

JANUARY 15, 2005

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**CAN YOU CONTROL  
YOUR FUTURE?**



# THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

January 15, 2005

Average Printing Each Issue: 26,439,000

Vol. 126, No. 2

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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Publication of *The Watchtower* is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*.

*The Watchtower* (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; M. H. Larson, President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589.

Changes of address should reach us 30 days before your moving date. Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label).

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Semimonthly

ENGLISH

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**NOW PUBLISHED IN 150 LANGUAGES. SEMIMONTHLY:** Afrikaans, Albanian,\* Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bicol, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cebuano,\* Chichewa,\* Chinese, Chinese (Simplified),\* Cibemba,\* Croatian,\* Czech, \*\* Danish,\*\* Dutch,\*\* East Armenian, Efik,\* English\*\* (also Braille), Estonian, Ewe, Fijian, Finnish,\*\* French,\*\* Ga, Georgian, German,\*\* Greek,\* Gujarati, Gun, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hungarian,\*\* Igbo,\* Ilokano,\* Indonesian, Italian,\* Japanese\*\* (also Braille), Kannada, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Korean\*\* (also Braille), Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Lvuale, Macedonian, Malagasy,\* Malayalam, Maltese, Marathi, Myanmar, Nepali, New Guinea Pidgin, Norwegian,\*\* Pangasinan, Papiamento (Aruba), Papiamento (Curaçao), Polish,\*\* Portuguese\*\* (also Braille), Punjabi, Rarotongan, Romanian,\* Russian,\* Samar-Leyte, Samoan, Sango, Sepedi, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona,\* Silozi, Sinhala, Slovak,\* Slovenian, Solomon Islands Pidgin, Spanish,\*\* Sranantongo, Swahili,\* Swedish,\*\* Tagalog,\* Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tigrinya, Tongan, Tshiluba, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian,\* Urdu, Venda, Vietnamese, Wallian, Xhosa, Yoruba,\* Zulu\*

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# WHAT CONTROLS YOUR FUTURE?

"HUMANS can no more be masters of their destiny than any other animal," writes evolutionist John Gray. Author Shmuley Boteach expresses quite the opposite view in his book *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Judaism*. He says: "Man is not an animal, and is therefore always in control of his own destiny."

Many people agree with Gray and believe that blind forces of nature control the destiny of the human family. Others consider man to be a creation of God endowed with the ability to have control over his own future.

Some feel that their future is controlled by powerful human forces. According to writer Roy Weatherford, "the majority of the people in the world—and especially the majority of women in history—have . . . no power or control over their own lives for straightforward reasons of human oppression and exploitation." (*The Implications of Determinism*) Many have seen their dreams of a happy future wrecked by competing political or military powers.

Others throughout history have felt helpless because they thought that supernatural forces controlled their destiny. "The ancient Greeks," says Boteach, "were obsessed with the idea that all hope was futile since man could not overcome predetermined destiny." They felt that the destiny of every person was decided by capricious goddesses. These goddesses,



they believed, decided when a person would die as well as how much distress and pain he would have to endure throughout his life.

The belief that a person's destiny is controlled by a superhuman power is common today. For example, many people believe in Kismet, or fate. They say that God has predetermined the outcome of all human actions and the time of one's death. There is also the doctrine of predestination, which promotes the view that "the ultimate salvation or damnation of each human individual has been ordained beforehand" by Almighty God. Many professed Christians adhere to this teaching.

What do you think? Has your destiny already been fixed by forces completely beyond your control? Or is there some truth in the words of English playwright William Shakespeare, who wrote: "Men at some time are masters of their fates"? Consider what the Bible says on this matter.

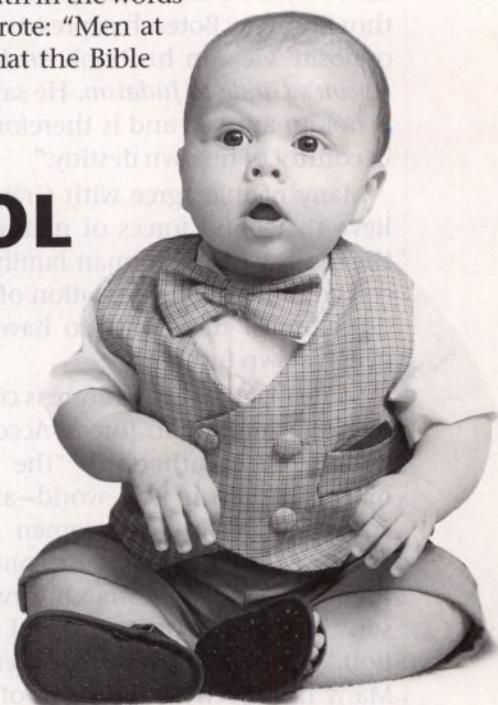
## CAN YOU CONTROL YOUR DESTINY?

IS OUR ultimate destiny predetermined? Do the choices we make in life have no effect on our future?

Suppose man is master of his own fate. In this case, could any individual be foreordained to perform a specific task or occupy a certain office? And how could God accomplish his will for the earth if humans were free to shape their own destiny? The Bible provides satisfying answers to these questions.

### Predestination and Free Will —Reconcilable?

Consider how Jehovah God made us. "In God's image he created [man]; male and female he created them," states the Bible. (Genesis 1:27) Made in God's likeness, we have the ability to reflect his qualities, such as love, justice, wisdom, and power. God has also given us the gift of free will, or freedom of choice. This makes us unique among his



earthly creation. We can choose whether we will follow God's moral guidance or not. That is why the prophet Moses could say: "I do take the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you today, that I have put life and death before you, the blessing and the malediction; and you must choose life in order that you may keep alive, you and your offspring, by loving Jehovah your God, by listening to his voice and by sticking to him." —Deuteronomy 30:19, 20.

The gift of freedom of choice, though, does not mean absolute freedom. It does not free us from the physical and moral laws that God made for the stability and peace of the universe. These laws were set up for our good, and any violation of them could lead to serious consequences. Just think of what would happen if we chose to ignore the law of gravity and jumped off the roof of a tall building!—Galatians 6:7.

Freedom of choice also binds us with a restraint that creatures lacking such freedom do not have. The writer Corliss Lamont asks: “How can we attribute ethical responsibility to men, and punish them for wrongdoing, if we accept . . . that their choices and actions

not do this, for “God is love,” and “all his ways are justice.” (1 John 4:8; Deuteronomy 32:4) Having given us freedom of choice, he did not at the same time ‘determine from eternity whom he would save and whom he would damn,’ as believers in predestination assert. Freedom of choice precludes predestination.

The Bible clearly shows that the choices we make will alter our destiny. For example, God appeals to wrongdoers, saying: “Turn back, please, every one from his bad way and from the badness of your dealings . . . that I may not cause calamity to you.” (Jeremiah 25:5, 6) This appeal would be pointless if God had already fixed each individual’s destiny.

*Unlike animals, humans are morally responsible for their actions*



Eagle: Foto:  
Cortesía de GREFA

are predetermined?” Of course, we cannot. Instinct-driven animals are not held morally responsible for what they do, nor are computers deemed accountable for the functions they are programmed to perform. Freedom of choice, then, places upon us a heavy responsibility and makes us accountable for our actions.

How unloving and unjust Jehovah God would be if before we were born, he predetermined the course we would take and then held us responsible for our actions! He does

Moreover, God’s Word states: “Repent, therefore, and turn around so as to get your sins blotted out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the person of Jehovah.” (Acts 3:19) Why would Jehovah ask people to repent and turn around if he knew beforehand that they could do absolutely nothing to change their destiny?

The Scriptures speak of some who are invited by God to rule as kings in heaven with Jesus Christ. (Matthew 22:14; Luke 12:32) However, the Bible says that they will lose

that privilege if they do not endure to the end. (Revelation 2:10) Why would God invite them at all if he had already decided that they would not be chosen? Consider also the apostle Paul's words to his fellow believers. He wrote: "If we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left." (Hebrews 10:26) Such a warning would be valueless if God had foreordained their destiny. But has not God foreordained at least some individuals to be rulers with Jesus Christ?

### Foreordained—Individuals or a Group?

"[God] has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in union with Christ," wrote the apostle Paul, "just as he chose us in union with him before the founding of the world . . . For he foreordained us to the adoption through Jesus Christ as sons to himself." (Ephesians 1:3-5) What has God foreordained, and what is the meaning of being selected "before the founding of the world"?

This passage states that God has chosen some descendants of the first man, Adam, to rule with Christ in the heavens. (Romans 8:14-17, 28-30; Revelation 5:9, 10) However, the assumption that Jehovah God foreordained thousands of years before they were born specific individuals to receive this privilege conflicts with the fact that humans are endowed with freedom of choice. What God foreordained was a group, or class of people, not individuals.

To illustrate: Suppose that a government decides to set up a particular agency. It pre-determines the agency's functions, its powers, and its size. The agency finally goes into operation some time after it was set up, and its members issue a statement saying: "The government determined a number of years ago what our job would be. Now we begin

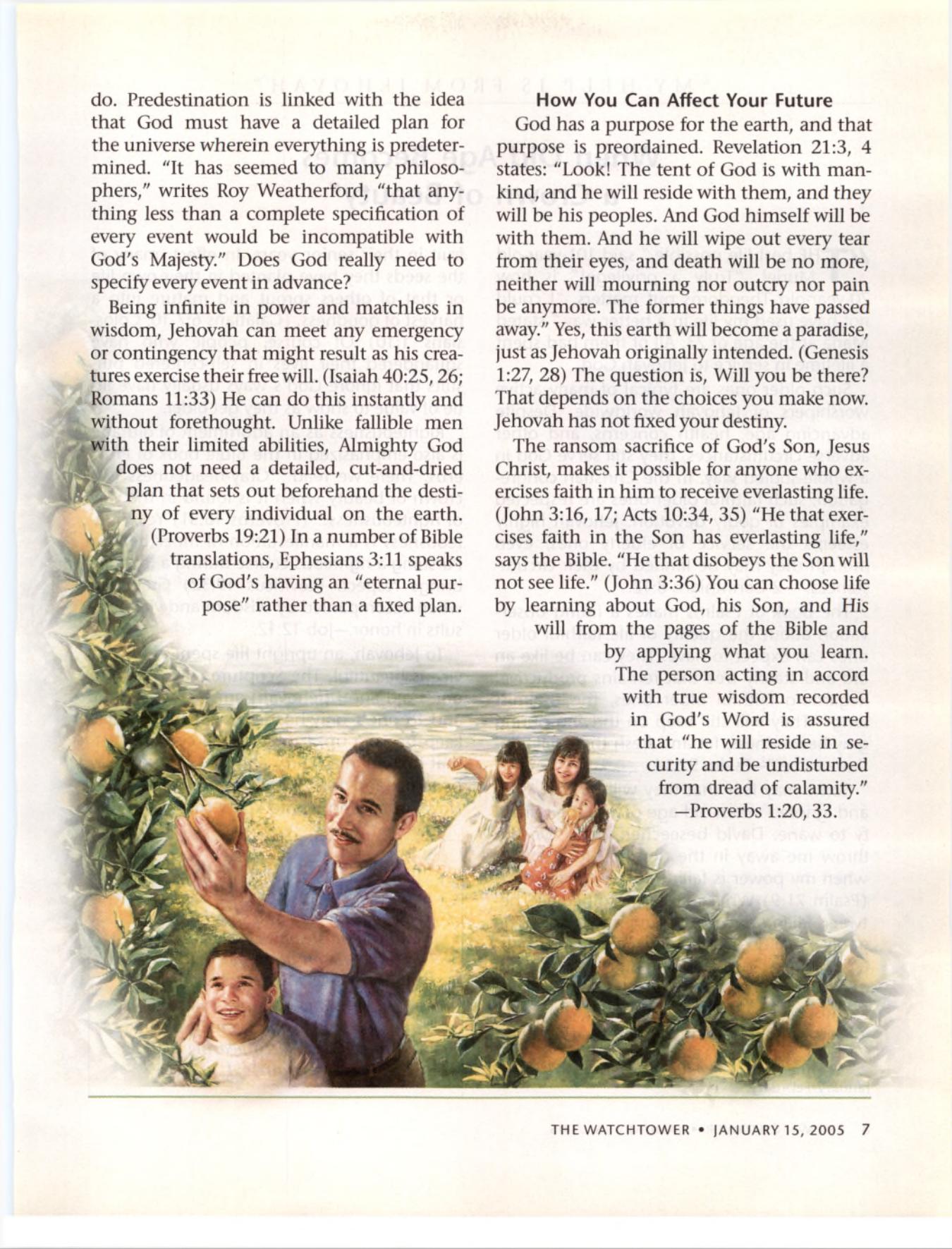
the work assigned to us." Would you conclude that the government must have pre-determined some years earlier who the individual members of that agency would be? Surely not. Similarly, Jehovah predetermined that he would set up a special agency to remedy the effects of Adam's sin. He foreordained the class of people who would serve in that agency—but not the individuals. They would be chosen later, and the choices they would make in life would have a bearing on whether they were finally approved or not.

