in David’s city.’” At that the shepherds “went with haste and found Mary as well as Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.”—Luke 2:4-16.

## Awake!®

**THIS JOURNAL IS PUBLISHED** for the enlightenment of the entire family. It shows how to cope with today’s problems. It reports the news, tells about people in many lands, examines religion and science. But it does more. It probes beneath the surface and points to the real meaning behind current events, yet it always stays politically neutral and does not exalt one race above another. Most important, this magazine builds confidence in the Creator’s promise of a peaceful and secure new world that is about to replace the present wicked, lawless system of things.

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# The Truth About Christmas

**D**O YOU care about spiritual truth? If so, then perhaps you have asked these questions: (1) Was Jesus actually born on December 25? (2) Who were the “wise men,” and were they really three in number? (3) What sort of “star” led them to Jesus? (4) What does Santa Claus have to do with Jesus and his birth? (5) How does God view the Christmas custom of giving gifts or, to be more precise, exchanging gifts?

Let us now consider these questions in the light of the Bible and historical facts.

## 1 Was Jesus Born on December 25?

**The custom:** According to tradition, Jesus' birth took place on December 25 and is celebrated on that date. “Christmas,” says the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, means “‘Christ’s Mass,’ that is, the mass celebrating the feast of Christ’s nativity,” or birth.

**Its roots:** “The establishment of December 25 evolved not from biblical precedent,” says *The Christmas Encyclopedia*, “but from pagan Roman festivals held at year’s end,” about the time of the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. Those festivals included the Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, god of agriculture, “and the combined festivals of two sun gods, the Roman Sol and the Persian Mithra,” says the same encyclopedia. Both

birthdays were celebrated on December 25, the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar.

Those pagan festivals began to be “Christianized” in the year 350, when Pope Julius I declared December 25 to be Christ’s birthday. “The Nativity gradually absorbed or supplanted all other solstice rites,” says the *Encyclopedia of Religion*. “Solar imagery came increasingly to be used to portray the risen Christ (who was also called Sol Invictus), and the old solar disk . . . became the halo of Christian saints.”

**What the Bible says:** The Bible does not give Jesus’ birth date. But we can safely conclude that he was not born on December 25. How so? The Bible tells us that when Jesus was born, shepherds were “living out of doors” tending their flocks *at night* in the vicinity of Bethlehem. (Luke 2:8) The cold, rainy season usually began in October, and shepherds—especially in the colder highlands, such as those around Bethlehem—brought their sheep into protected shelters at night. The coldest weather, sometimes accompanied by snow, occurred in December.\*

Significantly, the early Christians, many of whom had accompanied Jesus in his

\* It appears that Jesus was born during the ancient Jewish month of Ethanim (September-October).—See the reference work *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, page 56, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

**Languages:** Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Armenian, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese (Simplified), Chinese (Traditional)<sup>+</sup> (audio Mandarin only), Chitonga, Cibemba, Croatian, Czech,<sup>+</sup> Danish,<sup>+</sup> Dutch,<sup>+</sup> English,<sup>+</sup> Estonian, Ewe, Fijian, Finnish,<sup>+</sup> French,<sup>+</sup> Georgian, German,<sup>+</sup> Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Igbo, Iloko, Indonesian, Italian,<sup>+</sup> Japanese,<sup>+</sup> Kannada, Kinyarwanda, Kirghiz, Kirundi, Korean,<sup>+</sup> Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Lvale, Macedonian, Malagasy, Malayalam, Maltese, Myanmar, Norwegian,<sup>+</sup> Polish,<sup>+</sup> Portuguese,<sup>+</sup> Punjabi, Rarotongan, Romanian, Russian,<sup>+</sup> Samoan, Sepedi, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona, Silozi, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish,<sup>+</sup> Swahili, Swedish,<sup>+</sup> Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tok Pisin, Tongan, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Xhosa, Yoruba, Zulu

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<sup>o</sup> Audio recordings also available at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

**Would you welcome more information or a free home Bible study?** Please send your request to Jehovah’s Witnesses, using one of the addresses below. For a complete list of addresses, see [www.watchtower.org/address](http://www.watchtower.org/address). **America:** United States of: 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. **Australia:** PO Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. **Bahamas:** PO Box N-1247, Nassau, NP. **Britain:** The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. **Canada:** PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. **Germany:** Am Steinfeld, 65618 Selters. **Guam:** 143 Jehovah St, Barrigada, GU 96913. **Guyana:** 352-360 Tyrell St, Republic Park Phase 2 EBD. **Hawaii:** 2055 Kamehameha IV Road, Honolulu, HI 96819-2619. **Jamaica:** PO Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. **Japan:** 4-7-1 Nakashinden, Ebina City, Kanagawa-Pref, 243-0496. **Puerto Rico:** PO Box 3980, Guayanabo, PR 00970. **South Africa:** Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. **Trinidad and Tobago:** Lower Rapsey Street & Laxmi Lane, Curepe.

ministry, never celebrated his birth on *any* date. Rather, in harmony with his command, they commemorated only his death. (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) Still, some may say, ‘Does the pagan connection really matter?’ The answer? It does to God. “The true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit *and truth*,” said Jesus Christ.—John 4:23.

## 2 The “Wise Men”—How Many? Who Were They?

**The custom:** Guided by a “star” from the east, three “wise men” are portrayed as presenting gifts to Jesus in a manger in a stable. Sometimes shepherds are also shown as being present.

**Its roots:** Aside from the brief account in the Bible, “everything written about the Wise Men stems principally from legend,” says *The Christmas Encyclopedia*.

**What the Bible says:** The Bible does not say how many “wise men” visited Jesus. There may have been two, or there may have been three, four, or more. Although termed “wise men” in some Bible translations, the original-language word is *magoi*, which means astrologers or sorcerers—professions that the Bible says are “detestable to Jehovah.” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12) By virtue of their long journey from the East, the astrologers did not arrive in time to visit Jesus in the stable. Rather, after perhaps months of travel, they “went into the house” where Jesus was staying. There they saw “the young child with Mary its mother.”—Matthew 2:11.

## 3 What Sort of Star Led the Astrologers?

Clues are provided by what the star actually did. For one thing, it did not lead the men directly to Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem, where their inquiries about Jesus reached the ears of King Herod. Herod then “secretly summoned the astrologers,” who told him

about the newborn “king of the Jews.” Herod then said: “Make a careful search for the young child, and when you have found it report back to me.” Herod’s interest in Jesus, however, was anything but noble. Rather, this proud and ruthless ruler was resolved to put Jesus to death!—Matthew 2:1-8, 16.

Interestingly, the “star” now led the astrologers south to Bethlehem. There “it came to a stop” above the house where Jesus was.—Matthew 2:9, 10.

Clearly this was no ordinary star! And why would God, who had used angels to inform humble shepherds of Jesus’ birth, now employ a star to guide pagan astrologers—first to Jesus’ enemy and then to the child himself? The only reasonable conclusion is that the star was a sinister device of Satan, who is capable of such manifestations. (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10) Ironically, an ornament called the star of Bethlehem is usually seen at the very top of the Christmas tree.

## 4 What Does Santa Claus Have to Do With Jesus and His Birth?

**The custom:** In many lands, Santa Claus is viewed as the one who brings children gifts.\* Children often write to Santa, asking for presents, which, according to tradition, elves help him to make at his North Pole headquarters.

**Its roots:** According to the popular view, the Santa Claus myth owes its origin to Saint Nicholas, Archbishop of Myra in Asia Minor, now Turkey. “Virtually everything written about St. Nicholas is based on legends,” says *The Christmas Encyclopedia*. The designation “Santa Claus” may owe its origin to the word *Sinterklaas*, a corruption of the Dutch terms for “Saint Nicholas.” Historically and Biblically, Santa Claus has nothing in common with Jesus Christ.

\* In some European lands, such as Austria, “Santa is still not as eagerly expected as Christkind,” or the Christ child, says a BBC news report. Nevertheless, the visit is still about presents.



