

DECEMBER 15, 2006

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Peace on Earth *A Mere Dream?*

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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The Christmas Spirit

All Year Round?

*"Glory in the heights above to God,
and upon earth peace among men
of goodwill."*—Luke 2:14.

MILLIONS of people are familiar with these words of God's angels announcing the birth of Jesus to shepherds who were watching over their flocks by night. At about the date that the churches claim that Jesus was born, many nominal Christians make a special effort to improve their behavior. The seasonal attention to joy, peace, and goodwill—qualities mentioned in the angelic proclamation—is often referred to as the Christmas spirit.

Such positive sentiments even attract people who attribute no religious significance to Christmas. They too appreciate the warm feelings that the celebration seems to foster. Where Christmas means time off from school or work, the holiday offers people an opportunity to relax, to spend time with their families and friends, or simply to enjoy themselves. Of course, many sincere people view Christmas principally as a time to honor Jesus Christ.

Whatever significance they attach to Christmas, most are willing to admit that any positive feelings engendered by the holiday are often short-lived. People quickly revert to



their normal pattern of behavior. An essay entitled "The Spirit of Christmas," published by the Royal Bank of Canada, stated: "All too many 'Christians' only qualify for that description conceptually for a few weeks every year, oozing good will towards their fellow men until after the New Year, when they can go back to their dog-eat-dog existence and their indifference to the plight of other human beings." What is "essentially wrong" with the Christmas spirit, continued the same letter, is that people do not have it "all year round."

Whether you agree with that analysis or not, it does raise important questions. Will people ever be capable of manifesting generosity and understanding toward one another on a permanent basis? Is there any realistic hope that the angelic proclamation on the night of Jesus' birth will be fulfilled? Or is the hope of true peace nothing more than a dream?



Jesus' Birth

How It Brings Peace

THE proclamation of "peace among men of goodwill" was not the only prophecy connected with Jesus' birth. In addition to what the angels announced to the astonished shepherds, heavenly messengers had made divinely inspired declarations about the newborn Jesus to Mary and her husband, Joseph. A consideration of these messages will enable us to gain a broader perspective on Jesus' birth and to understand the real significance behind the angelic promise of peace among men.

Prior to Jesus' birth, even before she became pregnant, Mary was visited by an angel whom the Bible identifies as Gabriel. "Good day, highly favored one, Jehovah is with you" was the angel's greeting. As you might imagine, Mary was deeply disturbed at this and perhaps a little frightened. What could such a greeting mean?

Gabriel explained: "Look! you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus. This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule as king over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of his kingdom." Mary questioned how this was to be, since she, a virgin, was not having intercourse with a man. Gabriel responded that the child would be conceived by means of God's holy spirit. This would be no ordinary child.
—Luke 1:28-35.

A Foretold King

Gabriel's words must have helped Mary to discern that the son she would bear was the

subject of ancient prophecies. The disclosure that Jehovah would give Mary's son "the throne of David his father" would make her—and indeed any Jewish person acquainted with the Scriptures—think of the promise that God had made to King David of Israel.

Through the prophet Nathan, Jehovah had told David: "Your house and your kingdom will certainly be steadfast to time indefinite before you; your very throne will become one firmly established to time indefinite." (2 Samuel 7:4, 16) Jehovah stated concerning David: "I shall certainly set up his seed forever and his throne as the days of heaven. His seed itself will prove to be even to time indefinite, and his throne as the sun in front of me." (Psalm 89:20, 29, 35, 36) Thus, it was no coincidence that Mary had descended from the house of David, as had Joseph.

These were not the only prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures regarding a royal son of David. Mary would also have been familiar with Isaiah's prophecy: "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 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, 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.

What Gabriel announced to Mary, then, was much more than the miraculous birth of a baby boy. Her son would be the royal heir of King David—the permanent, everlasting heir to a divinely ordained Kingdom. Gabriel's prophecies concerning Jesus' future role have profound significance for all of us.

When Joseph learned that his future wife was expecting a child, he decided to end their engagement. He knew that the child was not his because he and his fiancée had never had sexual relations. You can imagine how difficult it must have been for Joseph to believe Mary's explanation of her pregnancy. The Gospel account reports: "Jehovah's angel appeared to him in a dream, saying: 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife home, for that which has been begotten in her is by holy spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you must call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"—Matthew 1:20, 21.

To what extent Joseph understood how the child would "save his people from their sins," the Bible does not say. Still, this message was sufficient to assure Joseph that the expectant mother was innocent of any wrongdoing. He did as the angel directed and took Mary home, an act that was the equivalent of a wedding.

Thanks to information found elsewhere in the Scriptures, we can understand what the angel meant. Early in human history, a rebellious angel challenged Jehovah's sovereignty. The Hebrew Scriptures show that this rebel asserted, among other things, that God's way of ruling was unjust and that no man would maintain integrity to Jehovah when put to the test. (Genesis 3:2-5; Job 1:6-12) Adam, for one, did not. As a result of his sin, all humans inherit sin, and the consequence of that sin is death. (Romans 5:12; 6:23) Jesus, however, was born sinless because his conception was not by a human father.



By willingly surrendering his perfect human life as a ransom corresponding exactly to what Adam lost, Jesus was in a position to save men from their sins and to offer them the prospect of everlasting life.—1 Timothy 2:3-6; Titus 3:6, 7; 1 John 2:25.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus provided a foretaste of what the removal of the effects of sin will mean. He freed people from every sort of physical ailment and even brought the dead back to life. (Matthew 4:23; John 11:1-44) Those miracles were a shadow of what he will do in the future. Jesus himself said: “The hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [my] voice and come out.”—John 5:28, 29.

That promise of a future resurrection explains why the birth—and even more so the death—of Jesus is of utmost importance to us. God sent his Son into the world “for the world to be saved through him,” says John 3:17. This wonderful news brings us back to the proclamation made to the shepherds who were watching over their flocks on the night Jesus was born.

“Good News of a Great Joy”

It was indeed “good news of a great joy” for humankind when the angels announced the birth of “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10, 11) This child was to be the Messiah, the great Prophet and Ruler that God’s people had long been expecting. (Deuteronomy 18:18; Micah 5:2) His life and death on earth would be central to the vindication of Jehovah’s universal sovereignty, so that the angels could say: “Glory in the heights above to God.”—Luke 2:14.

Jesus, whom the Bible calls “the last Adam,” showed that it is possible for a human to be faithful to Jehovah under even the severest test. (1 Corinthians 15:45) He thus proved Satan to be a wicked liar. This