What world did the apostle Paul have in mind when he said: "[God] chose us in union with him before the founding of the world"? The world that Paul refers to here is not the world that God started when he created Adam and Eve. That world was "very good"—absolutely free from sin and corruption. (Genesis 1:31) It did not need a "release" from sin.—Ephesians 1:7.

The particular world that Paul meant is the one that came into existence after Adam and Eve rebelled in Eden—a world very different from the one originally purposed by God. It was the world that began with the children of Adam and Eve. That world consisted of people alienated from God and enslaved to sin and corruption. It was a world of people who, unlike the willful sinners Adam and Eve, were redeemable.—Romans 5:12; 8:18-21.

Jehovah God was instantly able to meet the situation resulting from the rebellion in Eden. As soon as the need arose, he foreordained a special agency—the Messianic Kingdom in the hands of Jesus Christ—that he would use in connection with the redemption of mankind from Adamic sin. (Matthew 6:10) God did this "before the founding of the world" of redeemable mankind, that is, before rebellious Adam and Eve brought forth children.

Humans usually need a plan of action in order to accomplish what they want to



do. Predestination is linked with the idea that God must have a detailed plan for the universe wherein everything is predetermined. "It has seemed to many philosophers," writes Roy Weatherford, "that anything less than a complete specification of every event would be incompatible with God's Majesty." Does God really need to specify every event in advance?

Being infinite in power and matchless in wisdom, Jehovah can meet any emergency or contingency that might result as his creatures exercise their free will. (Isaiah 40:25, 26; Romans 11:33) He can do this instantly and without forethought. Unlike fallible men with their limited abilities, Almighty God does not need a detailed, cut-and-dried plan that sets out beforehand the destiny of every individual on the earth.

(Proverbs 19:21) In a number of Bible translations, Ephesians 3:11 speaks of God's having an "eternal purpose" rather than a fixed plan.

## How You Can Affect Your Future

God has a purpose for the earth, and that purpose is preordained. Revelation 21:3, 4 states: "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." Yes, this earth will become a paradise, just as Jehovah originally intended. (Genesis 1:27, 28) The question is, Will you be there? That depends on the choices you make now. Jehovah has not fixed your destiny.

The ransom sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus Christ, makes it possible for anyone who exercises faith in him to receive everlasting life. (John 3:16, 17; Acts 10:34, 35) "He that exercises faith in the Son has everlasting life," says the Bible. "He that disobeys the Son will not see life." (John 3:36) You can choose life by learning about God, his Son, and His will from the pages of the Bible and by applying what you learn.

The person acting in accord with true wisdom recorded in God's Word is assured that "he will reside in security and be undisturbed from dread of calamity."

—Proverbs 1:20, 33.

## When Old Age Becomes "a Crown of Beauty"

**T**HE best life possible," said 101-year-old Muriel. "Truly a privilege!" is how 70-year-old Theodoros put matters. "I could not have used my life in a better way," stated Maria at the age of 73. All of them had spent a lifetime in service to Jehovah God.

Such older ones are typical of many active worshipers of Jehovah worldwide. Despite advancing age, health concerns, and other adverse circumstances, they still serve God in a whole-souled way. In the Christian congregation, such faithful older ones are respected examples of godly devotion. Jehovah highly esteems the service of elderly ones, even though they may be limited by their circumstances.\*—2 Corinthians 8:12.

The book of Psalms makes a fitting observation about the quality of life faithful older ones can expect to have. They can be like an old and stately tree that remains productive. Regarding faithful older ones, the psalmist sang: "They will still keep on thriving during gray-headedness, fat and fresh they will continue to be."—Psalm 92:14.

Some may fear that they will be cast aside and ignored when old age causes their vitality to wane. David beseeched God: "Do not throw me away in the time of old age; just when my power is failing, do not leave me." (Psalm 71:9) What makes the difference between failing and flourishing in old age? The godly quality of righteousness. "The righteous himself will blossom forth as a palm tree does," sang the psalmist.—Psalm 92:12.

Those who have filled their lives with faithful service to God tend to keep bearing good

fruit in their senior years. In effect, many of the seeds they have planted in their own life or that of others sprout and mature into a harvest of goodness. (Galatians 6:7-10; Colossians 1:10) Of course, people who have squandered their lives in self-centered pursuits that ignore God's ways usually have little of value to show as they get older.

Righteousness as an adornment of old age is also emphasized in the Bible book of Proverbs. There we read: "Gray-headedness is a crown of beauty when it is found in the way of righteousness." (Proverbs 16:31) Yes, righteousness is a manifestation of inner beauty. Pursuing a righteous course during a long life brings respect. (Leviticus 19:32) Gray hair when accompanied by wisdom and virtue results in honor.—Job 12:12.

To Jehovah, an upright life spent in his service is beautiful. The Scriptures say: "Even to one's old age I [Jehovah] am the same One; and to one's gray-headedness I myself shall keep bearing up. I myself shall certainly act, that I myself may carry and that I myself may bear up and furnish escape." (Isaiah 46:4) How comforting it is to know that our loving

### JEHOVAH CARES FOR HIS OLDER SERVANTS

*"Before gray hair you should rise up, and you must show consideration for the person of an old man."*

—Leviticus 19:32.

*"Even to one's old age I am the same One; and to one's gray-headedness I myself shall keep bearing up."*

—Isaiah 46:4.

\* See the 2005 Calendar of Jehovah's Witnesses, January/February.

***"Gray-headedness is a crown  
of beauty when it is found in the way  
of righteousness."***

—PROVERBS 16:31

heavenly Father promises to sustain and support his loyal ones in their old age!—Psalm 48:14.

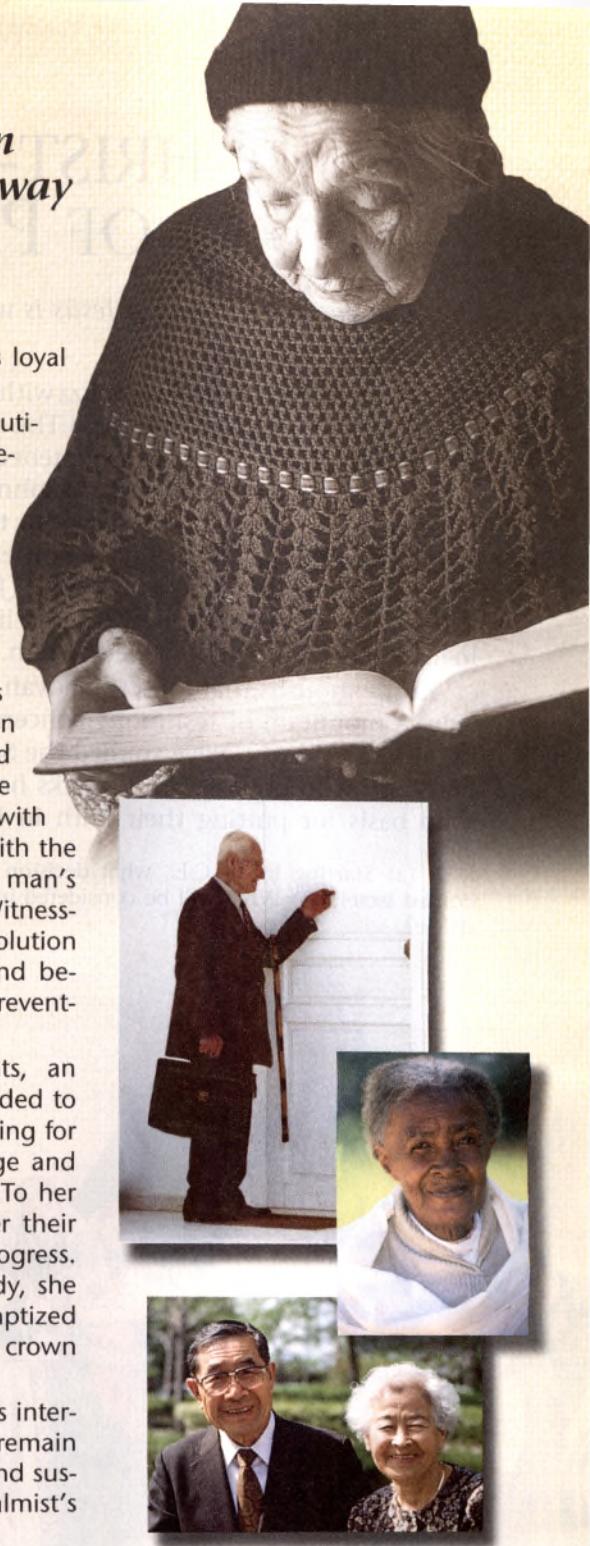
Since a life spent in faithful service to Jehovah is beautiful from his standpoint, does it not also merit the respect of others? Reflecting God's view, we treasure elderly fellow believers. (1 Timothy 5:1, 2) Let us therefore look for practical ways to show Christian love in caring for their needs.