**The Christmas season, like the ancient festival of Saturnalia, is marked by partying, feasting, and drinking**

**What the Bible says:** “Now that you have put away falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor.” Our closest ‘neighbors’ are our family members. (Ephesians 4:25) The Bible also says that we should “love truth,” “speaking the truth in [our] heart.” (Zechariah 8:19; Psalm 15:2) True, telling children that Santa (or the Christ child) is the bearer of presents at Christmas may seem to be innocent fun, but is it right or wise to deceive little children, even if one’s intentions are not bad? Do you not find it ironic that an occasion that is supposedly meant to honor Jesus becomes a time to deceive children?

## 5 How Does God View Christmas Gift-Giving and Merrymaking?

**The custom:** Christmas giving is unusual in that it largely involves an exchange of gifts, and the Christmas season is marked by partying, feasting, and drinking.

**Its roots:** Ancient Roman Saturnalian festivities began on December 17 and concluded on the 24th, when gifts were exchanged. Homes and streets were noisy with banqueting, heavy drinking, and riotous behavior. The Saturnalia was followed by an event celebrat-

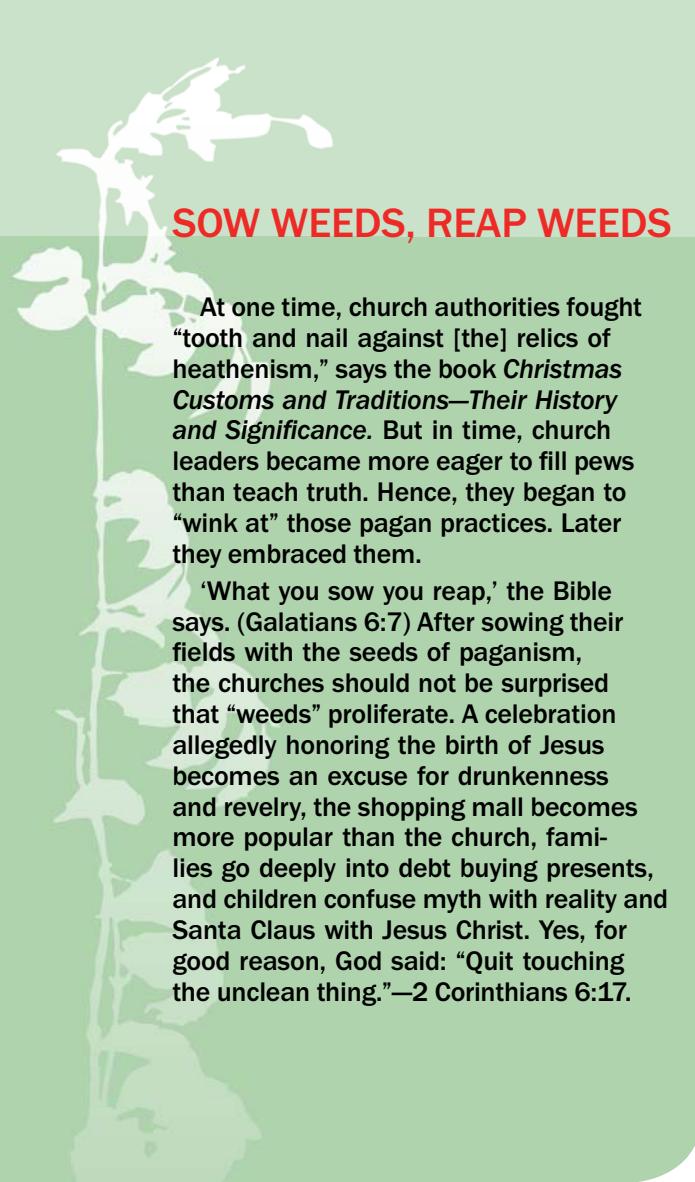


▲ © Mary Evans Picture Library

ing the first day of January. This was also observed by a festival, usually lasting about three days. The Saturnalia and the first day of January likely formed one festive occasion.

**What the Bible says:** Joy and generosity characterize true worship. “Be joyful, you righteous ones; and cry out joyfully,” the Bible says. (Psalm 32:11) Such joy is often associated with generosity. (Proverbs 11:25) “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving,” said Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:35) He also said: “Practice giving,” or make it a regular part of your life.—Luke 6:38.

Such giving has little in common with ritualized giving or giving that is compelled, perhaps by social custom. Describing the true spirit of generosity, the Bible states: “Each person should give as he has decided for himself; there should be no reluctance, no sense of compulsion; God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Corinthians 9:7, *The New English Bible*) Those who heed these excellent Bible



## SOW WEEDS, REAP WEEDS

At one time, church authorities fought “tooth and nail against [the] relics of heathenism,” says the book *Christmas Customs and Traditions—Their History and Significance*. But in time, church leaders became more eager to fill pews than teach truth. Hence, they began to “wink at” those pagan practices. Later they embraced them.

‘What you sow you reap,’ the Bible says. (Galatians 6:7) After sowing their fields with the seeds of paganism, the churches should not be surprised that “weeds” proliferate. A celebration allegedly honoring the birth of Jesus becomes an excuse for drunkenness and revelry, the shopping mall becomes more popular than the church, families go deeply into debt buying presents, and children confuse myth with reality and Santa Claus with Jesus Christ. Yes, for good reason, God said: “Quit touching the unclean thing.”—2 Corinthians 6:17.

principles give because their generous heart impels them to do so, which can be at any time of the year. To be sure, this kind of giving has God’s blessing, and it is *never* burdensome.

### A Counterfeit!

When examined in the light of the Bible, virtually every facet of Christmas is either pagan in origin or a distortion of the Bible accounts. Hence, Christmas customs are Christian in name only. How did this come about? Centuries after the death of Christ, many false teachers arose, just as the Bible had foretold. (2 Timothy 4:3, 4) Those unprincipled men were more interested in making Christianity fashionable to the pagan masses than they were in teaching truth. Hence, they gradually adopted popular pagan religious festivals and labeled them “Christian.”

Such “false teachers,” the Bible warned, “will exploit you with counterfeit words. But as for them, the judgment from of old is not moving slowly, and the destruction of them is not slumbering.” (2 Peter 2:1-3) Jehovah’s Witnesses take those words seriously—as they do the entire Bible, which they view as the written Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16) Hence, they reject false religious customs or celebrations. Has this stand deprived them of happiness? On the contrary! As we shall now see, they know from experience that Bible truth is liberating!

# “The Truth Will Set You Free”!

**T**HAT statement of Jesus Christ, found in the Bible at John 8:32, is an eternal truth. That truth liberates us from superstition and from customs that displease God and harm us. The following shows how Bible truth has liberated people in various lands from some of the burdensome customs associated with Christmas.

### Bible Truth Set Them Free!

**Argentina** “Our family has been set free from the problems associated with excess eating and drinking and the cost of gifts we could not afford,” says Oscar.

Mario felt a great sense of freedom when the “Christmas lie,” as he terms it, was revealed to him. “I now find joy in expressing

my appreciation to others by means of gifts at any time of the year and when my budget allows me to."

**Canada** "I love giving and receiving gifts," writes Elfie. "But I don't like the kind of giving that is done under pressure. When our family stopped celebrating Christmas, it felt like a vacation!"

Ulli, one of Elfie's daughters, recalls: "After my parents stopped celebrating Christmas, they used to surprise us with fun activities or gifts throughout the year, and we loved that! When our classmates asked us what the occasion was, we would proudly tell them, 'Just because!' Still, the transition to living by Bible truth was not easy for our parents, because it meant family opposition and pressure. But they stood firm. Seeing their determination to worship Jehovah God acceptably had a big influence on me."

For Silvia, giving up Christmas "was a relief," she says. "Afterward I felt so good! I knew I was pleasing Jehovah God, and that felt better than thousands of Christmas celebrations."

**Kenya** Peter writes: "When I was celebrating Christmas, I borrowed heavily in order to purchase gifts and pay for lavish meals. Of course, all this meant that I had to work overtime, which took me away from my family. How thrilled I was to be set free from all that!"

"I give—and receive—gifts from family and friends at any time," says Carolyne. "I believe such unexpected gifts, which are given out of a pure heart, are by far the best."

**Japan** "Our children," write Hiroshi and Rie, "have not fallen into the trap of expecting gifts and taking them for granted. It makes us happy as parents to see them understand that giving should come from the heart."