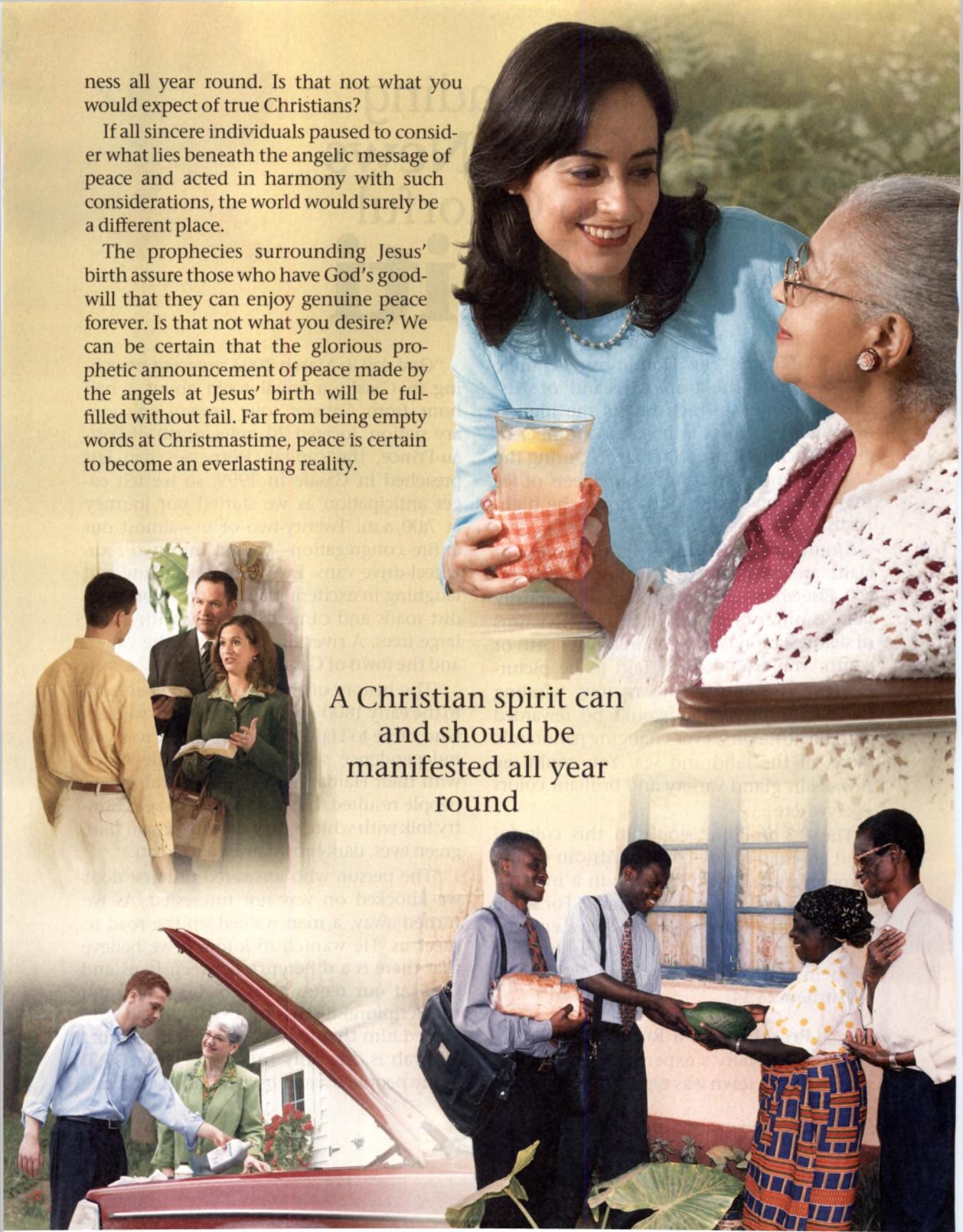
was reason for joy in heaven among faithful angels.

Let us, though, return to the question, “Is there any realistic hope that the angelic proclamation on the night of Jesus’ birth will be fulfilled?” The answer is an emphatic yes! Peace is an essential condition in the outworking of the divine purpose for the earth, which includes the restoration of paradisaic conditions. When that is accomplished earth wide, all people will be motivated by love and loyalty. Hence, the accomplishment of Jehovah’s purpose also means the elimination of all resistance to his sovereignty. This is not good news for any who side with Satan in asserting that Jehovah’s standards are bad. For them, it will mean destruction.—Psalm 37:11; Proverbs 2:21, 22.

Please note that the angels did not tell the shepherds of peace and goodwill to *all men*. Rather, they announced “peace among *men of goodwill*.” That is to say, among those who are approved by God and have his goodwill. Those who express genuine faith in Jehovah become faithful followers and imitators of Jesus. Such men and women are willing to manifest generosity and understanding toward others, not just a few days each year, but every day.

A Christian Spirit All Year Round?

The power of the good news that Jesus preached has touched the lives of countless individuals. Many have adopted Christian principles in every aspect of their lives. People who were once basically self-centered have begun to ask what Jesus might have done had he been in their situation. Some who had centered their lives on possessions and pleasures have come to recognize the importance of spiritual values and of sharing these with their neighbors. People who do this strive to show generosity and kind-



ness all year round. Is that not what you would expect of true Christians?

If all sincere individuals paused to consider what lies beneath the angelic message of peace and acted in harmony with such considerations, the world would surely be a different place.

The prophecies surrounding Jesus' birth assure those who have God's goodwill that they can enjoy genuine peace forever. Is that not what you desire? We can be certain that the glorious prophetic announcement of peace made by the angels at Jesus' birth will be fulfilled without fail. Far from being empty words at Christmastime, peace is certain to become an everlasting reality.

A Christian spirit can
and should be
manifested all year
round





Spreading Good News in Colorful Haiti

HAITI and the Dominican Republic share the tropical island of Hispaniola, which boasts the highest mountains in the Caribbean. A number of peaks reach well over 8,000 feet. During the "cold" months, frost and thin sheets of ice may form on small ponds up in the highlands.

Mountains and valleys in the south of Haiti are covered with lush tropical forest. Elsewhere, the mountains are mostly bare, gaunt, often sharply chiseled—victims of deforestation. Were you to travel north or south, you would find Haiti to be picturesque. On some of the narrow, winding mountain roads, you would be rewarded with breathtaking, ever-changing panoramic views of the land and sea. You could see flowers in grand variety and brilliant colors everywhere.

The 8.3 million people in this colorful land are mainly rural folk of African origin. Though most have very little in a material way, they are kind and hospitable. For some 60 years, Jehovah's Witnesses have enjoyed taking the good news of God's Kingdom to them and have been warmly welcomed.

—Matthew 24:14.

Preaching in a Rural Town

One missionary's experience on her first visit to a rural town was typical. She wrote:

"One day in March 2003, we went preaching in Casale, a small town about a half hour from Cabaret, our present missionary station, located 20 miles north of Port-au-Prince, the capital. Witnesses had last preached in Casale in 1999, so we felt eager anticipation as we started our journey at 7:00 a.m. Twenty-two of us—almost our entire congregation—packed into two four-wheel-drive vans. Everyone was talking and laughing in excitement as we drove on steep dirt roads and came to a valley with many large trees. A river flows through the valley, and the town of Casale straddles it.

"The history of this quiet town goes back to the early 1800's when some Polish soldiers who came to Haiti to help former slaves win independence settled in this fertile valley with their Haitian wives. A beautiful mix of people resulted. It is fascinating to see country folk with white skin, tan skin, brown skin, green eyes, dark-brown eyes, and so on.

"The person who answered the first door we knocked on was not interested. As we turned away, a man walked up the road to meet us. He wanted to know if we believe that there is a difference between Jesus and God. At our request, he got his Bible, and the Scriptural discussion that followed convinced him that Jesus is God's Son and that Jehovah is 'the only true God.' (John 17:3) Many people invited us to sit down and talk

with them. Some asked, 'When will you come back and study the Bible with us?'

"At noon, we found a nice shady spot and got ready for lunch. Two sisters had cooked a large pot of fish. It was delicious! As we lingered, eating and talking, we also preached to passersby. Then, we crossed the river to the other side of the town. We enjoyed talking with these fine people who were sitting under the trees near their modest homes. How pleasant to note the sounds of children playing, women washing clothes in the river, and grandmas grinding coffee beans!"

"It was soon four o'clock, and our happy group headed back to the vans to return to Cabaret. My husband and I truly enjoyed our first visit to Casale, with its welcoming and friendly people."

Since the first Witness missionaries arrived in Haiti in 1945, the number of Kingdom proclaimers in this land has steadily increased, so that there are now some 14,000 engaged in preaching and in conducting more than 22,000 home Bible studies. They