#### Onto the Path of Righteousness Later in Life

"In the path of righteousness there is life," Solomon assures us. (Proverbs 12:28) Advanced age does not prevent someone from getting on this path later in life. In Moldova, for instance, a 99-year-old man had devoted his youth to promoting Communist ideals. He was proud that he had personally had conversations with renowned Communist leaders, such as V. I. Lenin. With the decline and fall of Communism, however, this elderly man's life lost purpose and direction. But when Jehovah's Witnesses showed him that God's Kingdom is the only real solution to mankind's problems, he embraced Bible truth and became an avid student of the Scriptures. Only death prevented him from becoming a baptized servant of Jehovah.

When learning about God's moral requirements, an 81-year-old woman in Hungary realized that she needed to get married to the man with whom she had been living for several years. The woman summoned all her courage and explained her Bible-based viewpoint to her partner. To her great surprise and joy, he agreed to marry her. After their union was legalized, she made rapid spiritual progress. Within eight months after the start of her Bible study, she became an unbaptized publisher, and she was baptized soon thereafter. How true it is that righteousness can crown older ones with real beauty!

Yes, faithful older Christians can be certain of God's interest in them. Jehovah will not abandon those who remain loyal to him. Rather, he promises to guide, support, and sustain them even into old age. And they attest to the psalmist's words: "My help is from Jehovah."—Psalm 121:2.



# CHRIST—THE FOCUS OF PROPHECY

*"The bearing witness to Jesus is what inspires prophesying."*—REVELATION 19:10.

THE year is 29 C.E. Israel is abuzz with talk about the promised Messiah. The ministry of John the Baptizer has heightened the sense of expectation. (Luke 3:15) John denies being the Christ. Instead, pointing to Jesus of Nazareth, he says: "I have borne witness that this one is the Son of God." (John 1:20, 34) Soon, crowds follow Jesus to listen to his teaching and to be healed by him.

2 In the months that follow, Jehovah provides a mountain of testimony concerning his Son. Those who have studied the Scriptures and who observe Jesus' works have a solid basis for putting their faith in him.

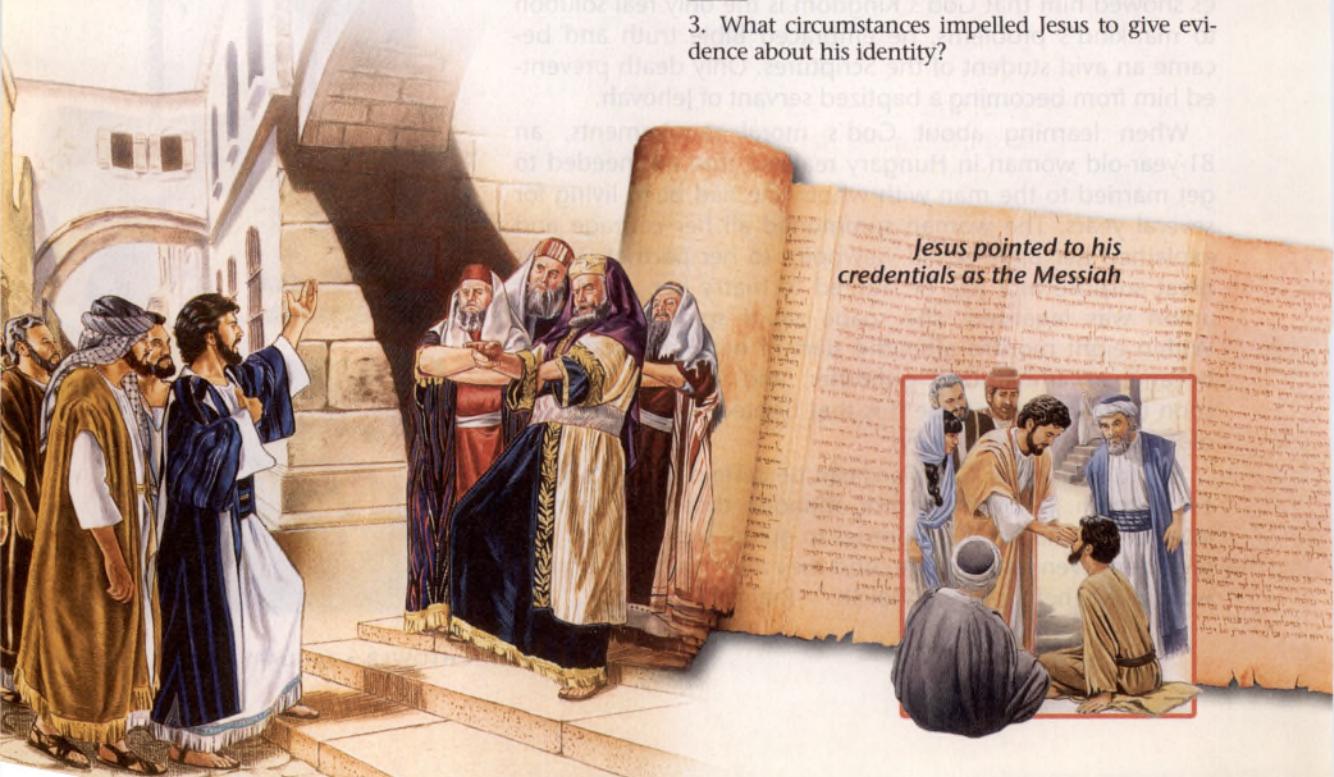
1, 2. (a) Starting in 29 C.E., what decision confronted Israel? (b) What will be considered in this article?

However, God's covenant people in general show a lack of faith. Relatively few acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. (John 6:60-69) What would you have done if you had lived back then? Would you have been moved to accept Jesus as the Messiah and become his faithful follower? Consider the evidence about his identity that Jesus himself gives when he is accused of breaking the Sabbath, and note subsequent proofs that he gives in order to strengthen the faith of his loyal disciples.

## Jesus Himself Gives the Evidence

3 It is Passover time in 31 C.E. Jesus is in Jerusalem. He has just cured a man who had been sick for 38 years. The Jews, though, per-

3. What circumstances impelled Jesus to give evidence about his identity?



secute Jesus for doing this on the Sabbath. They also accuse him of blasphemy and seek to kill him because he calls God his Father. (John 5:1-9, 16-18) The defense that Jesus gives in his own behalf presents three powerful lines of reasoning that would convince any honesthearted Jew of Jesus' true identity.

<sup>4</sup> First, Jesus points to the witness of his forerunner, John the Baptizer, saying: "You have dispatched men to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. That man was a burning and shining lamp, and you for a short time were willing to rejoice greatly in his light."—John 5:33, 35.

<sup>5</sup> John the Baptizer was "a burning and shining lamp" in that prior to his unjust imprisonment by Herod, he had fulfilled his divine commission to prepare the way for the Messiah. John said: "The reason why I came baptizing in water was that [the Messiah] might be made manifest to Israel. . . . I viewed the spirit coming down as a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. Even I did not know him, but the very One who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'Whoever it is upon whom you see the spirit coming down and remaining, this is the one that baptizes in holy spirit.' And I have seen it, and I have borne witness that this one is the Son of God."\* (John 1:26-37) John specifically identified Jesus as the Son of God—the promised Messiah. So clear was John's witness that some eight months after his death, many honesthearted Jews confessed: "As many things as John said about this man were all true."—John 10:41, 42.

\* Evidently, at Jesus' baptism, only John heard God's voice. The Jews whom Jesus is addressing "have neither heard [God's] voice at any time nor seen his figure."—John 5:37.

4, 5. What was the purpose of John's ministry, and how well did he accomplish it?

<sup>6</sup> Next, Jesus uses another line of reasoning to confirm his credentials as the Messiah. He points to his own fine works as evidence of God's backing. "I have the witness greater than that of John," he says, "for the very works that my Father assigned me to accomplish, the works themselves that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father dispatched me." (John 5:36) Even Jesus' enemies could not deny this evidence, which included numerous miracles. "What are we to do, because this man performs many signs?" certain ones later ask. (John 11:47) Some, though, respond favorably and say: "When the Christ arrives, he will not perform more signs than this man has performed, will he?" (John 7:31) Jesus' listeners were in an excellent position to discern the Father's qualities in the Son.—John 14:9.

<sup>7</sup> Finally, Jesus draws attention to an unassailable witness. "The Scriptures . . . are the very ones that bear witness about me," he says, adding: "If you believed Moses you would believe me, for that one wrote about me." (John 5:39, 46) Of course, Moses was just one of the many pre-Christian witnesses who wrote about the Christ. Their writings include hundreds of prophecies and detailed genealogies, all pointing to the Messiah. (Luke 3:23-38; 24:44-46; Acts 10:43) And what about the Mosaic Law? "The Law has become our tutor leading to Christ," wrote the apostle Paul. (Galatians 3:24) Yes, "the bearing witness to Jesus is what inspires [or, is the whole inclination, intent, and purpose of] prophesying."—Revelation 19:10.

<sup>8</sup> Would not all this evidence—John's explicit witness, Jesus' own powerful works

6. Why should Jesus' works have convinced people that he had God's backing?
7. How do the Hebrew Scriptures bear witness about Jesus?
8. Why did many Jews not put faith in the Messiah?

*The transfiguration vision  
was faith strengthening*

and godly qualities, and the monumental testimony of the Scriptures—convince you that Jesus was the Messiah? Anyone who had genuine love for God and for his Word would readily see this and exercise faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. Such love, though, was basically lacking in Israel. To his opposers, Jesus said: “I well know that you do not have the love of God in you.” (John 5:42) Rather than “seeking the glory that is from the only God,” they were “accepting glory from one another.” No wonder they were at odds with Jesus, who like his Father abhors such thinking!—John 5:43, 44; Acts 12:21-23.

### **Fortified by a Prophetic Vision**

<sup>9</sup> Over a year has gone by since Jesus gave the aforementioned proof of his Messiahship. The Passover of the year 32 C.E. has come and gone. Many who believed have ceased following him, perhaps because of persecution, materialism, or the anxieties of life. Others may be confused or disappointed because Jesus rejected the people’s efforts to make him king. When challenged by the Jewish religious leaders, he refused to provide a self-glorifying sign from heaven. (Matthew 12:38, 39) This refusal may have puzzled some. Furthermore, Jesus has begun to reveal to his disciples something they find very difficult to grasp—“he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the older men and chief priests and scribes, and be killed.”—Matthew 16:21-23.

<sup>10</sup> In another nine to ten months, it would be time “for [Jesus] to move out of this world to the Father.” (John 13:1) Deeply con-

9, 10. (a) Why was the timing of a sign for Jesus’ disciples providential? (b) What remarkable promise did Jesus make to his disciples?



cerned about his loyal disciples, Jesus promises some of them the very thing he denied the faithless Jews—a sign from heaven. “Truly I say to you,” Jesus says, “there are some of those standing here that will not taste death at all until first they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28) Obviously, Jesus is not saying that certain ones of his disciples will live until the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in 1914. Jesus has in mind giving three of his intimate disciples a spectacular foregleam of his glory in Kingdom power. This visionary preview is called the transfiguration.