Keiko recalls: "Our family used to celebrate Christmas. After confirming that our son was asleep, my husband and I would place a present at his bedside. On the follow-



**Christians give out of love and at any time of the year**

ing morning, we would say to him: 'Because you have been a good boy, Santa gave you a present.' When I learned the truth about Christmas and shared what I had learned with my son, he was shocked and cried. At that point, it really hit me that Christmas is not the beautiful thing it is portrayed to be. Rather, it is a lie, and by perpetuating that lie, I felt I had betrayed my son."

**Philippines** Dave says: "It is hard to convey in writing the joy that Jehovah gives us by means of the pure truths found in the Bible. When members of our family give gifts to others, we do not expect anything in return. And we give from the heart."

The individuals quoted above are just some of the millions who have learned from personal experience that Bible truth sets people free. More important still, when we live in harmony with that truth, we bring joy to God's heart. (Proverbs 27:11) Jesus Christ said: "The true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth, for, indeed, the Father is looking for suchlike ones to worship him." (John 4:23) When God looks into your heart, does he see someone who yearns for truth? We hope that the answer is an unequivocal yes!

# Why Doesn't God Get Rid of the Devil?

If YOU could relieve the suffering of another person, would you? Relief workers often rush to a natural disaster to relieve suffering and to save the lives of total strangers. So one might ask, 'Why wouldn't God hurry to get rid of the Devil, the one who is responsible for untold human suffering?'

To help answer that question, you might visualize a prominent court case. The murderer, desperate to halt the proceedings, claims that the judge is dishonest in the way he presides over his own courtroom, and he even asserts that the jurors are being bribed by the judge. So countless witnesses are allowed to provide testimony.

The judge knows that the extensive proceedings will cause much inconvenience, and

he would like to have the case concluded without undue delay. Yet, he realizes that to arrive at a judgment that will set a precedent for possible future cases, both parties must be allowed sufficient time to present their side of the dispute.

How does this illustration relate to a challenge the Devil—also called “dragon,” “serpent,” and “Satan”—hurled at Jehovah, “the Most High over all the earth”? (Revelation 12:9; Psalm 83:18) Who really is the Devil? And what accusations has he made against Jehovah God? Also, when will God get rid of him?

## The Setting of a Moral Precedent

Originally the one who became the Devil was a perfect spirit person, one of God's an-

***To arrive at a judgment that will set a moral precedent, both parties must be allowed sufficient time to present their side of the dispute***



gels. (Job 1:6, 7) He made himself the Devil when he became obsessed with a selfish ambition to be worshipped by humans. So he challenged God's right to rule, even insinuating that God does not deserve to be obeyed. He charged that humans serve God only when bribed with blessings. Satan claimed that under personal hardship all people would "curse" their Creator.—Job 1:8-11; 2:4, 5.

Such accusations from Satan required responses that could not be answered simply by a show of force. In fact, executing the Devil in the garden of Eden would perhaps have suggested to some that the Devil was right. So God, possessing absolute authority, began legal proceedings to settle such issues in the minds of all observers.

In harmony with his principles and perfect justice, Jehovah God indicated that each party would produce witnesses who would give supporting testimony to its side of the controversy. The time allowed has given Adam's descendants a chance to live and to add their testimony in God's behalf by choosing to keep integrity to him out of love despite any hardships.

### How Much Longer?

Jehovah God is keenly aware that while those legal proceedings take place, humans continue to suffer. Yet, he is determined to close the case at the earliest time possible. The Bible describes him as "the Father of tender mercies and the God of all comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:3) Clearly, "the God of all comfort" will not allow the Devil to live any longer than necessary, nor will He allow the effects of his influence to remain. On the other hand, God will not eliminate the Devil prematurely, without the universal court case being completely finished.

When the issues are finally settled, Jehovah's right to rule will have been thoroughly vindicated. The legal case against Satan will stand as a touchstone for all eternity. Should a similar challenge ever arise again, Satan's

example could be pointed to as a precedent that will not need to be repeated.

In due time, Jehovah God will direct his resurrected Son to get rid of the Devil and undo all of his works. The Bible tells of the time when Christ "hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has brought to nothing all government and all authority and power. For he must rule as king until God has put all enemies under his feet. As the last enemy, death is to be brought to nothing."—1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

Happily, the Bible promises that Paradise-like conditions will be found earth wide. As God originally purposed, people will live in a peaceful paradise! "The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace." Yes, "the righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it."—Psalm 37: 11, 29.

Consider the grand prospect for God's servants that is described in the Bible: "Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away."—Revelation 21:3, 4.

### HAVE YOU WONDERED?

- How has the Devil falsely accused God and man?—Job 1:8-11.
- What qualities of God assure us that in time he will get rid of the Devil?  
—2 Corinthians 1:3.
- What hope does the Bible offer?  
—Revelation 21:3, 4.



# God Has Comforted Me in All My Trials

AS TOLD BY VICTORIA COLLOY

A doctor told Mother: "We cannot do anything more for your daughter. She will have to use crutches and wear leg braces for the rest of her life." I was devastated! What could I do if I couldn't walk?

I WAS born on November 17, 1949, in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. I was a happy, healthy baby, the firstborn of four children. But at six months I suddenly stopped crawling and had limited mobility. Two months later I couldn't move at all. Local doctors were puzzled, since other babies in Tapachula had similar symptoms. So an orthopedist from Mexico City came and examined us. Our ailment was diagnosed as poliomyelitis, or polio.

When I was three, I had operations that involved my hip, knees, and ankles. Later my right shoulder was also adversely affected. When I was six, I was taken to Mexico City to continue treatment at a children's hospital. Mother worked on a farm back in Chiapas, so I stayed in Mexico City with my grandmother. Most of the time, however, I was in a hospital.

At about eight years of age, I made some progress. But later I got worse, gradually losing the little movement I had. Then doctors said that I would have to use crutches and braces for the rest of my life.

By the time I was 15, I had undergone 25 operations. These were on my spine, legs, knees, ankles, and toes. After each operation, I went through a period of rehabilitation. After one of the surgeries, my legs were put in a cast. When the cast was removed, I had to do painful exercises.

## Receiving True Comfort

When I was 11, Mother visited when I was recovering from an operation. She had learned that Jesus cured the sick and even made a paralytic walk. She gave me a copy of *The Watchtower*, a magazine published by Jehovah's Witnesses, from which she had learned this. I hid it under my pillow, but one day it disappeared. The nurses had found the magazine and took it away. They chastised me for reading it.

About a year later, Mother again came from Chiapas to see me. By then she was studying the Bible with the Witnesses. She brought me the book *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained*.<sup>\*</sup> Mother said, "If you



**Wearing leg braces  
at the age of seven**

\* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses in 1958 but now out of print.

want to live in the promised new world where Jesus will make you well, you have to study the Bible." So despite Grandmother's opposition, I began to study with the Witnesses at about age 14. The following year I was required to leave the hospital because it was only for young children.

### Coping With Challenges

I became very depressed. Because of my grandmother's opposition, I had to return to Chiapas and live with my parents. However, there were problems at home because Father was an alcoholic. For a time I saw no reason for living. I thought about poisoning myself. But as I continued to study the Bible, my viewpoint changed. The Bible's promise of a paradise earth made me feel happy.

I began to talk to others about the magnificent hope the Bible holds out. (Isaiah 2:4; 9:6, 7; 11:6-9; Revelation 21:3, 4) Eventually, on May 8, 1968, when I was 18, I was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Since 1974, I have been devoting over 70 hours a month to sharing with others the hope that motivated me to keep on living.

### A Productive, Satisfying Life

In time, Mother and I moved to the city of Tijuana, near the border between Mexico and the United States. Mother and I live together in a place suited for our needs. I can still get around the house with braces and crutches, and I use a wheelchair from which I can cook as well as wash and iron my clothes. To carry out my ministry, I drive an electric cart that has been adapted to my needs.