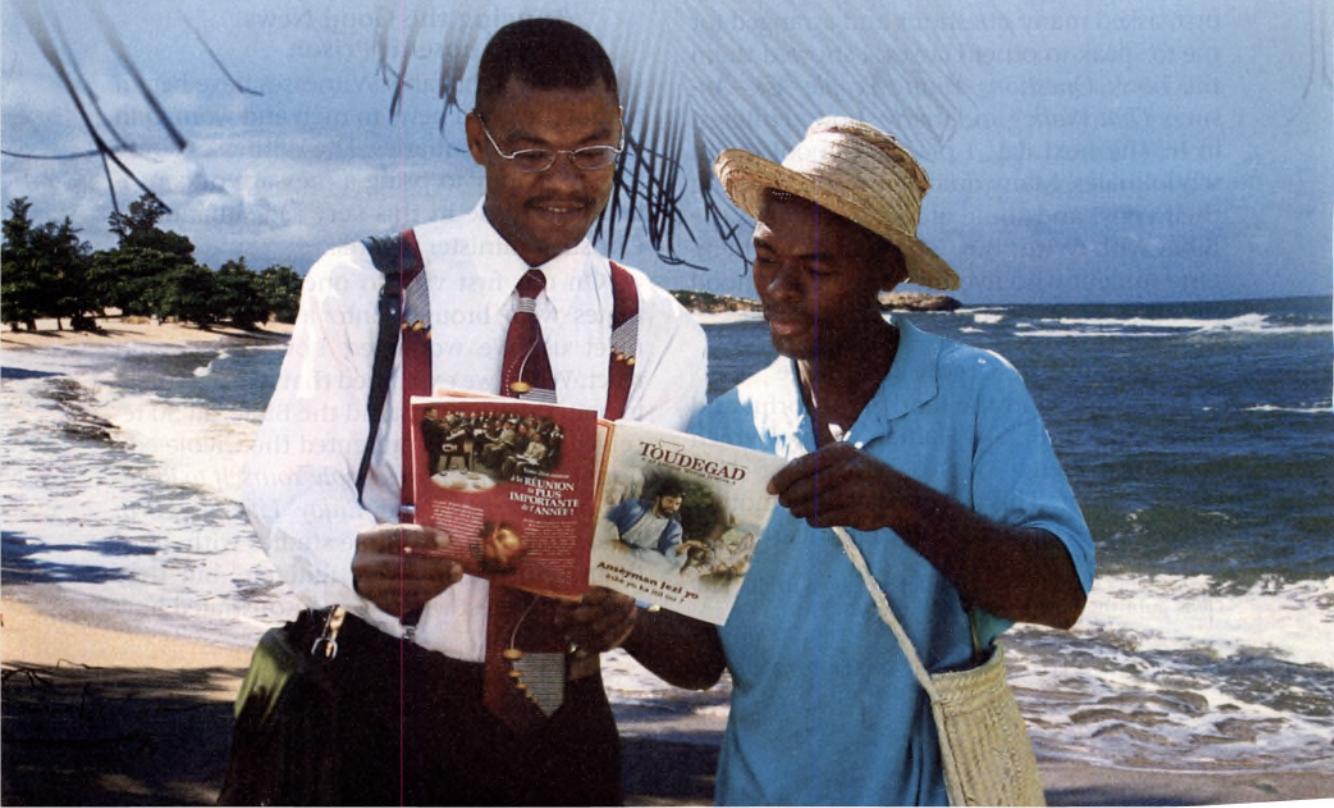
have touched the lives of the 59,372 people who attended the Memorial in March 2005 and have kept the good news of God's Kingdom clearly in the public view. Consider the many ways in which the work of Jehovah's Witnesses has affected people.

The Good News in Colorful Art

Most Haitians love color. They reflect this in their dress, in their painted houses, in the variety of flowers in their gardens, and in their artwork. Canvases painted in the vivid local style known as L'Art Haitien are on display on the streets all over Port-au-Prince. Buyers come from many parts of the world.

Vivid colors are seen not just on canvases. The streets of Port-au-Prince are alive with passenger vehicles called camionettes, or tap-taps, that are elaborately painted in imaginative designs. One often sees in such designs tableaux based on the Bible.

As you walk along the streets, a familiar scene—such as one of Adam and Eve in Eden—may suddenly come into view. Yes,



there it is, painted on the rear window of the camionette that has just passed by. Scriptures or slogans containing the name Jehovah are frequently seen painted on these vehicles or included in the names of commercial enterprises.

Sharing the Good News in School

Young Witnesses in Haiti have fine opportunities to help fellow students learn about the Bible. The following report from a 17-year-old Witness girl is an example.

"A classmate approached me one day and asked what was meant by 'fornication.' Thinking that he wanted to get familiar with me, I ignored him. But when he asked a male student the same question, the whole class became interested. So the following week, after doing some research on the subject, I gave a presentation to the class, explaining why Jehovah's Witnesses endeavor to be clean morally, spiritually, and physically.

"The students asked many questions and accepted the answers I gave from the Bible. Even the headmaster, who was hesitant at first, asked many questions and arranged for me to speak to other classes. I showed them the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*,* and many showed interest in it. The next day, I placed 45 books with schoolmates. Many quickly finished reading their copy, and some are now studying the Bible with Witnesses who live near them. One student who lives in my neighborhood now attends all the meetings."

Using the Creole Language

The people and the land are colorful and interesting, and so is Haitian Creole, which combines French words with West African grammar. This is the Haitians' mother tongue, the language of their heart. It is

* The literature for which titles are given in this article is published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

mainly in this language that Jehovah's Witnesses carry out their ministry, and arrangements are in place to produce more Bible literature in Haitian Creole.

In 1987 the brochure *Enjoy Life on Earth Forever!* was translated into Haitian Creole, followed by the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* and then the brochure *What Does God Require of Us?* These publications have been of great help to new Bible students who want to gain a basic understanding of God's Word. Beginning September 1, 2002, *The Watchtower* has also been published in Haitian Creole. French-language literature is still used, yet many prefer reading the publications in their own language.



Bringing the Good News to Those in Prison

Recently, Jehovah's Witnesses have begun taking the good news to men and women in the State penitentiaries. The Witnesses doing this are happy to bring a message of consolation to those in this very sad situation. A Christian minister reports:

"On our first visit to one prison, the inmates were brought into a large room to meet us. We wondered how they would react. When we explained that we were there to help them understand the Bible, all 50 received us well. We presented the Creole editions of the brochures *Apply Yourself to Reading and Writing* and *Enjoy Life on Earth Forever!* and started Bible studies with 26 of them. Ten present were illiterate, but they showed interest when we demonstrated how

to use the illustrations in the brochures as an aid to understanding the words."

When the Witnesses returned, one man said: "I have read and reread the brochure. I constantly think of what it says, and I have been looking forward to your visit." A man who was arrested for armed robbery said that he wanted to change, and he asked that someone be sent to study the Bible with his wife. A father of two who was in prison made the same request so that his wife could see the difference between true beliefs and false. A Protestant clergyman guilty of defrauding his church members of a large sum of money said that he had now found the truth and that after serving his sentence, he would help members of his church to become Jehovah's Witnesses.

Another prisoner, lacking his own copy of the *Require* brochure in Creole, copied the entire text from a cell mate's brochure and learned it by heart. A female prisoner started sharing with nine cell mates what she was learning, even studying with them. A male prisoner finished studying that brochure, and advancing to the *Knowledge* book, he began preaching to other inmates. Soon he was conducting Bible studies with four of them.

Mercony* used to study the Bible and has relatives who are Jehovah's Witnesses. He encouraged other prisoners to read the Bible literature that his relatives brought him. He comments: "When I offer the literature to the prisoners, they call me Witness of Jehovah. I tell them that I am not, since I know what being a Witness means. I want to take this matter seriously now, to study and get baptized. When I was younger, if I had followed the course that my brothers did, I would not be here in prison."

One of the inmates who had received literature from Mercony told the Witness who

visited him: "Before you came last Monday, I was depressed and was going to take my life. But after I read the magazines, I prayed to God to forgive me for the bad things I have done and to send someone to show me the right way. How joyful I felt when you came the next day to offer to study the Bible with the prisoners! I would like you to teach me how to serve Jehovah."

***Awake!* Brings the Good News to Many**

The November 8, 2000, issue of *Awake!* featured the nursing profession. A woman obtained 2,000 copies, and she distributed them to the nurses attending a seminar in Port-au-Prince. The July 8, 2002, issue of *Awake!* with articles about the police and their work was widely distributed to policemen in Port-au-Prince. They appreciated this, and even now, some stop the Witnesses on the street and ask for more copies of that magazine.

Recently, an official of the World Health Organization arranged for a program to educate people about the problem of AIDS. She was invited to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses, where she was shown information published in *Awake!* on the subject. She was impressed to see articles that discuss from the Bible the best way to prevent AIDS and how to help infected ones cope with their situation. She observed that *Awake!* is in the forefront in providing such information on the subject.

Yes, in many ways Jehovah's Witnesses are spreading the Kingdom good news in colorful Haiti, just as they are doing in 234 other lands around the globe. Many are responding to this message of hope and are being helped to look beyond the present difficulties of life to a new world, where all who worship the true God, Jehovah, will enjoy perfect life in abundance.—Revelation 21:4.

* Name has been changed.



Archaeologist: Missione Archeologica Italiana a Ebla - Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza"

Ebla

AN ANCIENT CITY EMERGES FROM OBLIVION

In the summer of 1962, Paolo Matthiae, a young Italian archaeologist, surveyed the plains of northwestern Syria with uncertainty. The interior of Syria was considered archaeologically poor. Yet, from the excavations begun two years later at Tell Mardikh, about 40 miles south of Aleppo, would emerge what many consider 'the most important archaeological find of the 20th century.'