<sup>11</sup> Six days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up into a lofty mountain—likely a ridge of Mount Hermon. There, Jesus is “transfigured before them, and his face shone as the sun, and his outer garments became brilliant as the light.” The prophets Moses and Elijah also appear, conversing with Jesus. This awesome event possibly takes place at night, making it especially vivid. In fact, it is so real that Peter offers to erect three tents—one each for Jesus, Moses, and

11. Describe the transfiguration vision.

Elijah. While Peter is still speaking, a bright cloud overshadows them and a voice out of the cloud says: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him."—Matthew 17:1-6.

<sup>12</sup> True, Peter had recently testified that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16) But imagine hearing God himself give his testimony, confirming the identity and the role of his anointed Son! What a faith-strengthening experience the transfiguration vision is for Peter, James, and John! With their faith thus greatly fortified, they are now better prepared for what lies ahead and for the important role they will play in the future congregation.

<sup>13</sup> The transfiguration makes a lasting impression on the disciples. Over 30 years later, Peter writes: "[Jesus] received from God the Father honor and glory, when words such as these were borne to him by the magnificent glory: 'This is my son, my beloved, whom I myself have approved.' Yes, these words we heard borne from heaven while we were with him in the holy mountain." (2 Peter 1: 17, 18) John is equally moved by the event. More than 60 years after it occurred, he apparently alludes to it with the words: "We had a view of his glory, a glory such as belongs to an only-begotten son from a father." (John 1:14) Yet, the transfiguration is not to be the last of the visions granted to Jesus' followers.

### Further Enlightenment for God's Loyal Ones

<sup>14</sup> After his resurrection, Jesus appears to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. There he tells Peter: "If it is my will for [John] to re-

12, 13. What impact did the transfiguration vision have on Jesus' disciples, and why?

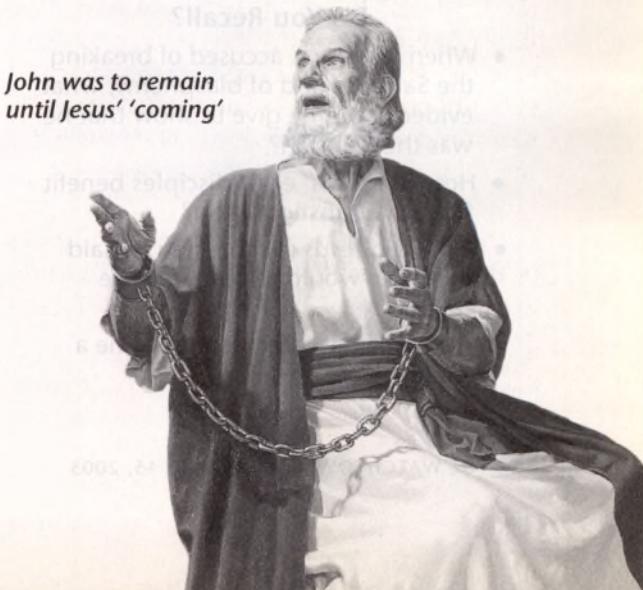
14, 15. In what way was the apostle John to remain until Jesus came?

main until I come, of what concern is that to you?" (John 21:1, 20-22, 24) Do these words indicate that the apostle John would outlive the other apostles? Apparently so, for he serves Jehovah faithfully for almost another 70 years. However, there is more to Jesus' statement.

<sup>15</sup> The expression "until I come" reminds us of Jesus' reference to "the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:28) John remains until Jesus comes in that John is later given a prophetic vision of Jesus coming in Kingdom power. Near the end of John's life, while in exile on the isle of Patmos, he receives the Revelation with all its amazing prophetic signs of events that are to occur during "the Lord's day." John is so deeply moved by these spectacular visions that when Jesus says: "Yes; I am coming quickly," John exclaims: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus."—Revelation 1:1, 10; 22:20.

<sup>16</sup> Honesthearted ones living in the first century accept Jesus as the Messiah and put faith in him. In view of the prevailing lack of faith around them, the work that they have to do, and the tests that lie ahead, those who become believers need

16. Why is it important that we continue to strengthen our faith?



to be strengthened. Jesus has given ample proof of his Messiahship and has provided enlightening prophetic visions for the encouragement of his loyal followers. Today, we are well along in "the Lord's day." Soon, Christ will destroy Satan's entire wicked system of things and deliver God's people. We too must strengthen our faith by taking full advantage of all of Jehovah's provisions for our spiritual welfare.

### Preserved Through Darkness and Tribulation

<sup>17</sup> After Jesus' death, the disciples courageously obey his command to bear witness to him "both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Despite waves of persecution, Jehovah blesses the fledgling Christian congregation with spiritual enlightenment and with many new disciples.—Acts 2:47; 4:1-31; 8:1-8.

<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the prospects of those who oppose the good news grow progressively gloomier. "The way of the wicked

17, 18. What sharp contrast existed in the first century between Jesus' followers and those who opposed God's purpose, and how did things turn out for each group?

### Do You Recall?

- When Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath and of blasphemy, what evidence did he give to show that he was the Messiah?
- How did Jesus' early disciples benefit from the transfiguration?
- What did Jesus mean when he said that John would remain until he came?
- In 1914, what foregleam became a reality?

ones is like the gloom," states Proverbs 4:19. "They have not known at what they keep stumbling." "The gloom" intensifies in 66 C.E. when Roman forces besiege Jerusalem. After making a temporary withdrawal for no apparent reason, the Romans return in 70 C.E., this time razing the city. According to Jewish historian Josephus, over a million Jews perish. Faithful Christians, however, escape. Why? Because when the first siege is lifted, they obey Jesus' command to flee.—Luke 21:20-22.

<sup>19</sup> Our situation is similar. The upcoming great tribulation will spell the end of Satan's entire wicked system. But God's people need not fear, for Jesus promised: "Look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 28:20) To build up the faith of his early disciples and to prepare them for what lay ahead, Jesus gave them a foregleam of his heavenly glory as Messianic King. What about today? In 1914 that foregleam became a reality. And what a faith-strengthening reality it has been to God's people! It holds promise of a wonderful future, and Jehovah's servants have been granted progressive insight into that reality. In the midst of today's darkening world, "the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established."—Proverbs 4:18.

<sup>20</sup> Even before 1914, a small band of anointed Christians began to grasp important truths about the Lord's return. For instance, they discerned that it would be invisible, as implied by the two angels who appeared in 33 C.E. to the disciples while Jesus was ascending to heaven. After a cloud

19, 20. (a) Why do God's people have no reason to be fearful as the present system nears its end? (b) What remarkable insight did Jehovah give to his people in the decades leading up to 1914?

caught Jesus up from the disciples' vision, the angels said: "This Jesus who was received up from you into the sky will come thus *in the same manner* as you have beheld him going into the sky."—Acts 1:9-11.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus' departure was observed only by his loyal followers. As with the transfiguration, there was no public display; the world

21. What will be discussed in the following article?

in general was not even aware of what had occurred. The same would be true when Christ returned in Kingdom power. (John 14:19) Only his faithful anointed disciples would discern his royal presence. In the next article, we will see how that insight would have a profound effect on them, culminating in the gathering of millions who would become Jesus' earthly subjects.—Revelation 7:9, 14.

## FOREGLEAMS OF GOD'S KINGDOM BECOME A REALITY

*"You are doing well in paying attention to [the prophetic word] as to a lamp shining in a dark place."*—2 PETER 1:19.

**C**RISIS after crisis—that is a major theme of today's world. From ecological disasters to global terrorism, mankind's problems seem to be raging out of control. Even the world's religions have not been able to help. In fact, they often make matters worse by inflaming the bigotry, hatred, and nationalism that divide people. Yes, as foretold, "thick gloom" has enveloped "the national groups." (Isaiah 60:2) At the same time, however, millions look to the future with confidence. Why? Because they pay attention to God's prophetic word "as to a lamp shining in a dark place." They allow God's "word," or message, now found in the Bible, to guide their steps.—2 Peter 1:19.

<sup>2</sup> Concerning "the time of the end," the prophet Daniel wrote: "Many will rove about, and the true knowledge will be

come abundant. Many will cleanse themselves and whiten themselves and will be refined. And the wicked ones will certainly act wickedly, and no wicked ones at all will understand; but the ones having insight will understand." (Daniel 12:4, 10) Spiritual insight is reserved only for those who sincerely "rove about" in, or diligently study, God's Word, submit to his standards, and strive to do his will.—Matthew 13:11-15; 1 John 5:20.

<sup>3</sup> As early as the 1870's, before "the last days" commenced, Jehovah God began to shed more light on "the sacred secrets of the kingdom of the heavens." (2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 13:11) At that time a group of Bible students discerned—contrary to popular opinion—that Christ's return was to be invisible. After being enthroned in heaven, Jesus would return in the sense of focusing his royal attention on the earth. A visible,

3. During the 1870's, what important truth did early Bible students discern?

1. What contrast do we find in the world today?
2. According to Daniel's prophecy about "the time of the end," who only are granted spiritual insight?

composite sign would alert his disciples that his invisible presence had begun.—Matthew 24:3-14.

### When a Foregleam Becomes a Reality

<sup>4</sup> The transfiguration vision was a brilliant foregleam of Christ in Kingdom glory. (Matthew 17:1-9) That vision strengthened the faith of Peter, James, and John at a time when many had left off following Jesus because he had not fulfilled their unscriptural expectations. Likewise, in this time of the end, Jehovah has strengthened the faith of his modern-day servants by shedding increased light on the fulfillment of that awesome vision and many related prophecies. Let us now consider some of these faith-strengthening spiritual realities.

<sup>5</sup> Referring to the transfiguration, the apostle Peter wrote: “Consequently we have the prophetic word made more sure; and you are doing well in paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and a daystar rises, in your hearts.” (2 Peter 1:19) That figurative Daystar, or “bright morning star,” is the glorified Jesus Christ. (Revelation 22:16) He ‘rose’ in 1914 when God’s Kingdom was born in heaven, marking the dawn of a new era. (Revelation 11:15) In the transfiguration vision, Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Jesus, conversing with him. Whom do they foreshadow?

<sup>6</sup> Since Moses and Elijah shared in Christ’s glory, these two faithful witnesses must represent those who rule with Jesus in his Kingdom. The understanding that Jesus has corulers is in harmony with a visionary

4. How has Jehovah strengthened the faith of his modern-day servants?

5. Who proved to be the Daystar, and when and how did he ‘rise’?

6, 7. Who are represented by Moses and Elijah in the transfiguration, and what important details do the Scriptures reveal about those represented by them?



foregleam of the enthroned Messiah that the prophet Daniel was granted. Daniel saw “someone like a son of man” receiving “an indefinitely lasting rulership” from “the Ancient of Days,” Jehovah God. But note what Daniel is shown shortly thereafter. He writes: “The kingdom and the rulership and the grandeur of the kingdoms under all the heavens were given to the people who are the holy ones of the Supreme One.” (Daniel 7:13, 14, 27) Yes, more than five centuries before the transfiguration, God revealed that certain “holy ones” would share in Christ’s royal grandeur.