1. They gave in to fear and lacked faith in Jehovah.  
—Numbers 14:13, 11. 2. All the men 20 years of age and upward except Joshua and Caleb died in the wilderness.  
3. They had faith that Jehovah was with them.—Numbers 14:9. 4. Simon Peter, the companion Simon Peter,  
Gehes, and Symeon. 5. Yes.

ANSWERS TO PAGE 31

*In the ministry I drive an electric cart that has been adapted to my needs*



Besides sharing Bible teachings with people on the streets and at their homes, I regularly visit a nearby hospital and have Bible discussions with those waiting outside for medical attention. When I have finished talking with them, I drive my electric cart to the market to get whatever we need and then return home to help Mother cook and do the housework.

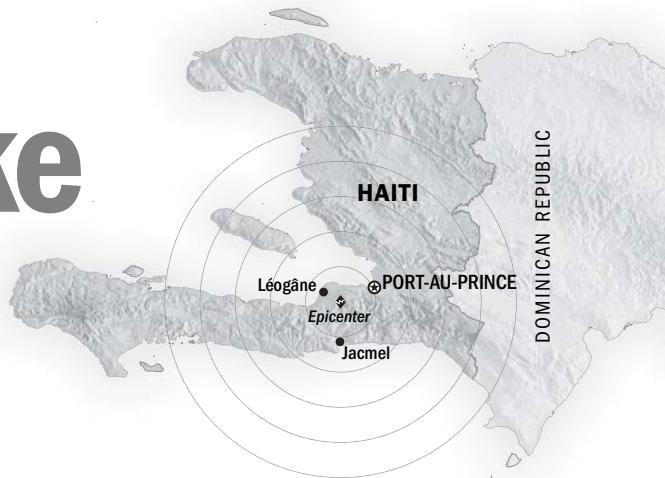
To provide for our financial needs, I sell used clothing. Mother is now 78 and is limited because she has had three heart attacks. So I take care of her medicine and diet. In spite of our limited health, we strive to attend the congregation meetings. More than 30 people with whom I studied the Bible over the years also now share in the Christian ministry.

I am convinced of the eventual fulfillment of the Bible's promise: "At that time [in God's new world] the lame one will climb up just as a stag does." In the meantime, God's words comfort me: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not gaze about, for I am your God. I will fortify you. I will really help you. I will really keep fast hold of you with my right hand of righteousness."—Isaiah 35:6; 41:10.\*

\* Victoria Colloy died November 30, 2009, at the age of 60. Her mother died July 5, 2009.

# Earthquake in Haiti

## Faith and Love in Action



On Tuesday, January 12, 2010, at 4:53 p.m., Evelyn heard a rumbling like the sound of a huge airplane rising from below, and the ground began to shake. Nearby, concrete beams cracked loudly, and buildings collapsed. When the shaking stopped, Evelyn climbed to a higher vantage point and surveyed the scene. All around she heard people wailing. A cloud of cement dust rose from the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince.

**I**N SECONDS, homes, government buildings, banks, hospitals, and schools fell. People from all walks of life died—more than 220,000. Some 300,000 were injured.

Many survivors sat numb and silent by the remains of their homes. Others frantically dug through rubble with bare hands to rescue relatives and neighbors. Electrical power failed, and darkness fell quickly, obliging rescuers to work by flashlight and candlelight.

In the city of Jacmel, Ralphendy, 11 years of age, lay trapped under a partially collapsed building. For hours, a city rescue team worked feverishly to release him. Repeated aftershocks forced them to abandon their efforts because of fear that the fractured upper floors would crash down on them. Philippe, a missionary of Jehovah's Witnesses, refused to give up, explaining, "I could not bear to leave Ralphendy there to die."

Philippe and three others squeezed through a narrow space under the broken building and inched their way forward to where Ralphendy lay, his feet held fast by

fallen debris. From midnight on, they cautiously chipped away. With every tremor, they heard the concrete overhead shift and crack. At 5:00 a.m., more than 12 hours after the quake, they pulled Ralphendy out to safety.

Sadly, not all such efforts ended in success. In the hard-hit city of Léogâne, Roger and his older son, Clid, escaped their collapsing home. His younger son, Clarence, was killed. Roger's wife, Clana, was alive and able to speak, but her head was pinned under the fallen ceiling. Roger and a friend labored to free her. "Hurry!" she urged from beneath the ruins. "I'm weakening! I'm losing my breath!" Three hours later, a rescue team arrived. But when they lifted her out, she was dead.

### **Wednesday, January 13, Day 2**

The light of dawn revealed the scale of destruction. Much of Port-au-Prince lay in ruins. As news of the devastation filtered out, relief organizations and many selfless individuals around the world mobilized to help. Vol-



unteers at the Dominican Republic office of Jehovah's Witnesses, about a 200-mile (about 300 km) drive away, had also felt the quake. Learning that the epicenter was near densely populated Port-au-Prince, home to nearly a third of Haiti's population of nine million, the Dominican Witnesses immediately began planning relief.

### **"I could not bear to leave Ralphendy there to die"**

It had been 150 years since Haiti's last great quake. Haiti had therefore largely left off constructing buildings that resisted earthquakes in favor of those that protected the population from hurricanes and floods. Hence, most of the block walls and heavy concrete roofs were no match for the magnitude 7.0 tremor. However, the Haiti office of Jehovah's Witnesses, completed in 1987, was designed in accord with accepted seismic construction standards. Although located near the eastern edge of Port-au-Prince, it suffered virtually no damage.

Overnight, the office in Haiti turned into a bustling relief center. Since international telephone and e-mail communication had become unreliable, staff members drove to the border of the Dominican Republic twice to send out reports. Meanwhile, hundreds of victims, many seriously injured, were streaming into the property of the Haiti office. Many others were taken to the few functioning hospitals in the area, quickly overwhelming them.

All around the hospitals, victims lay on the ground—bleeding and screaming. Lying among them was Marla, who had been buried under the rubble of a collapsed building for eight hours. She could not feel or move her legs. Neighbors had dug her out and taken her to a hospital, but which one? Evan, a Witness doctor who had arrived earlier from the Dominican Republic, set out to find her, knowing only her name.

By then, more than 24 hours had passed since the quake, and night had again fallen. Stepping over the dead bodies lying outside one hospital, Evan silently prayed and kept

calling Marla's name. Finally, he heard someone answer, "Yes!" Marla was looking up at him with a radiant smile. Stunned, Evan asked, "Why are you smiling?" She replied, "Because now I am with my spiritual brother." Evan could not hold back his tears.

### Thursday, January 14, Day 3

The world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses, located in the United States—along with the branches in Canada, the Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and elsewhere—coordinated relief efforts to make the best use of available materials, transportation, communication, funds, and manpower. In all, 78 medical professionals who are Jehovah's Witnesses would come to help, along with many other volunteers. By 2:30 a.m., the first relief truck left the Dominican branch office for Haiti, loaded with about 15,000 pounds (about 6,804 kg) of food, water, medicine, and other materials.

When the shipment arrived later that morning, the Haiti branch office staff set about organizing the supplies for distribution. To dissuade thieves from stealing the food to sell it, the relief workers disguised the loads. Volunteers worked day and night repacking food and other supplies into small bags for families and individuals. During the following months, Jehovah's Witnesses would ultimately distribute, free of charge, over 1,000,000 pounds (over 450,000 kg) of donated materials, including more than 400,000 meals.



### Friday, January 15, Day 4

By midday, 19 Witness medical doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals from the Dominican Republic and Guadeloupe had arrived in Haiti. They quickly set up a first-aid clinic. Those treated there included the injured from among the scores of children at an orphanage. Moreover, the Witness staff provided the orphanage with food and tarpaulins for shelter. "I am very grateful to Jehovah's Witnesses," says Étienne, the orphanage director. "I don't know what we would have done without them."

#### Lost and Then Found

When the quake struck, seven-year-old Islandde looked out of her home and saw power lines snapping and showers of sparks. Inside, the walls buckled and blocks cascaded down, breaking her leg and seriously injuring her. After she was lifted from the debris, her father, Johnny, drove Islandde just across the Dominican border to a hospital. She was airlifted to a hospital in the country's capital, Santo Domingo. But when Johnny later called the hospital, Islandde was not there.