ANCIENT inscriptions attested to the existence of a city named Ebla. However, no one knew under which of the many tells, or mounds, scattered throughout the Middle East the city might be found. One text told of the victory of Sargon, king of Akkad, over "Mari, Yarmuti, and Ebla." In another inscription, the Sumerian King Gudea mentioned the precious timbers that he received from "the mountains of Ibla [Ebla]." The name Ebla also appeared at Karnak, Egypt, in a list of ancient cities that Pharaoh Thutmose III conquered. You can understand why archaeologists had tried to find Ebla.

Further excavations, though, proved fruitful. In 1968, part of a statue of Ibbi-Lim, a sovereign of Ebla, came to light. It bore a votive inscription in the Akkadian language revealing that it had been dedicated to the goddess Ishtar, who "shone in Ebla." Yes, archaeological finds began to reveal "a new language, a new history, and a new culture."

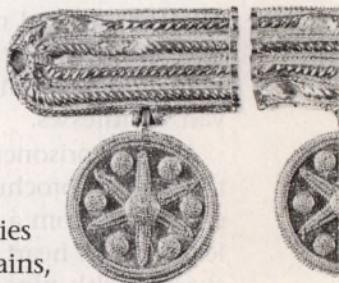
Confirmation that Tell Mardikh corresponded to ancient Ebla came in 1974/75 with the discovery of cuneiform tablets that repeatedly bore that ancient name. Excavations also showed that the city had had at least two lives. After a first period of influence, it had been devastated. Then Ebla

was rebuilt, only to be devastated again and to fall into centuries-long oblivion.

One City, Many Histories

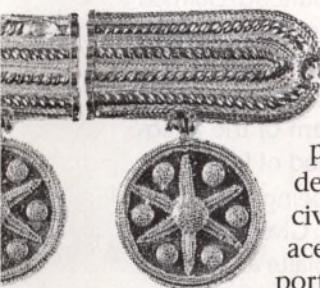
The most ancient cities were built on alluvial plains, such as that between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, where intensive agriculture was possible. The first cities mentioned in the Bible were located in Mesopotamia. (Genesis 10:10) It seems that the name Ebla means "White Rock," referring to the limestone substratum on which the city stood. The site was evidently chosen because the limestone layer guaranteed the presence of a natural water supply, important in a region far from major rivers.

Precipitation levels in the Ebla area limited extensive cultivation to cereals, vines, and olive trees. The area was also suitable for raising stock, particularly sheep. Ebla's strategic position—between the Mesopotamian Plain and the Mediterranean Coast—favored trade in timber, semiprecious stones, and metals. The city dominated a region inhabited by some 200,000 people, up to a tenth of whom lived in the capital.





Remains of a great palace

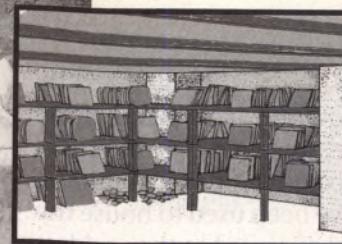


A gold necklace dating to about 1750 B.C.E.

The remains of a great palace testify to the grandeur of this phase of Eblaite civilization. Access to the palace was gained through a portal some 40 to 50 feet high.

The palace had been enlarged over the course of time to make way for the growing needs of an increasingly powerful administration. Officials worked under a complex hierarchy—the king and his consort were aided by “lords” and “elders.”

More than 17,000 clay tablets and fragments have been found. Originally, there were probably more than 4,000 complete tablets, carefully placed on wooden shelves. These documents give evidence of the vast extent of Ebla’s trade. For example, the city did business with Egypt, as shown by the royal symbols of two pharaohs. The tablets were written mainly in Sumerian cuneiform. But some were in Eblaite, a very ancient Semitic language that could be deciphered, thanks to these documents. Orientalists were surprised to discover such an old Semitic language. You may find it interesting that some tablets contain bilingual



Artist's rendering of clay tablets kept in the archive room



Cuneiform tablet



Egyptian royal club, 1750-1700 B.C.E.

Sumerian-Eblaite lists. The book *Ebla—Alle origini della civiltà urbana* (Ebla—At the Origins of Urban Civilization) calls these “the oldest dictionaries known to us.”

Ebla was evidently a military power, for excavated carvings depict Eblaite warriors in the act of executing their enemies or presenting severed heads. Yet, Ebla’s splendor ended when its history intersected that of the rising powers of Assyria and Babylon. It is not easy to trace those events exactly, but it seems that first Sargon I (not the Sargon mentioned at Isaiah 20:1) and then his grandson Naram-Sin moved against Ebla. The archaeological evidence shows that the encounters were violent and the raids ferocious.

As mentioned, though, after a time the city rose again and even gained importance in the region. The new city was constructed according to a precise plan, accentuating its grandeur. In the lower city was a sacred area dedicated to the goddess

Eblaite warrior with enemies' heads



Ishtar, also viewed as a fertility goddess by the Babylonians. You may have heard of the famous Ishtar Gate, uncovered in the ruins of Babylon. A particularly imposing building at Ebla seems to have been used to house the lions that were held as sacred to the goddess Ishtar. This brings us to Ebla's religion.

Religion in Ebla

Like elsewhere in the ancient East, Ebla had a pantheon of gods. Some of them were Baal, Hadad (a name appearing as part of the names of certain Syrian kings), and Dagan. (1 Kings 11:23; 15:18; 2 Kings 17:16) The Eblaites feared them all. They even honored the gods of other peoples. Archaeological finds indicate that, particularly in the second millennium B.C.E., worship was also given to deified royal ancestors.

The Eblaites did not trust in their gods entirely. The new Ebla also had an imposing ring of double walls, which might impress any enemies. The outer walls had a perimeter of almost two miles. They are still clearly discernible.

Nevertheless, even the reconstructed Ebla came to an end. Possibly the Hittites in about 1600 B.C.E. inflicted the final defeat on what had been a great power. According to an ancient poem, Ebla was "shattered like a ceramic vase." It soon began to vanish from history. A document written by crusaders marching on Jerusalem in 1098 mentions the site where Ebla once stood, referring to it as a remote outpost in the country, named Mardikh. Ebla had been virtually forgotten, to be rediscovered only after many centuries.

A stela dedicated to the goddess Ishtar



EBLA AND THE BIBLE

An article published in 1976 in the *Biblical Archeologist* magazine aroused the curiosity of Bible scholars. The decipherer of the Ebla tablets raised the possibility that, among other things, the tablets cited names of people and places mentioned centuries later in the Bible. Perhaps going beyond what the article actually said, some began to write that Ebla had yielded archaeological proof of the trustworthiness of the Genesis account.* Jesuit Mitchell Dahood claimed that the "clay tablets [from Ebla] are illuminating the obscurities of the Bible." He believed, for example, that they could shed light on "the problem of the antiquity of the name of the God of Israel."

Now these texts are being examined with greater objectivity. Given the fact that both Hebrew and Eblaite are Semitic languages, it cannot be ruled out that some names of cities or individuals may be similar or identical to those in the Bible. Yet, this does not prove that they refer to the same locations or people. How far discoveries at Ebla will influence Biblical studies remains to be seen. As to the divine name, the writer of the *Biblical Archeologist* article has denied that he ever said that "Yahweh" was mentioned in the Ebla texts. For some, the cuneiform sign interpreted as *ja* indicates just one of the many deities in the Eblaite pantheon, while a number of other specialists explain it as no more than a grammatical sign. In either case, it does not refer to the one true God, Jehovah.—Deuteronomy 4:35; Isaiah 45:5.

* For a discussion on how archaeology supports the Bible account, see chapter 4 of the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

"THE GREAT DAY OF JEHOVAH IS NEAR"

"The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much."—ZEPHANIAH 1:14.

A RADIANT young woman eagerly awaits the arrival of her wedding day. An expectant mother lovingly looks forward to the birth of her baby. An exhausted worker deeply desires the start of his long-awaited vacation. What do they have in common? They all wait for a special day—a day that will have an impact on their lives. Their emotions run deep and yet are very different. The day they await will eventually arrive, and when it does, they hope to be ready for it.

² True Christians today likewise eagerly await the arrival of a special day. It is the great "day of Jehovah." (Isaiah 13:9; Joel 2:1; 2 Peter 3:12) What is this coming "day of Jehovah," and how will its arrival affect mankind? Moreover, how can we make sure that we are ready for its arrival? It is imperative that we seek the answers to these questions now because evidence indicates the truthfulness of the following words of the Bible: "The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much."—Zephaniah 1:14.