<sup>7</sup> Who are the holy ones in Daniel’s vision? It is with reference to such individuals that the apostle Paul says: “The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are God’s children. If, then, we are children, we are also heirs: heirs indeed of God, but joint heirs with Christ, provided we suffer together that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16, 17) The holy ones are none other than Jesus’ spirit-anointed disciples. In the Revelation, Jesus says: “To the one that conquers I will grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Numbering 144,000, these resurrected ‘conquerors,’ along with Jesus, will rule over the entire earth.—Revelation 3:21; 5:9, 10; 14:1, 3, 4; 1 Corinthians 15:53.

<sup>8</sup> Why, though, are anointed Christians represented by Moses and Elijah? The reason

8. How have Jesus’ anointed disciples served in the capacity of Moses and Elijah, and with what results?



*A foregleam becomes a reality*



is that such Christians, while still in the flesh, do a work similar to that performed by Moses and Elijah. For example, they serve as Jehovah's witnesses, even in the face of persecution. (Isaiah 43:10; Acts 8:1-8; Revelation 11:2-12) Like Moses and Elijah, they courageously expose false religion while exhorting sincere people to give God exclusive devotion. (Exodus 32:19, 20; Deuteronomy 4:22-24; 1 Kings 18:18-40) Has their work borne fruit? Absolutely! Besides helping to gather the full complement of anointed ones, they have helped millions of "other sheep" to show willing submission to Jesus Christ. —John 10:16; Revelation 7:4.

### Christ Completes His Conquest

No longer a mere human mounted on the colt of an ass, Jesus is now a powerful King. He is portrayed as riding on a horse—a Biblical symbol of warfare. (Proverbs 21:31) "Look! a white horse," says Revelation 6:2, "and the one seated upon it had a bow; and a crown was given him, and he went forth conquering and to complete his conquest."

9. How does Revelation 6:2 portray Jesus as he is today?

Moreover, concerning Jesus, the psalmist David wrote: "The rod of your strength Jehovah will send out of Zion, saying: 'Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.'"—Psalm 110:2.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus' first victory was over his most powerful foes—Satan and the demons. Expelling them from heaven, he hurled them down to the earth. Knowing that their time is short, these wicked spirits have vented their violent anger on mankind, causing great woe. This woe is symbolized in Revelation by the ride of three more horsemen. (Revelation 6:3-8; 12:7-12) In line with Jesus' prophecy concerning "the sign of [his] presence and of the conclusion of the system of things," their ride has resulted in warfare, famine, and deadly plague. (Matthew 24:3, 7; Luke 21:7-11) Like literal birth pangs, these "pangs of distress" will no doubt continue to intensify until Christ 'completes his conquest' by destroying every vestige of Satan's visible organization.\*—Matthew 24:8.

\* In the original Greek, the word rendered "pangs of distress" literally means "pangs of birth." (Matthew 24:8, *Kingdom Interlinear*) This suggests that like birth pangs, the world's problems will increase in frequency, intensity, and duration, climaxing in the great tribulation.

10. (a) How did Jesus' ride of conquest get off to a glorious start? (b) How did Christ's first victory affect the world in general?



*Do you know  
what happened  
when Christ began  
his conquest?*

<sup>11</sup> Jesus' royal authority is also evident in that he has preserved the Christian congregation so that it can fulfill its commission to preach the Kingdom message worldwide. Despite brutal opposition from Babylon the Great—the world empire of false religion—and from hostile governments, the preaching work not only has continued but has attained a scale unprecedented in the history of the world. (Revelation 17:5, 6) What a powerful testimony to Christ's kingship!—Psalm 110:3.

<sup>12</sup> Sadly, though, most people, including millions of professed Christians, fail to discern the invisible realities behind the momentous events occurring on earth. They even ridicule those who announce God's Kingdom. (2 Peter 3:3, 4) Why? Because Satan has blinded their minds. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4) In fact, he began to cast the veil of spiritual darkness over professed Christians

many centuries ago, even causing them to abandon the precious Kingdom hope.

### The Kingdom Hope Abandoned

<sup>13</sup> Jesus foretold that apostates, like weeds sown among wheat, would infiltrate the Christian congregation and lead many astray. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Acts 20:29-31; Jude 4) In time, these so-called Christians adopted pagan festivals, practices, and teachings, even labeling them "Christian." For example, Christmas has its origin in rites involving the worship of the pagan deities Mithra and Saturn. But what induced professed Christians to adopt these unchristian celebrations? Says *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* (1974): "Christmas, the festival of the birth of Jesus Christ, was established in connection with a fading of the expectation of Christ's imminent return."

<sup>14</sup> Consider also the distortion of the

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11. How does the history of the Christian congregation testify to Christ's royal authority?
  12. Why do most people not discern Christ's invisible presence?

13. To what did the veil of spiritual darkness lead?
14. How did the teachings of Origen and Augustine misrepresent Kingdom truth?

meaning of the word "kingdom." The book *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation* states: "Origen [a third-century theologian] marks the change in Christian usage of 'kingdom' to the interior meaning of the rule of God in the heart." On what did Origen base his teaching? Not on the Scriptures, but on "the framework of a philosophy and world view quite different from the thought world of Jesus and the earliest church." In his work *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God), Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.) stated that the church itself is the Kingdom of God. Such unscriptural thinking gave the churches of Christendom theological grounds to embrace political power. And they wielded such power for many centuries, often with brutality.—Revelation 17:5, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Today, though, the churches are reaping what they have sown. (Galatians 6:7) Many seem to be losing their power as well as their parishioners. Such a trend is quite noticeable in Europe. According to the journal *Christianity Today*, "now the great cathedrals of Europe [serve] not as houses of worship but as museums, empty of all but tourists." The same trend can be observed in other parts of the world. What does this bode for false religion? Will it just die from a lack of support? And how will true worship be affected?

### Be Prepared for God's Great Day

<sup>16</sup> Just as smoke and ash spewing from a previously dormant volcano may portend an imminent eruption, the simmering hostility toward religion in many parts of the world is an indication that the days of false religion are numbered. Soon, Je-

15. How has Galatians 6:7 been fulfilled in regard to many of the churches of Christendom?

16. Why is the growing ill will toward Babylon the Great significant?

hovah will move the world's political elements to unite in efforts to expose and devastate the spiritual harlot Babylon the Great. (Revelation 17:15-17; 18:21) Should true Christians fear that event and the other aspects of the "great tribulation" that will follow? (Matthew 24:21) Not at all! They will actually have reasons to rejoice when God acts against the wicked. (Revelation 18:20; 19:1, 2) Consider the example of first-century Jerusalem and the Christians who lived there.

<sup>17</sup> When Roman forces besieged Jerusalem in 66 C.E., spiritually alert Christians were neither shocked nor terrified. Being good students of God's Word, they knew 'that the desolating of her had drawn near.' (Luke 21:20) They also knew that God would open the way for them to flee to safety. When that happened, Christians fled. (Daniel 9:26; Matthew 24:15-19; Luke 21:21) Likewise today, those who know God and who obey his Son can face this system's end with confidence. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9) In fact, when the great tribulation strikes, they will joyfully 'raise themselves erect and lift their heads up, because they know their deliverance is near.'—Luke 21:28.

<sup>18</sup> After the destruction of Babylon the Great, in his role as Gog of Magog, Satan will launch an all-out attack against Jehovah's peaceful Witnesses. Coming up "like clouds to cover the land," Gog's hordes will expect an easy victory. What a shock awaits them! (Ezekiel 38:14-16, 18-23) The apostle John writes: "I saw the heaven opened, and, look! a white horse. And the one seated upon it is called Faithful and True . . . Out of his mouth there protrudes a sharp long sword, that he may strike the nations with

17. Why can Jehovah's faithful servants face this system's end with confidence?

18. What will be the result of Gog's all-out assault on Jehovah's servants?

it." This invincible "King of kings" will rescue Jehovah's loyal worshipers and annihilate all their enemies. (Revelation 19:11-21) What a culmination that will be of the fulfillment of the transfiguration vision!

<sup>19</sup> Jesus will be "regarded in that day with wonder in connection with all those who exercised faith." (2 Thessalonians 1:10) Do you want to be among those who will stand in awe of the victorious Son of God? Then continue to nourish your faith and to 'prove yourself ready, because at an hour that you do not think to be it, the Son of man is coming.'—Matthew 24:43, 44.

### Keep Your Senses

<sup>20</sup> "The faithful and discreet slave" regularly exhorts God's people to stay spiritually vigilant and to keep their senses. (Matthew 24:45, 46; 1 Thessalonians 5:6) Do you appreciate these timely reminders? Do you use them in setting priorities in life? Why not ask yourself: 'Do I have clear spiritual vision that enables me to see the Son of God ruling in heaven? Do I see him poised to execute divine judgment against Babylon the Great and the rest of Satan's system?'

<sup>21</sup> Some now associated with Jehovah's people have allowed their spiritual vision to grow dim. Could it be that they lack patience or endurance, as did some of Jesus' early disciples? Have anxieties of life, materialism, or persecution affected them? (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23; Luke 21:34-36) Perhaps some have found certain information published by "the faithful and discreet slave" hard to grasp. If any of this has happened to you, we

19. How will Christ's total victory affect his loyal disciples, and what should they strive to do now?
20. (a) How can we show our appreciation for God's provision of "the faithful and discreet slave"? (b) What questions should we ask ourselves?
21. Why may some have allowed their spiritual vision to grow dim, and what is it urgent that they do?



urge you to study God's Word with renewed zeal and to supplicate Jehovah so that you may regain a strong, close relationship with him.—2 Peter 3:11-15.

<sup>22</sup> The transfiguration vision was given to Jesus' disciples when they needed encouragement. Today, we have something far greater to strengthen us—the fulfillment of that spectacular foregleam and many related prophecies. As we contemplate these glorious realities and their future significance, may we too express with all our heart the sentiments of the apostle John when he said: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus."—Revelation 22:20.

22. How has consideration of the transfiguration vision and related prophecies affected you?

### Do You Recall?

- In the 1870's, what did a small group of Bible students come to understand about Christ's return?
- How has the transfiguration vision been fulfilled?
- What effect does Jesus' ride of conquest have on the world and on the Christian congregation?
- What must we do to be among those who will survive when Jesus completes his conquest?

# "Be Hospitable to One Another"

**P**HOEIBE, a first-century Christian, had a problem. She was journeying from Cenchreae, in Greece, to Rome, but she was unacquainted with fellow believers in that city. (Romans 16:1, 2) "The Roman world [of those days] was a bad and brutal world," says Bible translator Edgar Goodspeed, "and inns were notoriously likely to be no places for a decent woman, particularly a Christian woman." So where was Phoebe to lodge?

People traveled extensively in Bible times. Jesus Christ and his disciples did so to preach the good news throughout Judea and Galilee. Soon thereafter, Christian missionaries like Paul were taking the message to various parts of the Mediterranean basin, including Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. When first-century Christians traveled, whether inside or outside Jewish territory, where did they stay? In finding accommodations, what difficulties did they face? What can we learn from them about extending hospitality?