For two days Johnny searched everywhere for Islandde, without result. She had been taken to a different hospital, where a hospital volunteer heard her praying to Jehovah. (Psalm 83:18) "Do you love Jehovah?" the volunteer asked. "Yes," Islandde replied through her tears. "Then don't worry," the volunteer reassured her. "Jehovah will help you."

Johnny asked the Dominican Republic office of Jehovah's Witnesses for help in find-

ing Islande. A Witness named Melanie offered to search for her. As Melanie inquired at one hospital, the volunteer who had heard Islande praying overheard the conversation and pointed the little girl out. Soon, Islande was reunited with her family.

### **Operations and Rehabilitation**

Many of the injured had received little or no treatment before arriving at the clinic set up at the Witnesses' office in Haiti, and their wounded limbs had turned gangrenous. Too often, only amputation could save the patient's life. In the first days after the quake, surgical equipment, medicines, and even anesthetics were in short supply. The situation

was traumatic even for the doctors. One said, "There are images and sounds that I wish God would erase from my memory."

The second week after the quake, Witness doctors from Europe who had the experience and the equipment to perform complex and urgently needed surgeries began to arrive. The medical team performed 53 operations and administered thousands of other medical treatments. Wideline, a 23-year-old Witness, had arrived in Port-au-Prince a day before the quake. When it struck, her right arm was crushed and had to be amputated in a local hospital. Relatives later took her to a hospital near their home in Port-de-Paix, seven hours

## **PROVIDING HOMES FOR VICTIMS**

Within a month after the quake, Witness civil engineers began verifying which homes were safe for families to move back into. Many who lost their homes needed transitional housing to tide them over until they could find more-permanent dwellings.

"Drawing on the experience of international relief organizations, we designed an inexpensive, easy-to-assemble dwelling, similar in size to the homes many had

been living in," explains John, a staff member at the branch office in Haiti. "It provides protection from the rain and wind, without threatening to crush the family in case of further tremors." Only three weeks after the quake, a crew of Haitian and international volunteers began building temporary homes.

People on the streets cheered as trucks passed through carrying the pre-fabricated sections of these

homes. One Haitian customs official, while approving the importation of the construction materials, commented: "Jehovah's Witnesses were among the first ones who came across the border to get help for people. They don't just talk about helping, they really do it." In the first few months following the quake, 1,500 homes had already been built by the Witnesses for those who had lost theirs.





▲ **A group of Haitian Jehovah's Witnesses heading out to bring comfort to the victims of the disaster**

◀ **A doctor treating a boy at the clinic set up by Jehovah's Witnesses**

away. But Wideline's condition deteriorated, and the hospital staff there gave her up for dead.

Learning of her plight, a Witness medical team traveled from Port-au-Prince to treat Wideline and to bring her back for further care. When the other patients saw that her spiritual brothers had come for her, they applauded. With the help of her family and congregation, Wideline is now adjusting well to her new circumstances.

In the Dominican Republic, Jehovah's Witnesses rented homes to serve as rehabilitation centers for patients sent there. The homes were staffed by rotating teams of Witness vol-

unteers—doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and other caretakers. They cheerfully cared for the patients' needs during recovery.

#### **Sharing Faith, Hope, and Love**

Only 6 of the 56 Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses in Haiti's earthquake zone suffered significant damage. Most Witnesses displaced by the quake stayed at the undamaged halls or in other open areas. The Witnesses, already accustomed to gathering together, organized themselves as they would for one of their regular assemblies.

"We maintained the congregation's regular routine of spiritual programs," explained Jean-Claude, a local overseer of Jehovah's Witnesses, "providing a vital element of stability for young and old alike." With what

result? “I’m so glad to see Jehovah’s Witnesses still going around preaching,” one man said. “If we didn’t see you, we would feel that things were much more serious.”

The Witnesses brought people comfort. “Nearly everyone we meet believes that the quake was a punishment from God,” explained one Witness. “We assure them that the earthquake was a natural disaster and not God’s doing. We show them Genesis 18:25. There Abraham declares it unthinkable that God would destroy good people along with the bad. We also show them Luke 21:11. There Jesus foretold great earthquakes for this time, and we explain that he will soon resurrect dead loved ones and remove all suffering. Many people express profound gratitude for this knowledge.”\*

Still, challenges remain. “We had the first disaster, the earthquake. Now we must deal

### **“I’m so glad to see Jehovah’s Witnesses still going around preaching”**

with the aftermath,” noted Jean-Emmanuel, a Witness physician. “Apart from the threat of multiple diseases breaking out in crowded, unsanitary, and rain-soaked camps, there is emotional trauma that has been suppressed but is not going away.”

Weeks after the quake, a Witness came to the clinic complaining of relentless headaches and sleeplessness, common post-disaster complaints. “Did something hit your head?” a Witness nurse asked. “No,” he replied stoically. “My wife of 17 years was killed. But we expected such things to occur. Jesus said they would.”

Discerning the possible root of the problem, the nurse said: “But you lost your life partner. That’s terrible! It’s all right to grieve, to cry. Jesus wept when his friend Lazarus

\* See chapter 11, “Why Does God Allow Suffering?,” in the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

died.” At that, the stricken man burst into tears.

Of the more than 10,000 Witnesses in the area, 154 died as a result of the quake. Over 92 percent of Port-au-Prince residents are estimated to have lost one or more loved ones in the disaster. To help those mourning ones, Jehovah’s Witnesses have made repeated visits on people who were physically and emotionally traumatized, giving them the opportunity to pour out their feelings to someone they could trust. The mourning Witnesses already knew the Bible’s promise of a resurrection and a paradise earth, but they also needed to express their feelings to empathetic fellow Christians and to hear compassionate words of encouragement.

### **Facing the Present and the Future**

The apostle Paul wrote: “There remain faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13) Those qualities are enabling the many Haitian Witnesses to bear up under present circumstances, to encourage others, and to look to the future without fear. True faith, unity, and warmth are obviously behind the ongoing international relief effort. “I have never before experienced such an outpouring of love,” said Petra, a Witness doctor who came from Germany to help. “I have cried so much, but more from joy than from pain.”

*The Wall Street Journal* called the Haiti earthquake of 2010 “the most destructive natural disaster that a single country has experienced, by some measures.” Yet, since that event, the world has seen further tragic disasters, natural and man-made. Will there ever be an end to them? Jehovah’s Witnesses in Haiti and around the world are confident that the day will soon come when God will fulfill the Bible’s promise: “He will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”—Revelation 21:4.

# More Major Earthquakes Expected

SINCE the invention of instruments that can measure the intensity of earthquakes, scientists have recorded hundreds of major earthquakes. Those that occur far away from human population cause little concern and receive little or no coverage by the media. On the other hand, the devastation can be great when an earthquake hits a big city. Loss of human life and property is then proportionate to the size and preparedness of the population.

On January 12, 2010, Haiti experienced one of the worst earthquakes in history in terms of loss of human life and property. But it was not the first nor has it been the only major earthquake this year. The following describes some quakes during the first few months of 2010 that registered as powerful as or more powerful than the one that devastated the capital of Haiti.

## January 3: 7.1 Quake, Solomon Islands

This great earthquake, which was initially rated even stronger than 7.1, caused a tsunami of a “6 to 10 foot (2-3 metre) wall of sea water.” Disaster management official Loti Yates explained that “a total inundation” was seen from an airplane flyover. According to Yates, in the village of Bainara on Rendova Island, 16 houses were destroyed and dozens more were damaged.

That earthquake was preceded by a 6.6 tremor. Many were alarmed by this less powerful quake and fled to the hills. Their reaction resulted in their protection when their shores were hit by the tsunami caused by the larger earthquake two hours later.

*Some of the quakes 7.0 or higher from January through May*



## **February 26: 7.0 Quake, Ryukyu Islands, Japan**

This earthquake struck at 5:31 a.m., local time, and was centered 50 miles (80 km) from Naha, Okinawa, on one of Japan's Ryukyu Islands. Tsunami warnings were given but were later canceled. A woman who had lived on Okinawa for more than 90 years said that it was the most powerful quake she had ever felt.