"The Great Day of Jehovah"

³ What is "the great day of Jehovah"? Throughout the Scriptures, the expression "the day of Jehovah" refers to special times when Jehovah executed judgment on his enemies and glorified his great name. The un-

- 1, 2. (a) What special day do Christians await?
(b) What questions do we need to ask, and why?
3. What is "the great day of Jehovah"?

faithful people of Judah and Jerusalem as well as the oppressive inhabitants of Babylon and Egypt all faced 'days of Jehovah' when they experienced the execution of Jehovah's judgments. (Isaiah 2:1, 10-12; 13:1-6; Jeremiah 46:7-10) However, the greatest "day of Jehovah" still lies ahead. It is the "day" when Jehovah's judgment will be executed on those who have defamed his name. It will start with the destruction of "Babylon the Great," the world empire of false religion, and culminate in the annihilation of the rest of the wicked system of things at the war of Armageddon.—Revelation 16:14, 16; 17:5, 15-17; 19:11-21.

⁴ Whether they realize it or not, most of mankind should dread this fast-approaching day. Why? Through the prophet Zephaniah, Jehovah answers: "That day is a day of fury, a day of distress and of anguish, a day of storm and of desolation, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick gloom." Fearsome indeed! Moreover, the prophet says: "I will cause distress to mankind . . . because it is against Jehovah that they have sinned."—Zephaniah 1:15, 17.

⁵ Millions of others, however, eagerly anticipate the arrival of Jehovah's day. Why? They know that it is a time of salvation and deliverance for the righteous, a day in which Jehovah himself is highly exalted

4. Why should most of mankind dread the fast-approaching day of Jehovah?
5. What positive viewpoint do millions have regarding Jehovah's day, and why?

and his glorious name sanctified. (Joel 3:16, 17; Zephaniah 3:12-17) Whether that day is dreaded or eagerly anticipated depends largely on what people are doing with their lives now. How do you view the approach of that day? Are you ready for it? Does the fact that Jehovah's day is on the horizon affect your day-to-day life right now?

"There Will Come Ridiculers With Their Ridicule"

⁶ Despite the urgency of the situation, most of earth's inhabitants are not concerned about the approaching "day of Jehovah." They mock and ridicule those who warn them of its imminent arrival. True Christians are not surprised by this. They remember the warning recorded by the apostle Peter: "You know this first, that in the last days there will come ridiculers with their ridicule, proceeding according to their own desires and saying: 'Where is this promised presence of his? Why, from the day our forefathers fell asleep in death, all things are continuing exactly as from creation's beginning!'"—2 Peter 3:3, 4.

⁷ What will help us to resist such negative thinking and thereby maintain a sense of urgency? Peter tells us: "I am arousing your clear thinking faculties by way of a reminder, that you should remember the sayings previously spoken by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles." (2 Peter 3:1, 2) Our paying attention to prophetic warnings will help us to 'arouse our clear thinking faculties.' Perhaps we have heard these reminders repeatedly, but it is vital that we now, more than

6. How do most people view the "day of Jehovah," and why are true Christians not surprised by this?
7. What will help us to maintain a sense of urgency?

ever, continue to pay attention to these warnings.—Isaiah 34:1-4; Luke 21:34-36.

⁸ Why do some ignore these reminders? Peter continues: "*According to their wish*, this fact escapes their notice, that there were heavens from of old and an earth standing compactly out of water and in the midst of water by the word of God; and by those means the world of that time suffered destruction when it was deluged with water." (2 Peter 3:5, 6) Yes, there are those who do not wish for Jehovah's day to arrive. They do not want their lives to be disrupted. They do not want to be held accountable to Jehovah for their selfish lifestyle! As Peter states, they live "according to their own desires."

⁹ Because of "their wish," these ridiculers prefer to ignore that Jehovah has intervened in mankind's affairs in the past. Both Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter refer to two such events—"the days of Noah" and "the days of Lot." (Luke 17:26-30; 2 Peter 2:5-9) Before the Flood, people took no note of the warning Noah gave. Likewise, prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the eyes of his sons-in-law, Lot "seemed like a man who was joking."—Genesis 19:14.

8. Why do many ignore Bible reminders?

9. What attitude was displayed by people in the days of Noah and of Lot?



¹⁰ It is no different today. Yet, note Jehovah's reaction to those who take no note: "I will give attention to the men who are congealing upon their dregs and who are saying in their heart, 'Jehovah will not do good, and he will not do bad.' And their wealth must come to be for pillage and their houses for a desolate waste. And they will build houses, but they will not have occupancy; and they will plant vineyards, but they will not drink the wine of them." (Zephaniah 1:12, 13) People may continue to go about their "normal" daily activities, but they will not gain any permanent benefit from their hard work. Why? Because Jehovah's day will arrive suddenly, and any material riches they may have accumulated will not save them.—Zephaniah 1:18.

"Keep in Expectation of It"

¹¹ Unlike the wicked world around us, we must keep in mind the admonition recorded by the prophet Habakkuk: "The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be

10. What is Jehovah's reaction to those who take no note?

11. What admonition should we keep in mind?

As in Noah's day, ridiculers will be taken by surprise when Jehovah acts

late." (Habakkuk 2:3) Even if that day may appear to delay from our imperfect viewpoint, we must remember that Jehovah is not slow. His day will come exactly on time, at an hour that humans do not expect. —Mark 13:33; 2 Peter 3:9, 10.

¹² Emphasizing the importance of keeping in expectation of Jehovah's day, Jesus warned that even some of his followers would lose their sense of urgency. He foretold about them: "If ever that evil slave should say in his heart, 'My master is delaying,' and should start to beat his fellow slaves and should eat and drink with the confirmed drunkards, the master of that slave will come on a day that he does not expect and in an hour that he does not know, and will punish him with the greatest severity." (Matthew 24:48-51) In contrast, the faithful and discreet slave class loyally keeps its sense of urgency. The slave class has kept on the watch and proved itself ready. Jesus has appointed it "over all his belongings" here on the earth.—Matthew 24:42-47.

The Need for Urgency

¹³ It was imperative that first-century Christians keep their sense of urgency. They needed to take immediate action to flee Jerusalem when they saw that city "surrounded by encamped armies." (Luke 21:20, 21) That

happened in the year 66 C.E. Notice how Jesus highlighted the need for urgency on the part of Christians back then: "Let the man on the housetop not come down to take the goods out of his house; and let the man in the field not return to the house to

12. Of what did Jesus warn, and how does this contrast with the actions of Jesus' faithful followers?

13. How did Jesus highlight the need for a sense of urgency?





Christians had to act without delay when they saw Jerusalem "surrounded by encamped armies"

pick up his outer garment." (Matthew 24:17, 18) In view of the fact that history shows that Jerusalem survived for four more years, why did Christians need to heed Jesus' words so urgently in 66 C.E.?

¹⁴ While it is true that the Roman army did not destroy Jerusalem until 70 C.E., the intervening years were not trouble free. Far from it! Those years were filled with violence and bloodshed. One historian describes the situation in Jerusalem during that time as "a fearfully bloody civil war, accompanied by acts of horrid cruelty." Young men were recruited to strengthen the fortifications, to take up weapons, and to serve in the military. They underwent daily military exercises. Those who were not in favor of extreme measures were viewed as traitors. If Christians had lingered in the city, they would have found themselves in an extremely dangerous position.—Matthew 26:52; Mark 12:17.

¹⁵ It should be noted that Jesus said that "those in Judea," not just Jerusalem, were to start fleeing. This was important because within a few months of their withdrawal

14, 15. Why was it imperative for first-century Christians to act without delay on seeing Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies?

from Jerusalem, the Roman troops once again renewed their war operations. First, Galilee was subdued in 67 C.E., and then Judaea was systematically conquered the following year. This resulted in great misery throughout the countryside. It also became increasingly difficult for any Jew to escape from Jerusalem itself. The city gates were guarded, and any trying to escape were assumed to be deserting to the Romans.

¹⁶ With all these factors in mind, we can understand why Jesus emphasized the urgency of the situation. Christians had to be willing to make sacrifices, not allowing themselves to become sidetracked by material possessions. They had to be willing to "say good-bye to all [their] belongings" in order to obey Jesus' warning. (Luke 14:33) Those who promptly obeyed and fled to the other side of the Jordan were saved.