## "Today I Must Stay in Your House"

Hospitality is defined as the "generous and cordial reception of guests," and it has

long been a characteristic of Jehovah's true worshippers. For instance, Abraham, Lot, and Rebekah practiced it. (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 24:17-20) Recounting his attitude toward strangers, the patri-



arch Job stated: "Outside no alien resident would spend the night; my doors I kept open to the path."—Job 31:32.

For travelers to receive hospitable treatment from their fellow Israelites, it was often sufficient to sit down in the public square of a city and await an invitation. (Judges 19:15-21) Hosts usually washed their guests' feet and offered the visitors food and drink, also providing fodder for their animals. (Genesis 18:4, 5; 19:2; 24:32, 33) Travelers who did not wish to be a burden on their hosts carried with them the needed provisions—bread and wine for themselves and straw and fodder for their asses. They required only shelter for the night.

While the Bible rarely specifies how Jesus found lodging during his preaching tours, he and his disciples had to sleep somewhere. (Luke 9:58) When visiting Jericho, Jesus simply told Zacchaeus: "Today I must stay in your house." Zacchaeus received his guest "with rejoicing." (Luke 19:5, 6) Jesus was often the guest of his friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in Bethany. (Luke 10:38; John 11:1, 5, 18) And it seems that in Capernaum,



Jesus stayed with Simon Peter.—Mark 1:21, 29-35.

Jesus' ministerial instruction to his 12 apostles reveals much about what kind of reception they could expect in Israel. Jesus told them: "Do not procure gold or silver or copper for your girdle purses, or a food pouch for the trip, or two undergarments, or sandals or a staff; for the worker deserves his food. Into whatever city or village you enter, search out who in it is deserving, and stay there until you leave." (Matthew 10:9-11) He knew that righthearted individuals would take his disciples in, providing them with food, shelter, and other necessities.

The time was coming, however, when evangelizers on the move would have to provide for themselves and cover their own expenses. In view of future hostility toward his followers and the expansion of the preaching work into territories outside Israel, Jesus said: "Let the one that has a purse take it up, likewise also a food pouch." (Luke 22:36) Travel and lodging would be indispensable to the spreading of the good news.

### "Follow the Course of Hospitality"

Relative peace and a great network of paved roads throughout the Roman Empire in the first century resulted in a highly mobile society.\* An abundance of travelers generated a great demand for lodging. That demand was met by inns a day's journey apart along the main highways. However, *The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting* states: "What is known of such facilities in the literature presents a rather unhappy picture. The available literary and archaeological sources generally witness to dilapidated and unclean facilities, virtually non-existent furnishings, bed-bugs, poor quality food and drink, untrustworthy pro-

\* It is estimated that by the year 100 C.E., there were some 50,000 miles of paved Roman roads.

prietors and staff, shady clientele, and generally loose morals." Understandably, a morally upright traveler would avoid staying at such inns whenever possible.

Not surprisingly, then, the Scriptures repeatedly exhort Christians to extend hospitality to others. Paul urged Christians in Rome: "Share with the holy ones according to their needs. Follow the course of hospitality." (Romans 12:13) He reminded the Jewish Christians: "Do not forget hospitality, for through it some, unknown to themselves, entertained angels." (Hebrews 13:2) Peter exhorted his fellow worshipers to "be hospitable to one another without grumbling." —1 Peter 4:9.

Situations did exist, however, in which extending hospitality would be inappropriate. Regarding "everyone that pushes ahead and does not remain in the teaching of the Christ," the apostle John said: "Never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works." (2 John 9-11) Concerning unrepentant sinners, Paul wrote: "Quit mixing in company with anyone called a brother that is a fornicator or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man."—1 Corinthians 5:11.

Impostors and others must have tried to exploit the good nature of true Christians. A second-century C.E. extra-Biblical statement of Christian faith known as *The Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, recommends that an itinerant preacher be entertained for "one day, or if need be a second as well." After that, when he is sent on his way, "let him accept nothing but bread . . . If he ask[s] for money, he is a false prophet." The document continues: "If he wishes to settle among you and has a craft, let him work for his bread. But if he has no craft provide for him according to your understanding, so that no man

*Christians "follow the course of hospitality"*

shall live among you in idleness because he is a Christian. But if he will not do so, he is making traffic of Christ; beware of such."

The apostle Paul was careful not to impose an expensive burden upon his hosts during his long stays in certain cities. He worked as a tentmaker to support himself. (Acts 18:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12) To help deserving travelers among them, early Christians apparently used letters of recommendation, such as Paul's introduction of Phoebe. "I recommend to you Phoebe our sister," wrote Paul, "that you may welcome her in the Lord . . . and that you may assist her in any matter where she may need you."

—Romans 16:1, 2.

### Blessings From Being Hospitable

First-century Christian missionaries trusted in Jehovah to provide for all their needs. But could they expect to enjoy the hospitality of fellow believers? Lydia opened up her house to Paul and others. The apostle stayed with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. A jailer in Philippi set a table before Paul and Silas. Paul was received hospitably by Jason in Thessalonica, by Philip in Caesarea, and by Mnason on the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem. En route to Rome, Paul was entertained by brothers in Puteoli. What spiritually rewarding occasions these must have been for the hosts who received him!—Acts 16:33, 34; 17:7; 18:1-3; 21:8, 16; 28:13, 14.

Scholar Frederick F. Bruce observes: "These friends and co-workers, hosts and



hostesses, had no other motive in being so helpful than love of Paul and love of the Master whom he served. They knew that in serving the one they were serving the other." This is an excellent motive for being hospitable.

The need to extend hospitality still exists. Thousands of traveling representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses receive hospitality from fellow believers. Some Kingdom proclaimers travel at their own expense to preach in places seldom reached with the good news. Great benefits result from opening our homes, however humble, to such ones. Warmhearted hospitality that may include no more than a simple meal offers excellent opportunities for "an interchange of encouragement" and for showing love for our brothers and for our God. (Romans 1:11, 12) Such occasions are particularly rewarding for the hosts, for "there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

# Jehovah's Word Is Alive

## Highlights From the Book of Judges

**H**OW does Jehovah respond when his own people turn their back on him and begin to worship false gods? What if they repeatedly fall away and call on him for help only when they are in distress? Does Jehovah provide a way of escape for them even then? The book of Judges answers these and other vital questions. Completed by the prophet Samuel about 1100 B.C.E., it covers events that span some 330 years—from the death of Joshua to the enthronement of Israel's first king.

As a part of God's dynamic word, or message, the book of Judges is of great value to us. (Hebrews 4:12) The exciting accounts recorded in it give us insight into God's personality. The lessons that we learn from them strengthen our faith and help us to get a firm hold on "the real life," everlasting life in God's promised new world. (1 Timothy 6:12, 19; 2 Peter 3:13) The deeds of salvation that Jehovah performs in behalf of his people provide a foregleam of the greater deliverance by his Son, Jesus Christ, in the future.

### WHY WERE JUDGES NEEDED?

(Judges 1:1–3:6)

After the kings of the land of Canaan are defeated under the leadership of Joshua, the individual tribes of Israel go to their inheritance and take possession of the land. However, the Israelites fail to dispossess the inhabitants of the land. This failure proves to be a real snare for Israel.

The generation that comes after the days of Joshua 'does not know Jehovah or the work that he has done for Israel.' (Judges 2:10) Moreover, the people proceed to form

marriage alliances with the Canaanites and to serve their gods. So Jehovah gives the Israelites into the hands of their enemies. When oppression becomes severe, though, the sons of Israel call upon the true God for help. In this religious, social, and political climate unfolds the account of a line of judges whom Jehovah raises up to save his people from their enemies.

### Scriptural Questions Answered:

**1:2, 4—Why is Judah designated to be the first tribe to take possession of the land allotted to it?** Normally, this privilege would go to the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. But in his deathbed prophecy, Jacob foretold that Reuben was not to excel, having forfeited his right as the firstborn. Simeon and Levi, who had acted with cruelty, were to be scattered in Israel. (Genesis 49:3-5, 7) Hence, the next in line was Judah, the fourth son of Jacob. Simeon, who went up with Judah, received small areas of land scattered throughout the large territory of Judah.\*—Joshua 19:9.

**1:6, 7—Why were the thumbs and the big toes of defeated kings cut off?** A person who lost his thumbs and big toes apparently was incapacitated for military action. Without the thumbs, how could a soldier handle a sword or a spear? And the loss of the big toes would result in inability to maintain one's balance properly.

### Lessons for Us:

**2:10-12.** We must have a regular program

\* The Levites were not given an inheritance in the Promised Land except for 48 cities scattered throughout Israel.

of Bible study so as ‘not to forget Jehovah’s doings.’ (Psalm 103:2) Parents need to sound down the truth of God’s Word into the hearts of their children.—Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

**2:14, 21, 22.** Jehovah allows bad things to happen to his disobedient people for a purpose—to chastise them, to refine them, and to move them to return to him.

### JEHOVAH RAISES UP JUDGES (Judges 3:7–16:31)

The exciting account of the exploits of the judges begins with Othniel’s bringing an end to Israel’s eight-year subjugation to a Mesopotamian king. Using a courageous strategy, Judge Ehud kills Eglon, the fat Moabite king. Valiant Shamgar single-handedly strikes down 600 Philistines using a cattle goad. With encouragement from Deborah, who serves as a prophetess, and with Jehovah’s backing, Barak and his lightly equipped army of ten thousand men rout the powerful army of Sisera. Jehovah raises up Gideon and gives him and his 300 men victory over the Midianites.

Through Jephthah, Jehovah delivers Israel from the Ammonites. Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon are also among the 12 men who judge Israel. The period of the Judges ends with Samson, who fights against the Philistines.

#### Scriptural Questions Answered:

**4:8—Why did Barak insist that the prophetess Deborah go with him to the battlefield?** Evidently, Barak felt inadequate to go up against Sisera’s army by himself. Having the prophetess with him would reassure him and his men that they had God’s guidance and would give them confidence. Ba-

rak’s insistence that Deborah accompany him, then, was not a sign of weakness but of strong faith.