## **February 27: 8.8 Quake, Chile**

This earthquake was the fifth strongest since the year 1900. The most powerful one was also in Chile, in 1960—a quake with a magnitude of 9.4. That earthquake, plus the 7.7 quake that devastated Chile's capital city in 1985, prompted the country to enforce strict building codes.

As a result, few buildings in Santiago and other cities affected by this year's earthquake collapsed. However, many thousands of peo-

ple were injured and suffered loss of property and possessions. About 500 are believed to have died, almost half of those in a tsunami along the coast of Chile.

## **April 4: 7.2 Quake, Baja California, Mexico**

This quake was centered 11 miles (18 km) from Guadalupe Victoria, Mexico, and 29 miles (47 km) from Mexicali. The area is remote and largely uninhabited. Violent shaking, however, was felt in many cities and towns in Mexico and the southern United States.

## **May 9: 7.2 Quake, Northern Sumatra, Indonesia**

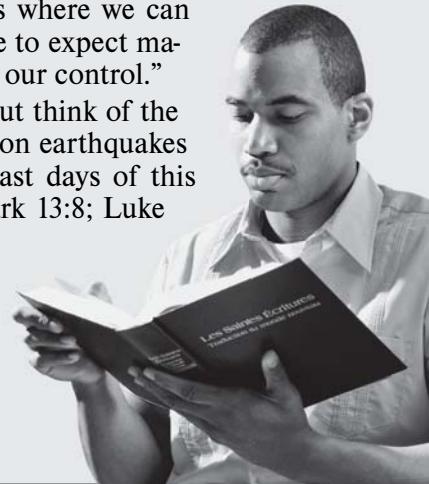
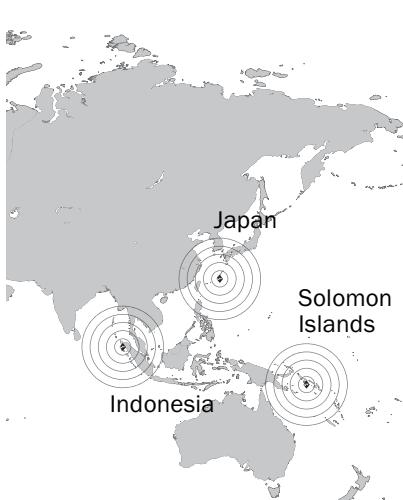
This undersea earthquake occurred at noon about 135 miles (217 km) from Indonesia's northernmost city of Banda Aceh. Many people ran out of their houses and for some time refused to go back out of fear. No fatalities, however, were reported.

### **More Expected**

Based on the long history of major earthquakes shaking our planet, it is fair to say that we should expect more in the years to come. The U.S. Geological Survey puts it bluntly by stating: "Large earthquakes will continue to occur just as they have in the past."

Interestingly, one newspaper editorial commented: "The recent earthquakes . . . are all beyond the possibility of human remedy and only remind us of man's limitations. That doesn't mean we shouldn't act in cases where we can . . . , but it does mean we must continue to expect major natural disasters that are far beyond our control."

Serious Bible students cannot help but think of the Bible prophecies that specifically mention earthquakes as part of the composite sign of the last days of this system of things.—Matthew 24:3, 7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11.



## How can I explain the Bible's view of homosexuality?



AS ILLUSTRATED in the above scenario, a few events create more media buzz than when a celebrity comes out as being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Some people praise such ones for their courage; others condemn them for their debauchery. Between the two extremes, many view homosexuality as nothing more than an alternative lifestyle. "When I was in school," says Daniel, 21, "even *straight* kids felt that if you had a problem with the idea of homosexuality, you were prejudiced and judgmental."<sup>\*</sup>

Attitudes about homosexuality may differ from one generation to another or from one land to another. But Christians aren't "carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching." (Ephesians 4:14) Instead, they adhere to the Bible's view.

What is the Bible's view of homosexuality?

\* Names in this article have been changed.

The awards ceremony erupts into a frenzy when two popular actresses greet each other with a passionate kiss! Onlookers gasp in shock and then cheer in support. Gays call it a triumph. Skeptics call it a publicity stunt. Whichever it is, video clips of the kiss will be aired repeatedly on TV newscasts—and elicit millions of hits on the Internet—for days to come.

If you live by the Bible's moral code, how can you respond to those who label you prejudiced, judgmental, or even homophobic? Consider the following questions and possible responses.

**What does the Bible say about homosexuality?** The Bible makes it clear that God designed sex to be engaged in only between a male and a female and only within the arrangement of marriage. (Genesis 1:27, 28; Leviticus 18:22; Proverbs 5:18, 19) When the Bible condemns fornication, it is referring to both homosexual and heterosexual conduct.\*—Galatians 5:19-21.

**If someone asks:** "What's your view of homosexuality?"

**You might reply:** "I don't hate homosexuals, but I can't approve of their conduct."

\* The Bible term "fornication" refers not only to intercourse but also to acts such as masturbating another person or engaging in oral sex or anal sex.

✓ Remember: If you're guided by the Bible's moral code, then *that is your lifestyle choice, and you have a right to it.* (Joshua 24:15) Don't feel ashamed of your view.—Psalm 119:46.

**Shouldn't Christians treat all people with respect, regardless of their sexual orientation?** Absolutely. The Bible says: "Honor men of all sorts" or, as *Today's English Version* renders it, "Respect everyone." (1 Peter 2:17) Therefore, *Christians are not homophobic.* They show kindness to all people, including those who are gay.—Matthew 7:12.

**If someone asks:** "Doesn't your view of homosexuality encourage prejudice against gays?"

**You might reply:** "Not at all. I reject homosexual conduct, not people."

✓ You could add: "To illustrate it, I also choose not to smoke. In fact, I find the very idea of it repugnant. But suppose you're a smoker and you feel differently. I wouldn't be prejudiced against you for your view, just as I'm sure you wouldn't be prejudiced against me for my view—am I right? The same principle applies to our differing views of homosexuality."

**Didn't Jesus preach tolerance? If so, shouldn't Christians take a permissive view of homosexuality?** Jesus didn't encourage his followers to accept any and all lifestyles. Rather, he taught that the way to salvation is open to "everyone exercising faith in him." (John 3:16) Exercising faith in Jesus includes conforming to God's moral code, which forbids certain types of conduct—including homosexuality.—Romans 1:26, 27.

**If someone says:** "Homosexuals can't change their orientation; they're born that way."

**You might reply:** "The Bible doesn't comment on the biology of homosexuals, although it acknowledges that some traits are deeply ingrained. (2 Corinthians 10:4, 5) Even if some are oriented toward the same

sex, the Bible tells Christians to shun homosexual acts."

✓ Suggestion: Rather than get ensnared in a debate about the cause of homosexual *desires*, emphasize that the Bible prohibits homosexual *conduct*. To make a comparison, you could say: "You know, many claim that violent behavior can have a genetic root and that as a result, some people are predisposed to it. (Proverbs 29:22) What if that was true? As you might know, the Bible condemns fits of anger. (Psalm 37:8; Ephesians 4:31) Is that standard unfair just because some may be inclined toward violence?"

**How could God tell someone who is attracted to the same sex to shun homosexuality? That sounds cruel.** Such reasoning is based on the flawed notion that humans *must* act on their sexual impulses. The Bible dignifies humans by assuring them that they *can* choose not to act on their improper sexual urges if they truly want to.—Colossians 3:5.

**If someone says:** "Even if you're not gay, you should change your view of homosexuality."

**You might reply:** "Suppose I didn't approve of gambling but you did. Would it be reasonable for you to insist that I change my view,

*When it comes to popular opinion,  
Christians have the courage to walk  
against the crowd*



## WHAT ABOUT BISEXUALITY?

Although it can be found among both genders, it seems that bisexuality is becoming increasingly common in girls. Consider a few reasons.

### ● Attention

*“Boys openly admit that they think lesbians are appealing. Girls who lack self-confidence will do almost anything to make a guy like them.”—Jessica, 16.*

### ● Curiosity

*“When you put something out there in movies, TV, and music that promotes girls kissing girls, teens will be tempted to try it—especially when they do not consider it to be wrong.”*

—Lisa, 26.