Maintaining Our Sense of Urgency

¹⁷ Bible prophecies clearly reveal that we are living deep in the time of the end. As never before, we need to strengthen our sense of urgency. A soldier in peacetime does

16. What attitude did first-century Christians need to have in order to survive that time of distress?
17. Why should we strengthen our sense of urgency?

not feel the tension and danger of battle. Still, if as a result, he feels no urgency to stay alert and is suddenly called into action, he may well be unprepared, with fatal consequences. The same is true spiritually. If we allow our sense of urgency to fade, we may be unprepared to fend off attacks that come our way and may be caught unawares when Jehovah's day finally arrives. (Luke 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:4) If any have 'drawn back from following Jehovah,' now is the time for them to seek him again.—Zephaniah 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9.

¹⁸ No wonder the apostle Peter admonishes us to keep close in mind "the presence of the day of Jehovah"! How can we do this? One way is by being involved "in holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion." (2 Peter 3:11, 12) Keeping busy in such activities will help us to anticipate eagerly the arrival of "the day of Jehovah." The Greek word translated "keeping close in mind" literally means "speeding up." We cannot actually speed up the time that remains until the arrival of Jehovah's day. Yet, as we wait for that day, the time will seem to pass much more quickly if we are busy in God's service.—1 Corinthians 15:58.

¹⁹ Meditating on God's Word and contemplating the reminders found therein will likewise enable us to do this—"earnestly long for (expect and hasten) the coming" of that day, yes, to be in "constant expectation" of it. (2 Peter 3:12, *The Amplified Bible; The New Testament*, by William Barclay) Included in these reminders are the numerous prophecies that foretell not only the arrival of Jehovah's day but also the bounteous blessings that will be bestowed upon those who 'keep in expectation of Jehovah.'—Zephaniah 3:8.

18, 19. What will help us to keep close in mind "the presence of the day of Jehovah"?

**The yeartext for 2007
will be: "The great day
of Jehovah is near."
—Zephaniah 1:14.**

²⁰ Now is truly the time for all of us to take to heart the exhortation given through the prophet Zephaniah: "Before there comes upon you people the burning anger of Jehovah, before there comes upon you the day of Jehovah's anger, seek Jehovah, all you meek ones of the earth, who have practiced His own judicial decision. Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Probably you may be concealed in the day of Jehovah's anger."—Zephaniah 2:2, 3.

²¹ How appropriate, then, is the yeartext that has been selected for the 2007 calendar year: "The great day of Jehovah is near." God's people are convinced that "it is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much." (Zephaniah 1:14) "It will not be late." (Habakkuk 2:3) So as we await that day, may we be ever alert to the times in which we live, realizing that the final fulfillment of these prophecies is near at hand!

20. What exhortation should we take to heart?
21. What will be the determination of God's people during 2007?

Can You Answer?

- What is "the great day of Jehovah"?
- Why do many ignore the urgency of the times?
- Why did Christians in the first century need to act with a sense of urgency?
- How can we heighten our sense of urgency?

JEHOVAH GIVES “HOLY SPIRIT TO THOSE ASKING HIM”

“If you, although being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!”—LUKE 11:13.

ICANNOT face this on my own. Only with the help of the holy spirit will I be able to endure this trial! Have you ever expressed such heartfelt sentiments? Most Christians have. Perhaps you did so after you learned that you had contracted a serious illness. Or perhaps it was at the time when your lifelong marriage mate fell asleep in death. Or it may have been when your once-sunny disposition was overshadowed by the dark clouds of depression. At painful times in life, you may have felt that you were surviving only because Jehovah's holy spirit provided you with “power beyond what is normal.”—2 Corinthians 4:7-9; Psalm 40:1, 2.

² True Christians have to deal with increasing pressure and opposition from today's ungodly world. (1 John 5:19) In addition, followers of Christ are attacked by Satan the Devil himself, who is waging a vicious war against those who “observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus.” (Revelation 12:12, 17) It is no wonder, therefore, that we need the support of God's spirit now more than ever. What can we do to make sure that we continue to receive God's holy spirit in abundance? And why can we be certain that

1. When do we especially need the help of the holy spirit?
2. (a) What challenges do true Christians face?
(b) What questions will we consider in this article?

Jehovah is more than willing to give us the strength needed in times of trial? We find the answers to these questions in two of Jesus' illustrations.

Pray Persistently

³ One of Jesus' disciples once requested: “Lord, teach us how to pray.” (Luke 11:1) In answer, Jesus gave his disciples two related illustrations. The first is about a man who is hosting a guest, and the second is about a father who listens to his son. Let us consider each of these two illustrations.

⁴ Jesus said: “Who of you will have a friend and will go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, loan me three loaves, because a friend of mine has just come to me on a journey and I have nothing to set before him?’ And that one from inside says in reply, ‘Quit making me trouble. The door is already locked, and my young children are with me in bed; I cannot rise up and give you anything.’ I tell you, Although he will not rise up and give him anything because of being his friend, certainly because of his bold persistence he will get up and give him what things he needs.” Jesus then explained how this illustration applies to the practice of prayer, saying: “Accordingly I say to you, Keep on asking, and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on

- 3, 4. What illustration did Jesus relate, and how did he apply it to prayer?

knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone asking receives, and everyone seeking finds, and to everyone knocking it will be opened.”—Luke 11:5-10.

⁵ This vivid illustration of a persistent man shows what our disposition should be when we pray. Note that Jesus says that the man succeeds in obtaining what he needs “because of his bold persistence.” (Luke 11:8) The expression “bold persistence” occurs only once in the Bible. It is translated from a Greek word that literally means “shamelessness.” Often shamelessness indicates a bad trait. However, when shamelessness or persistence is shown for a good cause, it can be a commendable quality. That is the case with the host in the illustration. He does not feel any shame in asking persistently for what he needs. Since Jesus presents this host as an ex-

5. What does the illustration about the persistent man teach us about our disposition when praying?

*What can we learn from
Jesus' illustration about the
persistent host?*

ample for us, our prayers should likewise be persistent. Jehovah wants us to ‘keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking.’ In response, he will “give holy spirit to those asking him.”

⁶ Jesus shows us not only how we should pray—with bold persistence—but also why we should do so. To discern that lesson clearly, we should consider how those who listened to Jesus’ illustration about the persistent host viewed the custom of extending hospitality. Numerous passages in the Scriptures show that in Bible times, caring for visitors was a custom that was taken seriously, especially by God’s servants. (Genesis 18:2-5; Hebrews 13:2) Failing to show hospitality was a disgrace. (Luke 7:36-38, 44-46) With that in mind, let us look again at Jesus’ story.

⁷ The host in the illustration receives a visitor in the middle of the night. The host feels compelled to serve food for his guest but has “nothing to set before him.” This, in his view, is an emergency! He has to get some bread, no matter what it takes. So he goes to a friend of his and shamelessly wakes him up. “Friend, loan me three loaves,” the host calls out. He persists with his request until he gets what he needs. Only then, with the loaves in his possession, can he be a proper host.

The More Needed—The More Asked For

⁸ What does this illustration show about the reason why we pray persistently? The man kept asking for bread because he felt that having those loaves in his possession was absolutely necessary to carry out his duty as a host. (Isaiah 58:5-7) Without

6. In Jesus’ day, how was the custom of showing hospitality viewed?
7. Why is the host in Jesus’ illustration not ashamed to wake up his friend?
8. What will move us to pray persistently for holy spirit?



*Do you pray persistently
for God's holy spirit?*

bread, he would fall short. Comparably, because we realize that having God's spirit is absolutely necessary to carry out our ministry as true Christians, we keep praying to God, asking for that spirit. (Zechariah 4:6) Without it, we will fail. (Matthew 26:41) Do you see the important conclusion that we can draw from this illustration? If we view God's spirit as something we urgently need, we are more likely to persist in asking for it.