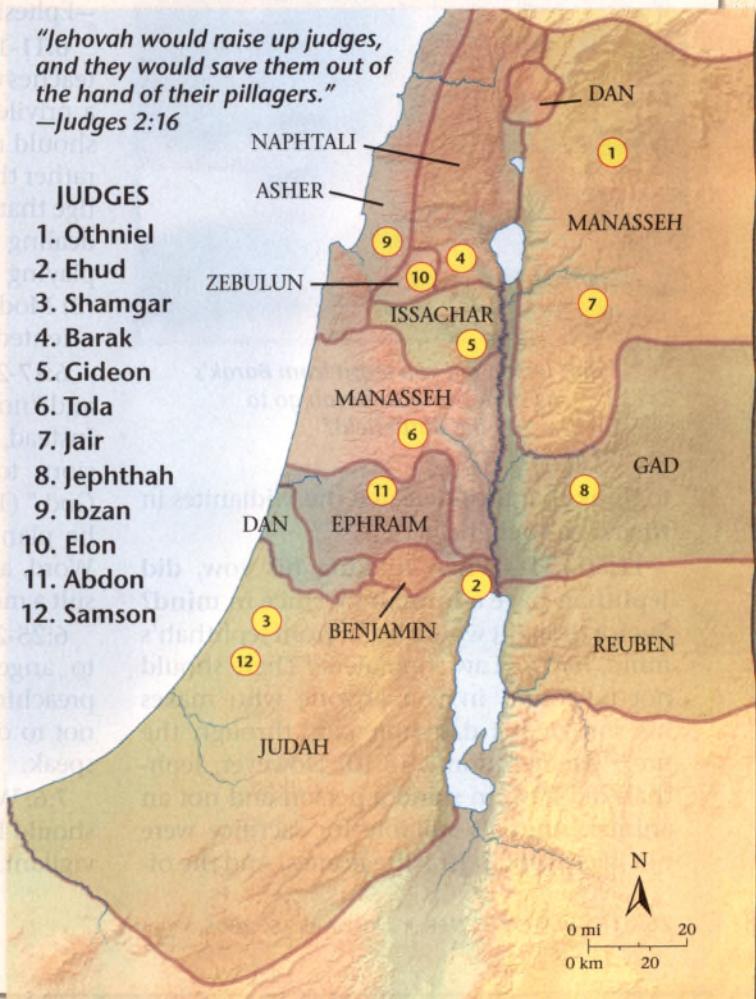
**5:20—How did the stars fight from the heavens in behalf of Barak?** The Bible does not say whether this involved angelic assistance, meteorite showers that were interpreted ominously by Sisera’s wise men, or perhaps astrological predictions for Sisera that proved false. Undoubtedly, however, there was some type of divine intervention.

**7:1-3; 8:10—Why did Jehovah say that Gideon’s 32,000 men were too many against the enemy force of 135,000?** This was because Jehovah was giving Gideon and his men the victory. God did not want them

*“Jehovah would raise up judges, and they would save them out of the hand of their pillagers.”*  
—Judges 2:16

#### JUDGES

1. Othniel
2. Ehud
3. Shamgar
4. Barak
5. Gideon
6. Tola
7. Jair
8. Jephthah
9. Ibzan
10. Elon
11. Abdon
12. Samson





**What lesson did you learn from Barak's insistence that Deborah go to the battlefield?**

to think that they defeated the Midianites in their own strength.

**11:30, 31—When making his vow, did Jephthah have a human sacrifice in mind?** Such a thought would be far from Jephthah's mind, for the Law stipulated: "There should not be found in you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire." (Deuteronomy 18:10) However, Jephthah did have in mind a person and not an animal. Animals suitable for sacrifice were not likely kept in Israelite homes. And the of-

ferring of an animal would be nothing outstanding. Jephthah was aware that the one coming out of his house to meet him might well be his daughter. This one was to be offered up "as a burnt offering" in that the person would be devoted to Jehovah's exclusive service in connection with the sanctuary.

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

**3:10.** Success in spiritual pursuits depends, not on human wisdom, but on Jehovah's spirit.—Psalm 127:1.

**3:21.** Ehud wielded his sword proficiently and with courage. We must acquire skill in using "the sword of the spirit, that is, God's word." This means that we must use the Scriptures courageously in our ministry.—Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 2:15.

**6:11-15; 8:1-3, 22, 23.** Gideon's modesty teaches us three important lessons: (1) When a privilege of service is extended to us, we should reflect on the responsibility it entails rather than dwell on the prominence or prestige that may be associated with it. (2) When dealing with those inclined to quarrel, displaying modesty is the course of wisdom. (3) Modesty protects us from being position oriented.

**6:17-22, 36-40.** We too must be cautious and "not believe every inspired expression." Instead, we need to "test the inspired expressions to see whether they originate with God." (1 John 4:1) To make sure that counsel he plans to give is solidly based on God's Word, a new Christian elder is wise to consult a more experienced elder.

**6:25-27.** Gideon used discretion so as not to anger his opposers needlessly. When preaching the good news, we must be careful not to offend others unduly by the way we speak.

**7:6.** When it comes to serving Jehovah, we should be like Gideon's 300 men—alert and vigilant.

**9:8-15.** How foolish to act proudly and harbor ambition for position or power!

**11:35-37.** The good example of Jephthah was undoubtedly instrumental in helping his daughter develop strong faith and a self-sacrificing spirit. Parents today can set such an example for their children.

**11:40.** Offering commendation to someone who displays a willing spirit in Jehovah's service encourages that one.

**13:8.** In teaching their children, parents should pray to Jehovah for guidance and follow his direction.—2 Timothy 3:16.

**14:16, 17; 16:16.** Applying pressure by weeping and nagging can damage a relationship.—Proverbs 19:13; 21:19.

## OTHER OFFENSES IN ISRAEL

(**Judges 17:1–21:25**)

The last part of the book of Judges contains two outstanding accounts. The first concerns a man named Micah, who sets up an idol in his house and employs a Levite to act as a priest for him. After destroying the city of Laish, or Leshem, the Danites build their own city and name it Dan. Using Micah's idol and his priest, they set up another form of worship in Dan. Evidently, Laish is captured before Joshua's death.—Joshua 19:47.

The second event takes place not long after the death of Joshua. A mass sex crime committed by some men of the Benjaminite city of Gibeah leads to the near annihilation of the entire tribe of Benjamin—only 600 men survive. However, an expedient arrangement allows them to get wives, and their number increases to nearly 60,000 warriors by the time of David's rulership.—1 Chronicles 7:6-11.

### Scriptural Questions Answered:

**17:6; 21:25**—If 'each one was accustomed to do what was right in his own eyes,' did this foster anarchy? Not necessarily, for Jehovah made ample provisions to guide his people. He gave them the Law and the priest-

hood to educate them in his way. By means of the Urim and the Thummim, the high priest could consult God on important matters. (Exodus 28:30) Every city also had older men capable of providing sound counsel. When an Israelite availed himself of these provisions, he had a sound guide for his conscience. His doing "what was right in his own eyes" in this way resulted in good. On the other hand, if a person ignored the Law and made his own decisions about conduct and worship, the result was bad.

**20:17-48—Why did Jehovah let the Benjamites defeat the other tribes twice, even though the former needed to be punished?** By allowing the faithful tribes to suffer great losses at first, Jehovah tested their determination to root out evil from Israel.

### Lessons for Us:

**19:14, 15.** The unwillingness on the part of the people of Gibeah to extend hospitality was an indication of a moral shortcoming. Christians are admonished to "follow the course of hospitality."—Romans 12:13.

### The Deliverance Ahead

Very soon now, God's Kingdom in the hands of Christ Jesus will destroy the wicked world and provide a great deliverance for the upright and the blameless. (Proverbs 2:21, 22; Daniel 2:44) 'All of Jehovah's enemies will then perish, and his lovers will be as when the sun goes forth in its mightiness.' (Judges 5:31) Let us prove to be among the lovers of Jehovah by applying what we have learned from the book of Judges.

The fundamental truth demonstrated over and over in the accounts of the Judges is this: Obedience to Jehovah leads to rich blessings, disobedience to dire consequences. (Deuteronomy 11:26-28) How vital that we become "obedient from the heart" to the revealed will of God!—Romans 6:17; 1 John 2:17.

# Saul's Preaching Excites HOSTILITY

THE Jews in Damascus could not understand it. How could a passionate defender of orthodoxy have become an apostate? Here was Saul, the man who had harassed those calling on Jesus' name in Jerusalem. He had come to Damascus to persecute the disciples there. But now he himself was preaching that the same despised felon impaled for blasphemy was the Messiah! Had Saul gone mad?—Acts 9:1, 2, 20-22.

Perhaps there was an explanation. Others who traveled from Jerusalem in the same caravan as Saul may well have spoken about what transpired on the road. As they approached Damascus, suddenly a bright light flashed around them, and all of them fell to the ground. There was also the sound of a voice. No one except Saul was hurt. He was lying on the road. When he finally got up, other travelers had to lead him into Damascus, for he could not see a thing.—Acts 9:3-8; 26:13, 14.

## An Opponent Becomes a Proponent

What had happened to Saul on the road to Damascus? Had the long journey or the heat of the midday sun perhaps debilitated him? Determined to find natural explanations, modern skeptics offer scenarios that include delirium, hallucination, a drastic psychological crisis provoked by the qualms of Saul's tormented

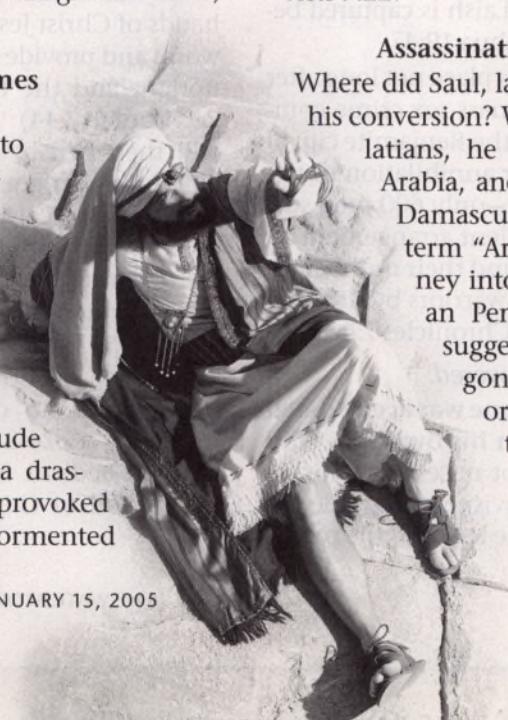
conscience, a nervous breakdown, and an assumed predisposition to epilepsy.

The fact was that Jesus Christ appeared to Saul in that blinding light, convincing him that He was the Messiah. Some artistic depictions of this episode show Saul falling from a horse. Though that is possible, the Bible simply says that he "fell to the ground." (Acts 22:6-11) Whatever physical fall Saul experienced was not nearly so great as the fall from the pride of his position. He now had to recognize that what Jesus' followers were preaching was true. The only course open to Saul was to join them. From a militant foe of Jesus' message, Saul became one of its staunchest proponents. After regaining his sight and getting baptized, "Saul kept on acquiring power all the more and was confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus as he proved logically that this is the Christ." —Acts 9:22.

## Assassination Plot Fails

Where did Saul, later called Paul, go after his conversion? When writing to the Galatians, he said: "I went off into Arabia, and I came back again to Damascus." (Galatians 1:17) The term "Arabia" allows for a journey into any part of the Arabian Peninsula. Some scholars suggest that Paul may have gone into the Syrian Desert or elsewhere in the Nabataean kingdom of Aretas IV. Very likely, Saul

*Saul "fell to the ground" when Jesus appeared to him*



went to a quiet place for meditation after his baptism, even as Jesus went into the wilderness following his immersion.—Luke 4:1.

When Saul returned to Damascus, “the Jews took counsel together to do away with him.” (Acts 9:23) The governor who served as King Aretas’ representative in Damascus was guarding the city in order to seize Saul. (2 Corinthians 11:32) But while enemies plotted Saul’s death, Jesus’ disciples planned his escape.