### ● Attraction

*“I met two bisexual girls at a party, and later I found out from a friend that they liked me. Eventually I started texting one of the girls, and I started developing feelings for her.”*

—Vicky, 13.

If you want to please God, you should avoid experimenting with conduct that the Bible describes as unclean. (Ephesians 4:19; 5:11) But what if you’re really drawn to both sexes? Many would urge you simply to embrace your sexuality and come out as bisexual. However, you should be aware that same-sex attraction *is often nothing more than a passing phase*. That’s what Lisette, 16, found. She says: “Talking to my parents about my feelings made me feel better. Also, through my biology classes in school, I learned that during the adolescent years, hormone levels can fluctuate greatly. I truly think that if more youths knew more about their bodies, they would understand that same-sex attraction can be temporary and they wouldn’t feel the pressure to be gay.”

Even if your feelings are more deep-rooted than a short-lived growing pain, realize that the Bible presents you with a reachable goal: You can choose not to act on any wrong desires.\*

\* For more information, see “How Can I Avoid Homosexuality?” in chapter 28 of the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 2, published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

simply because millions of people choose to gamble?”

✓ Remember this: Most people (including homosexuals) have some ethical code that causes them to deplore certain things—perhaps fraud, injustice, or war. The Bible prohibits those behaviors; it also draws the line at certain types of sexual conduct, including homosexuality.—1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

The Bible is not unreasonable nor does it promote prejudice. It simply directs those with same-sex urges to do the same thing that is required of those with an opposite-sex attraction—to “flee from fornication.”—1 Corinthians 6:18.

The fact is, millions of *heterosexuals* who wish to conform to the Bible’s standards employ self-control despite any temptations they might face. Their numbers include many who

are single with little prospect of marriage and many who are married to a disabled partner who is unable to function sexually. They are able to live happily without fulfilling their sexual urges. Those with homosexual inclinations can do the same if they truly want to please God.—Deuteronomy 30:19.

More articles from the “Young People Ask” series can be found at the Web site  
[www.watchtower.org/ype](http://www.watchtower.org/ype)

### TO THINK ABOUT

- Why does God impose moral laws on humans?
- How do you benefit from adhering to the Bible’s moral laws?

## WAS IT DESIGNED?



# The Salmon's Efficient Swimming Style

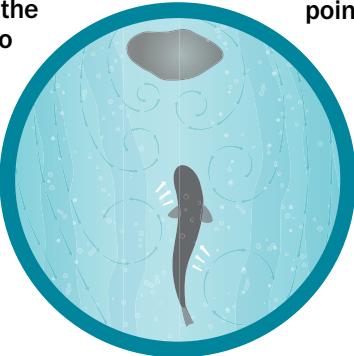


In order to breed, many salmon species swim upstream, facing turbulent waters along the way. How are they able to endure a grueling journey without succumbing to exhaustion? Instead of being overwhelmed by the rough water, these fish actually take advantage of it. How?

**Consider:** Salmon do not plow through chaotic water. Instead, when swimming upstream, they conserve energy by using vortices, or miniature whirlpools, that form where the water flow is disturbed by rocks, branches, or other objects. As the vortices form on alternating sides of an object, the fish curve their bodies from side to side and glide between the pockets of turbulence. (See diagram.) Some schools of fish use the vortices created by the fish swimming in front of them, effectively riding in their wake. The fish can even take advantage of the turbulence created by their own bodies!

Researchers hope to borrow from the salmon's efficient swimming style to harvest energy from slow-moving water. Traditional hydro-power equipment usually generates electricity in water flowing at a rate of about five knots (5.8 miles per hour [9.3 km/h]) or faster. Now a prototype using vortex-induced vibrations can generate electricity from water creeping along at only two knots.\* The technology, however, is nowhere near the level of sophistication found in such fish as salmon. Professor Michael Bernitsas of the University of Michigan, U.S.A., admits: "We are not as smart as fish at this point."

**What do you think?** Did the salmon's ability to harness energy from water turbulence come about by chance? Or was it designed?



\* This seems promising, since most of the earth's water currents move slower than three knots.

## A BOOK YOU CAN TRUST



### Part 2

# Assyria in Bible History

*This is the second in a series of seven articles in consecutive issues of “Awake!” that discuss the seven world powers of Bible history. The objective is to show that the Bible is trustworthy and inspired of God and that its message is one of hope for an end to the suffering caused by man’s cruel domination of his fellow man.*

THE very mention of Assyria to people of the ancient Middle East may have made their blood run cold. According to the Bible book of Jonah, when that prophet received an assignment from God to preach a judgment message in the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, he fled in the opposite direction! (Jonah 1:1-3) Perhaps that was so because of the Assyrians’ fearsome reputation.

### Trustworthy History

The Bible prophet Nahum described Nineveh as “the lair of lions” and “the city of bloodshed.” He added: “Prey does not depart! There is the sound of the whip and the sound of the rattling of the wheel, and the dashing horse and the leaping chariot. The mounted horseman, and the flame of the sword, and the lightning of the spear, and the multitude



◀ Huge human-headed, winged bulls guarded the palaces of Assyrian kings

of slain ones, and the heavy mass of carcasses; and there is no end to the dead bodies. They keep stumbling among their dead bodies.” (Nahum 2:11; 3:1-3) Does secular history corroborate the Bible’s description of ancient Assyria?

The book *Light From the Ancient Past* calls Assyria “the ruthless fighting machine whose calculated frightfulness was the terror of its enemies.” The following is the way one Assyrian king, Ashurnasirpal II, boasted of his treatment of those who opposed him:

“I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins; some I walled up within the pillar, some I impaled upon the pillar on stakes, . . . and I cut off the limbs of the officers, of the royal officers who had rebelled. . . . Many captives from among them I burned with fire, and many I took as living captives.” When archaeologists excavated Assyrian royal palaces, they found the walls decorated with depictions of horrendous treatment being meted out to captives.

In the year 740 B.C.E., Assyria conquered Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and took its people into exile. Eight

years later, Assyria invaded Judah.\* (2 Kings 18:13) The Assyrian King Sennacherib demanded of Judean King Hezekiah a tribute of 30 talents of gold and 300 talents of silver. The Bible record states that this tribute was paid. Even so, Sennacherib insisted that the capital of Judah, Jerusalem, also surrender unconditionally to him.—2 Kings 18:9-17, 28-31.

At Nineveh archaeologists have found an account of the same events in the annals of Sennacherib. In the text, which is inscribed on a hexagonal clay prism, the Assyrian king boasted: “As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) . . . Himself [Hezekiah] I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.” Sennacherib then claims that Hezekiah sent him “30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, . . . (and) all kinds of valuable treasures,” inflating the number of silver talents that he actually received.

Note, though, that Sennacherib does not claim to have conquered Jerusalem. In fact, he says nothing about the crushing defeat his army suffered through divine intervention. According to the Bible, God’s angel took the lives of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night. (2 Kings 19:35, 36) Says scholar Jack Finegan: “In view of the general note of boasting which pervades the inscriptions of the Assyrian kings, however, it is hardly to be expected that Sennacherib would record such a defeat.”

### Trustworthy Prophecy

About a hundred years before the fall of the Assyrian Empire, Isaiah declared that

\* After the reign of King Solomon, the 12-tribe nation of Israel was split. Judah and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom; and the other ten tribes, the northern kingdom. Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom, and Samaria was the capital of the northern.

Jehovah God would call those proud conquerors to account for their insolence toward his people. “I shall make an accounting for the fruitage of the insolence of the heart of the king of Assyria and for the self-importance of his loftiness of eyes,” Jehovah said. (Isaiah 10:12) Furthermore, God’s prophet Nahum foretold that Nineveh would be plundered, its gates would be opened to its enemies, and its guards would flee. (Nahum 2:8, 9; 3:7, 13, 17, 19) The Bible prophet Zephaniah wrote that the city would become “a desolate waste.”—Zephaniah 2:13-15.

Those prophecies of destruction were fulfilled in 632 B.C.E. That is when Nineveh fell to the combined forces of the Babylonians and the Medes, bringing the Assyrian Empire to an inglorious end. A Babylonian chronicle of that event states that the conquerors “carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple” and turned Nineveh “into a ruin heap.” Today the desolate waste that was once Nineveh is marked by mounds of ruins on the east bank of the Tigris River, opposite the city of Mosul, in Iraq.