⁹ To put this lesson in a present-day setting, imagine that one of your family members becomes sick in the middle of the night. Would you awaken a doctor to ask him for help? Not if the patient has a minor complaint. However, if he is having a heart attack, you would not be ashamed to call a doctor. Why? Because you face an emergency. You realize that skilled help is absolutely necessary. Not asking for help could prove fatal. Similarly, true Christians face an ongo-

9, 10. (a) Illustrate why we need to be persistent in asking God for his spirit. (b) What question should we ask ourselves, and why?

ing emergency, so to speak. After all, Satan goes about like "a roaring lion," trying to devour us. (1 Peter 5:8) For us to stay alive spiritually, the help of God's spirit is absolutely necessary. Not asking for God's help could be fatal. Hence, with bold persistence we ask God for his holy spirit. (Ephesians 3:14-16) Only by doing so will we maintain the strength needed to 'endure to the end.' —Matthew 10:22; 24:13.

¹⁰ It is therefore crucial for us to pause at times and ask ourselves, 'Really, how persistent are my prayers?' Remember, when we fully realize that we need God's help, our prayers for holy spirit will be more persistent.

What Moves Us to Pray With Confidence?

¹¹ Jesus' illustration of the persistent host highlights the disposition of the one who prays—the believer. The next illustration highlights the disposition of the one who hears prayers—Jehovah God. Jesus asked: "Indeed, which father is there among you who, if his son asks for a fish, will perhaps hand him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he also asks for an egg, will hand him a scorpion?" Jesus went on to make the application, saying: "Therefore, if you, although being wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more so will the Father in heaven give holy spirit to those asking him!"—Luke 11:11-13.

¹² With this example of a father responding to his son, Jesus reveals how Jehovah feels about those who turn to him in prayer. (Luke 10:22) First, note the contrast. Unlike the man in the first illustration who was re-

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11. How did Jesus apply the illustration of a father and his son to prayer?
 12. How does the illustration of the father hearing his son's request highlight Jehovah's willingness to respond to our prayers?

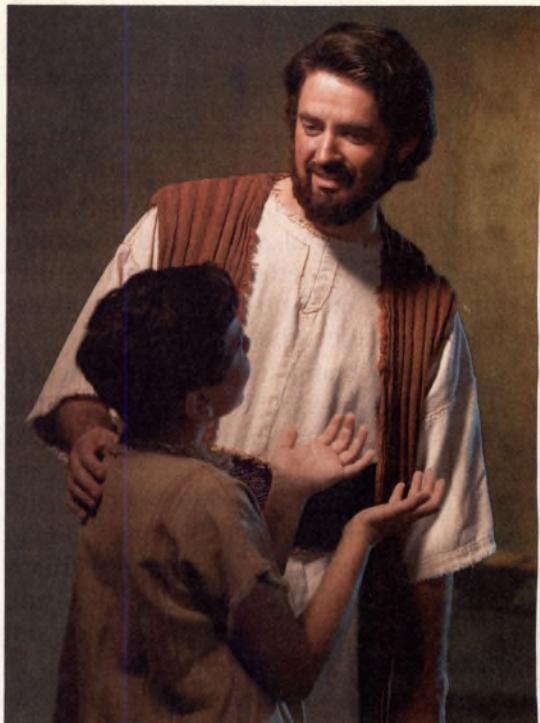
luctant to respond to a call for help, Jehovah is like a caring human parent, who is eager to respond to a request from his child. (Psalm 50:15) Jesus further reveals Jehovah's willing disposition toward us by reasoning from the lesser to the greater. He says that if a human father, though "being wicked" because of inherited sinfulness, gives a good gift to his son, how much more so can we expect that our heavenly Father, being benevolent, will give holy spirit to his family of worshippers!—James 1:17.

¹³ What is the lesson for us? We can be confident that when we ask our heavenly Father for holy spirit, he is more than willing to grant our request. (1 John 5:14) When we turn to him in prayer again and again, Jehovah will never say, as it were: "Quit making me trouble. The door is already locked." (Luke 11:7) On the contrary, Jesus stated: "Keep on asking, and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9, 10) Yes, Jehovah "will answer us in the day that we call."—Psalm 20:9; 145:18.

¹⁴ Jesus' illustration of the caring father also emphasizes that Jehovah's goodness is far greater than the goodness shown by any human parent. Hence, none of us should ever feel that the trials we may be facing must be an expression of God's displeasure with us. It is our archenemy, Satan, who wants us to think that way. (Job 4:1, 7, 8; John 8:44) There is no Scriptural basis for such self-condemnatory thoughts. Jehovah does not try us "with evil things." (James 1:13) He does not hand us a serpentlike trial or a scorpionlike test. Our heavenly Father gives "*good* things to those asking

13. Of what can we be sure when we pray to Jehovah?

14. (a) What erroneous idea troubles some who face trials? (b) When facing trials, why may we pray to Jehovah with confidence?



What do we learn about Jehovah from the illustration of a caring father?

him." (Matthew 7:11; Luke 11:13) Indeed, the more we appreciate Jehovah's goodness and his willingness to help us, the more we will be moved to pray with confidence. As we do, we too will be able to express sentiments like those of the psalmist who wrote: "Truly God has heard; he has paid attention to the voice of my prayer."—Psalm 10:17; 66:19.

How the Holy Spirit Is Our Helper

¹⁵ Shortly before his death, Jesus repeated the assurance he had given in his illustrations. Speaking about the holy spirit, he told his apostles: "I will request the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever." (John 14:16) Thus Jesus promised

15. (a) What promise did Jesus make regarding the holy spirit? (b) What is one way that the holy spirit helps us?

that the helper, or holy spirit, would be with his followers in times to come, including in our day. What is one significant way that we today experience such support? The holy spirit helps us to endure various trials. How so? The apostle Paul, who faced tests himself, described in a letter to the Christians in Corinth how God's spirit came to his aid. Let us briefly consider what he wrote.

¹⁶ First, Paul openly told his fellow believers that he was dealing with "a thorn in the flesh," a trial of some sort. Then, he said: "I three times entreated the Lord [Jehovah] that it might depart from me." (2 Corinthians 12:7, 8) Even though Paul begged God to remove his affliction, it remained. Perhaps you face a similar situation today. Like Paul, you may have prayed with persistence and with confidence, asking Jehovah to remove a trial. Despite your repeated petitions, however, the problem still confronts you. Does that mean that Jehovah did not respond to your prayers and that his spirit is not helping you? Not at all! (Psalm 10:1, 17) Note what the apostle Paul said next.

¹⁷ In response to Paul's prayers, God told him: "My undeserved kindness is sufficient for you; for my power is being made perfect in weakness." Paul said: "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather boast as respects my weak-

16. How may our situation be similar to that of Paul?

17. How did Jehovah answer Paul's prayers?

How Would You Answer?

- What do we need to do to receive God's holy spirit?
- Why can we be confident that Jehovah will respond to our prayers for holy spirit?
- How does the holy spirit help us to endure trials?

nesses, that the power of the Christ may like a tent remain over me." (2 Corinthians 12:9; Psalm 147:5) Hence, Paul experienced that through Christ, God's powerful protection was spread over him like a tent. Today, Jehovah answers our prayers in a similar manner. He spreads his protection like a shelter over his servants.

¹⁸ Of course, a tent does not stop the rains from falling or the winds from blowing, but it does provide some protection from those elements. Likewise, the shelter provided by "the power of the Christ" does not stop trials from befalling us or hardships from being brought against us. Yet, it does give spiritual protection against the harmful elements of this world and the attacks of its ruler, Satan. (Revelation 7:9, 15, 16) Therefore, even if you are dealing with a trial that does not 'depart from you,' you can be certain that Jehovah is aware of your struggle and that he has responded to "the sound of your outcry." (Isaiah 30:19; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) Paul wrote: "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but along with the temptation he will also make the way out in order for you to be able to endure it."—1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:6, 7.

¹⁹ Granted, the present "last days" of this ungodly world are characterized by "critical times hard to deal with." (2 Timothy 3:1) Even so, for servants of God, these times are not impossible to deal with. Why not? Because of the support and protection of God's holy spirit, which Jehovah gives willingly and abundantly to all those who ask him for it with persistence and confidence. May we, therefore, be resolved to keep on praying for holy spirit every day.—Psalm 34:6; 1 John 5:14, 15.

18. Why are we able to endure trials?

19. What are you determined to do, and why?

JEHOVAH WILL “CAUSE JUSTICE TO BE DONE”

“Shall not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?”—LUKE 18:7.