Among those who helped Saul to escape were Ananias and the disciples whose company the apostle enjoyed immediately after his conversion.\* (Acts 9:17-19) Some who had become believers because of Saul’s preaching in Damascus may also have helped, for Acts 9:25 states: “His disciples took him and let him down by night through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.” The expression “his disciples” may mean those whom Saul taught. In any case, the success of his ministry likely fueled the animosity already harbored against him.

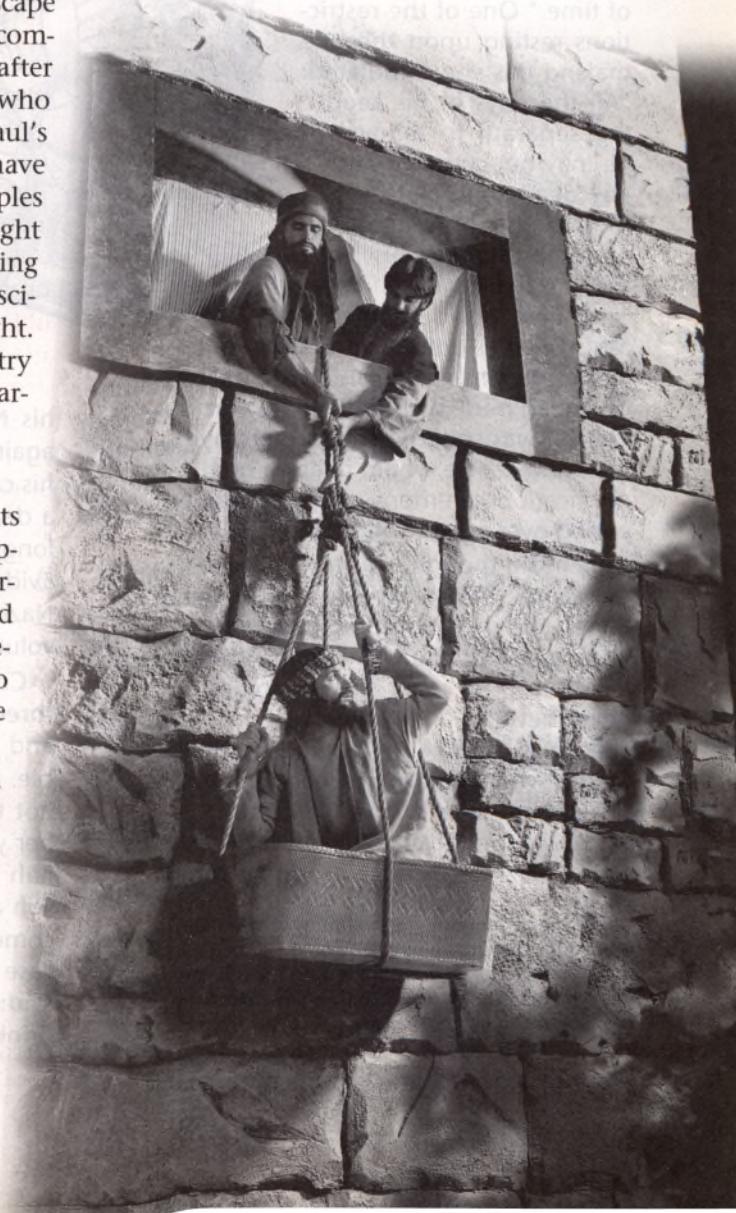
### A Lesson to Be Learned

When we examine some of the events surrounding Saul’s conversion and baptism, we clearly see that he was not overly concerned about how others judged him; neither did he quit because of severe opposition. What mattered most to Saul was the preaching commission he had received.—Acts 22:14, 15.

Have you recently become convinced of the importance of preaching the good news? If so, you know that all true Christians must be Kingdom preachers. You should not be surprised if your ministry at times provokes hostile re-

actions. (Matthew 24:9; Luke 21:12; 1 Peter 2:20) Saul’s response to opposition is exemplary. Christians who endure under trials without giving up will have God’s favor. Jesus told his disciples: “You will be objects of hatred by all people because of my name.” Yet, he assured them: “By endurance on your part you will acquire your souls.”—Luke 21:17-19.

*Saul escaped an assassination plot in Damascus*



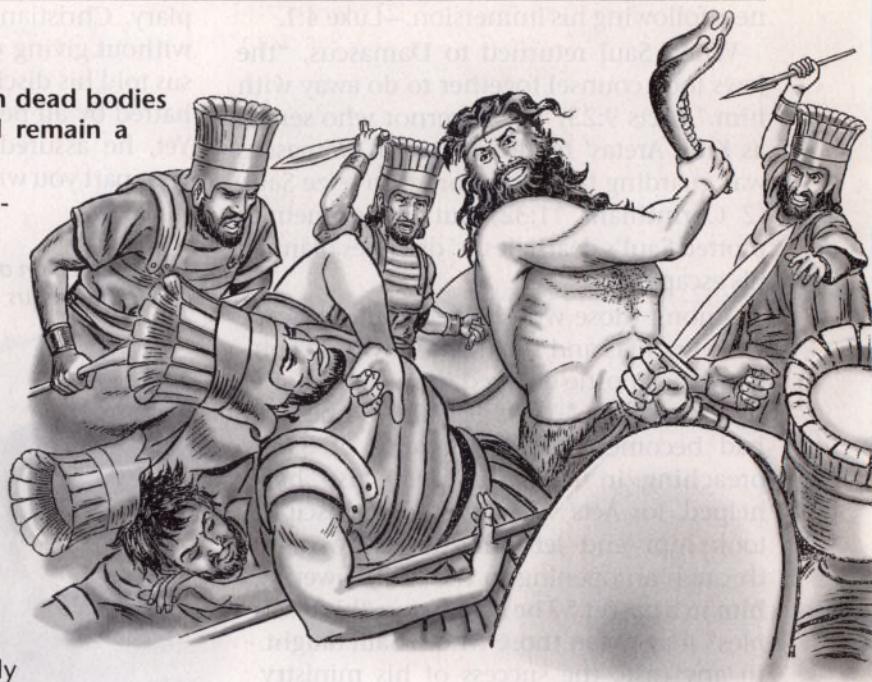
\* Christianity may have arrived in Damascus either following Jesus’ preaching in Galilee or after Pentecost 33 C.E.—Matthew 4:24; Acts 2:5.

## Questions From Readers

**How could Samson touch dead bodies that he had slain and still remain a Nazirite?**

In ancient Israel, an individual could voluntarily make a vow and become a Nazirite for a certain length of time.\* One of the restrictions resting upon the one making this vow stipulated: "All the days of his keeping separate to Jehovah he may not come toward any dead soul. Not even for his father or his mother or his brother or his sister may he defile himself when they die." What if someone "should die quite suddenly alongside him"? Such an accidental touching of a dead body would defile his Naziriteship. Thus, it was stated: "The former days will go uncounted." He would need to go through a purification ceremony and start the Nazirite period over again.—Numbers 6:6-12.

Samson, though, was a Nazirite in a different sense. Before Samson's birth, Jehovah's angel told his mother: "Look! you will be pregnant, and you will certainly give birth to a son, and no razor should come upon his head, because a Nazirite of God is what the child will become on leaving the belly; and he it is who will take the lead in saving Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5) Samson took no vow of Naziriteship. He was a Nazirite by divine appointment, and



his Naziriteship was for life. The restriction against touching a corpse could not apply in his case. If it did and he accidentally touched a dead body, how could he start over a life-long Naziriteship that began with his birth? Evidently, then, the requirements for lifetime Nazirites differed in some ways from those for voluntary Nazirites.

Consider Jehovah's commandments to the three lifelong Nazirites—Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptizer—mentioned in the Bible. As noted earlier, Samson was required not to cut the hair of his head. Concerning her yet to be conceived child—Samuel—Hannah made the vow: "I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and no razor will come upon his head." (1 Samuel 1:11) In the case of John the Baptizer, Jehovah's angel said: "He must drink no wine and strong drink at all." (Luke 1:15) Moreover, "John

\* The length of time for Naziriteship was left up to the individual making the vow. According to Jewish tradition, however, the minimum length for the vow was 30 days. It was thought that anything less would make the vow commonplace.

had his clothing of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his loins; his food too was insect locusts and wild honey." (Matthew 3:4) None of these three individuals were commanded not to come near a dead soul.

Though a Nazirite, Samson was among the judges whom Jehovah raised up to save the Israelites out of the hand of their pillagers. (Judges 2:16) And in fulfilling this assignment, he came in contact with dead bodies. On one occasion, Samson struck down 30 Philistines and stripped off their outfits. Later, he went smiting the enemy, "piling legs upon thighs with a great slaughter." He also took a moist jawbone of an ass and killed a thousand men with it. (Judges 14:19; 15:8, 15) Samson did all of this with Jehovah's favor and backing. The Scriptures refer to him as a man of exemplary faith.—Hebrews 11:32; 12:1.

**Does the statement that Samson ripped apart a lion "just as someone tears a male kid in two" suggest that the tearing apart of young goats was a common practice in his day?**

There is no evidence that in the time of Israel's Judges, it was common for people to tear apart young goats. Judges 14:6 states: "Jehovah's spirit became operative upon [Samson], so that he tore it [a maned young lion] in two, just as someone tears a male kid in two, and there was nothing at all in his hand." This comment likely is an illustration.

The expression "he tore it in two" could have two meanings. Samson either tore apart the jaws of the lion or tore the lion limb from limb in some way. If the former is meant, then doing the same thing to a young goat is conceivably within human power. In this case, the parallel illustrates that conquering a lion with his bare hands was no more difficult for Samson than had the lion been a mere male kid. However, what if Samson killed the lion by tearing it limb from limb? The comment then can hardly be taken as anything more than a simile. The point of the simile



would be that Jehovah's spirit empowered Samson to perform a task that required extraordinary physical strength. In either case, the comparison drawn at Judges 14:6 illustrates that with Jehovah's help, a powerful lion proved to be no more ferocious to Samson than a male kid would be to the average person.

## IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

How Precious Is Your Life?

"Finding One Pearl of High Value"

Is the Truth Bearing Fruit in Those You Teach?

# "What Is Your Secret?"

THIS question from an elderly stranger at a fast-food restaurant took Muriel, a mother of three, by surprise. Muriel had been busy with doctors' appointments for her children, and she was running behind schedule. There was not enough time for them to go home and eat supper before attending their Christian meeting. So she took the children to a nearby restaurant so that they could have something to eat.

As they were finishing their meal, a man approached Muriel and said: "I have been observing you ever since you came in here. And I have noticed a big difference between your children and those I normally encounter. You should see the way children treat the tables and chairs. Their feet go on the table. The chairs are bounced around. But your children are so quiet and well behaved. What is your secret?"

Muriel replied: "My husband and I regularly study the Bible with our children, and we try to apply in our lives what we learn. We are Jehovah's Witnesses." At this, the man said: "I

am Jewish and a Holocaust survivor. I remember seeing Jehovah's Witnesses being persecuted in Germany. Even then they stood out as being different. The behavior of your children has really impressed me. I must look into your religion."

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