Assyria’s destruction also contributed to the fulfillment of yet another Bible prophecy. Earlier, in 740 B.C.E., Assyria took the ten-tribe kingdom into exile. About the same time that Assyria did this, God’s prophet Isaiah foretold that Jehovah would “break the Assyrian,” “tread him down,” and bring Israel back to its homeland. Isaiah wrote: “The remnant of his people who will remain over from Assyria . . . , he [God] will collect together.” That is exactly what occurred—about two hundred years later!—Isaiah 11:11, 12; 14:25.

### A Promise You Can Trust

Long before Nineveh’s fall, while her kings still struck terror into the hearts of their enemies, Isaiah foretold the coming of a very different kind of ruler. He wrote: “There has been a child born to us, there has been a son

given to us; and the princely rule will come to be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called . . . Prince of Peace. To the abundance of the princely rule and to peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom in order to establish it firmly and to sustain it by means of justice and by means of righteousness, from now on and to time indefinite. The very zeal of Jehovah of armies will do this.”—Isaiah 9:6, 7.

The rulership of the “Prince of Peace,” Jesus Christ, will embrace the entire earth. Psalm 72:7, 8 says: “In his days the righteous one will sprout, and the abundance of peace until the moon is no more. And he will have subjects from sea to sea and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth.”

Through this mighty “Prince of Peace,” Jehovah God will fulfill the promise at Psalm 46:8, 9: “Come, you people, behold the activities of Jehovah, how he has set astonishing events on the earth. He is making wars to cease to the extremity of the earth. The bow he breaks apart and does cut the spear in pieces; the wagons he burns in the fire.”

As a prelude to the fulfillment of this Bible prophecy, Jehovah’s Witnesses are carrying out a Bible education program that teaches people the ways of peace, as Jesus did. Indeed, not man, but God will fulfill the Bible prophecy recorded at Isaiah 2:4: “They will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore.” In contrast, today the world and its rulers spend a trillion dollars a year on military endeavors!

Accurate history and prophecy put the Bible in a class of its own, demonstrating to those sincerely searching for the truth that it is indeed a book worthy of our trust. In the next article in this series, we will consider ancient Babylon, the capital of the third great empire of Bible history.

## **Earthquakes—“The Deadliest Disasters”**

“Earthquakes caused the deadliest disasters in the past decade,” says the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, based in Geneva, Switzerland. Of those who died because of disasters in this period, almost 60 percent were killed by earthquakes. This “natural hazard” continues to pose a serious risk, given that 8 of the 10 cities with the largest populations worldwide lie on earthquake-prone fault lines. The last ten years have seen more than 780,000 people killed in 3,852 events classified as disasters.

## **Dangerous Occupation**

“A total of 110 journalists were killed because of their work in 2009, making last year the most lethal in the past decade” for this profession, says the International Press Institute, based in Vienna, Austria. In conflict areas, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Somalia, there has been a “deliberate tar-

**The Serbian Ministry of Religious Affairs has accepted the application for registration of the legal entity representing Jehovah’s Witnesses.** According to government records, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been active in the area since at least 1930.

**It is estimated that 95 percent of music downloads worldwide in 2009 were illegal.**—TIME, U.S.A.

geting of journalists” in recent years, says the report. This has led to less press coverage and a “worrying vacuum in the understanding of . . . complex events” in these areas. Iraq was the most dangerous country for journalists over the past decade, followed by the Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, and Russia in that order.

## **Cheap Imports, Fewer Burglaries**

“An influx of cheap electronic goods” might put British burglars out of their jobs, according to a Reuters news report from London, quoting criminology lecturer James Treadwell, of the University of Leicester, England. The low cost of new DVD players, for example, means that those goods have almost zero resale value. They are “simply not worth stealing,” says Treadwell. Price reductions have not put an end to crime, however. On the contrary, thieves are now targeting more expensive and more marketable items, such as mobile phones and iPods, which people carry around with them.’ Former burglars are thus turning to other crimes, such as muggings.



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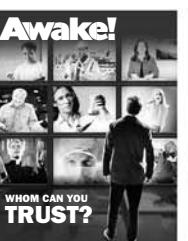
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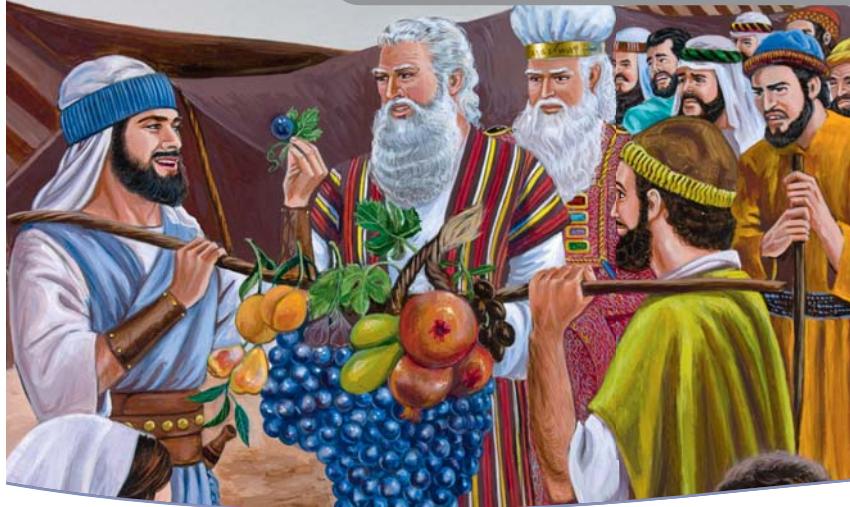
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## WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE APOSTLE PETER?

**4. What are the five different ways that Peter is named in the Bible? CLUE:** Read Matthew 10:2; 16:16; John 1:42; Acts 15:14.

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**5. Did Peter ever marry? CLUE:** Read 1 Corinthians 9:5.

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### FOR DISCUSSION:

Describe an account involving Peter that you enjoy. What qualities that Peter displayed would you like to imitate, and how can you do so?

● Answers on page 13



## CHILDREN'S PICTURE SEARCH

Can you find these pictures in this issue? In your own words, describe what is happening in each picture.

## FROM THIS ISSUE

Answer these questions, and provide the missing Bible verse(s).

**PAGE 7** What should we speak with our neighbors? Ephesians 4:\_\_\_\_\_

**PAGE 8** What will the truth do for you? John 8:\_\_\_\_\_

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# She Learned as They Did

● A mother in her 30's, who lives with her husband and three children in Kentucky, U.S.A., wrote, "My family and I have enjoyed everything we have that was published by Jehovah's Witnesses." She explained: "My favorite for my children is *My Book of Bible Stories*," adding, "I was actually able to learn as they did."



This book is attractively illustrated and covers Biblical events in chronological order. For example: Part 2 includes the stories "A Bad King Rules Egypt," "How Baby Moses Was Saved," "Why Moses Ran Away," "Moses and Aaron See Pharaoh," "The 10 Plagues," and "Crossing the Red Sea."

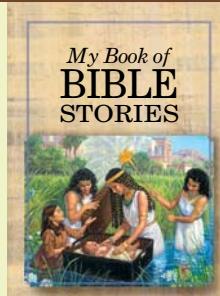
Part 6 of the book, entitled "Birth of Jesus to His Death," has several stories that relate the life of Jesus from his birth to his death. Included are "Jesus Born in a Stable" and "Men Guided by a Star." The latter shows that "wise men"—actually astrologers—came "into the house" to visit Jesus, not to the stable where he was born. In the house they "saw the young child with Mary his mother." These men were warned by God not to return to Herod, who was seeking to kill Jesus. What should that tell us about who was responsible for the so-called star?—Matthew 2:1, 11, 12, King James Version.

You too will learn along with your children as you read *My Book of Bible Stories*. It has 116 stories that feature people and events in the Bible. To obtain a copy, fill in and mail the accompanying coupon to an appropriate address listed on page 5 of this magazine.

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