AROUND the world, Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy the company of Christian brothers and sisters who have served Jehovah faithfully for years. Do you know some of these dear ones personally? Perhaps an elderly sister comes to mind, one who was baptized many years ago and rarely misses a meeting at the Kingdom Hall. Or you may think of an aged brother who loyally supports the congregation's field ministry activities week after week and has done so for decades. Granted, many of these faithful ones thought that by now Armageddon would have come and gone. Yet, the fact that this unjust world still exists has neither undermined their confidence in Jehovah's promises nor weakened their determination to 'endure to the end.' (Matthew 24:13) The depth of faith shown by such loyal servants of Jehovah is truly a source of encouragement for the entire congregation.—Psalm 147:11.

² At times, though, we may observe the opposite. Some Witnesses shared in the ministry for years, but over time their faith in Jehovah weakened, and they stopped associating with the Christian congregation. It saddens us that former companions have left Jehovah, and it is our heartfelt desire to keep on helping each "lost sheep" to return to the flock. (Psalm 119:176; Romans 15:1) Even so, these opposite outcomes—some

1. Who are a source of encouragement to you, and why?
2. What situation saddens us?

staying faithful while others lose faith—raise questions. What enables numerous Witnesses to keep their faith in Jehovah's promises while others lose it? What can we personally do to ensure that our conviction that "the great day of Jehovah" is approaching remains firm? (Zephaniah 1:14) Let us consider an illustration found in the Gospel of Luke.

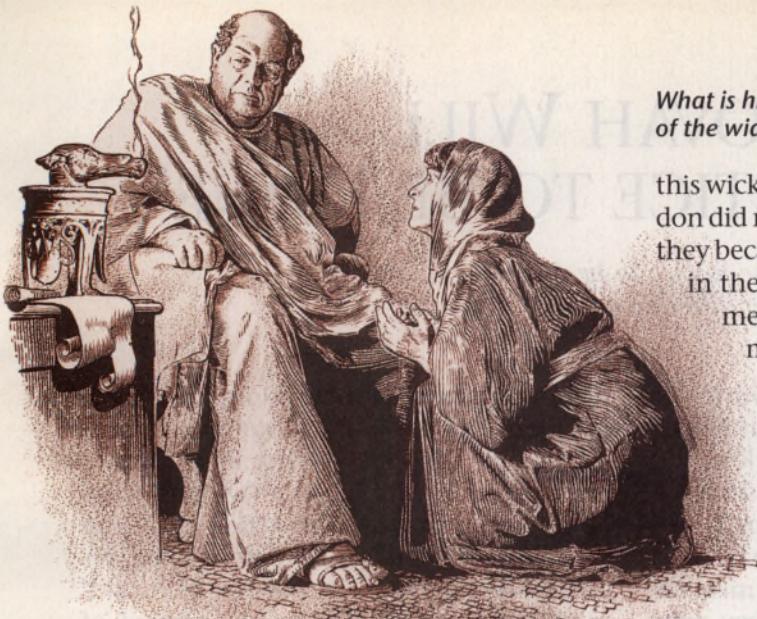
A Warning for Those Living “When the Son of Man Arrives”

³ In Luke chapter 18, we find Jesus' illustration regarding a widow and a judge. It is similar to the illustration about the persistent host, which we discussed in the preceding article. (Luke 11:5-13) However, the context of the Bible passage containing the illustration of the widow and the judge shows that this especially applies to those living "when the Son of man arrives" in Kingdom power, which time period began in 1914.—Luke 18:8.*

⁴ Leading up to the illustration, Jesus stated that the evidence of his presence in Kingdom power would be as widely discernible "as the lightning" that "shines from one part under heaven to another part

* To appreciate fully the import of this illustration, read Luke 17:22-33. Note how the references to "the Son of man" at Luke 17:22, 24, 30 bear on the question raised at Luke 18:8.

3. Who can especially benefit from the illustration of the widow and the judge, and why?
4. What did Jesus discuss before he related the illustration found in Luke chapter 18?



What is highlighted by the illustration of the widow and the judge?

this wicked world. However, when Armageddon did not occur by the time they expected, they became disheartened. Their confidence in the nearness of Jehovah's day of judgment faded. They slowed down in the ministry and gradually became so involved in the mundane matters of life that little time was left for spiritual matters. (Luke 8:11, 13, 14) In time, they 'returned to the things behind'—how sad!

The Need "Always to Pray"

⁶ What can we do to make sure that our firm confidence in the fulfillment of Jehovah's promises does not weaken? (Hebrews 3:14) Jesus addressed that question right after he warned the disciples not to turn back to Satan's wicked world.

⁷ Luke reports that Jesus "went on to tell them an illustration with regard to the need for them always to pray and not to give up." Jesus said: "In a certain city there was a certain judge that had no fear of God and had no respect for man. But there was a widow in that city and she kept going to him, saying, 'See that I get justice from my adversary at law.' Well, for a while he was unwilling, but afterward he said to himself, 'Although I do not fear God or respect a man, at any rate, because of this widow's continually making me trouble, I will see that she gets justice, so that she will not keep coming and pummeling me to a finish.'"

⁸ After giving this narration, Jesus made the application: "Hear what the judge, although unrighteous, said! Certainly, then, shall not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and

under heaven." (Luke 17:24; 21:10, 29-33) Nonetheless, most people living in "the time of the end" would not pay attention to that clear evidence. (Daniel 12:4) Why not? For the same reason that people in the time of Noah and that of Lot ignored Jehovah's warnings. Back in those times, people 'were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building until the day that they were destroyed.' (Luke 17:26-29) They lost their lives because they were so absorbed in those common activities that they did not pay attention to God's will. (Matthew 24:39) Today, people in general are likewise so caught up in daily affairs that they fail to see the evidence that the end of this ungodly world is near.—Luke 17:30.

⁵ Clearly, Jesus was concerned that his followers too could become distracted by Satan's world, even to the point that they might "return to the things behind." (Luke 17:22, 31) And, indeed, this has happened to some Christians. For years such ones longed for the day when Jehovah will put an end to

5. (a) To whom did Jesus direct a warning, and why? (b) What has caused some to lose their faith?

6-8. (a) Relate the illustration of the widow and the judge. (b) How did Jesus apply this illustration?

night, even though he is long-suffering toward them? I tell you, He will cause justice to be done to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man arrives, will he really find the faith on the earth?"—Luke 18:1-8.

"See That I Get Justice"

⁹ The central theme of this vivid illustration stands out clearly. It is mentioned by both characters in the illustration as well as by Jesus. The widow pleaded: "See that I get justice." The judge said: "I will see that she gets justice." Jesus asked: "Shall not God cause justice to be done?" And of Jehovah, Jesus stated: "He will cause justice to be done to them speedily." (Luke 18:3, 5, 7, 8) When in particular will God "cause justice to be done"?

¹⁰ In the first century, the "days for meting out justice" (or, "days of vengeance," *Kingdom Interlinear*) arrived in 70 C.E. when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. (Luke 21:22) For God's people today, justice will be done on "the great day of Jehovah." (Zephaniah 1:14; Matthew 24:21) At that time, Jehovah will "repay tribulation to those who make tribulation" for his people "as [Jesus Christ] brings vengeance upon those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news about our Lord Jesus."—2 Thessalonians 1:6-8; Romans 12:19.

¹¹ How, though, should we understand Jesus' assurance that Jehovah will cause justice to be done "speedily"? God's Word shows that "even though [Jehovah] is long-suffering," he will quickly execute justice when the time is ripe. (Luke 18:7, 8; 2 Peter 3:

9. What theme stands out in the illustration of the widow and the judge?

10. (a) When was justice meted out in the first century? (b) When and how will justice be done for God's servants today?

11. In what way will justice come "speedily"?

9, 10) In Noah's time, when the Flood arrived, the wicked were destroyed without delay. Likewise, in Lot's day, when fire rained from heaven, the wicked perished. Jesus said: "The same way it will be on that day when the Son of man is to be revealed." (Luke 17:27-30) Again, the wicked will experience "sudden destruction." (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3) Indeed, we can be fully confident that Jehovah will not allow Satan's world to exist for one day longer than justice requires.

"He Will Cause Justice to Be Done"

¹² Jesus' illustration of the widow and the judge highlights still other important truths. In applying the illustration, Jesus said: "Hear what the judge, although unrighteous, said! Certainly, then, shall not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones?" Of course, Jesus was not comparing Jehovah with the judge as if to say that God would treat believers in the same way. Instead, Jesus taught his followers a lesson about Jehovah by highlighting a contrast between that judge and God. What are some of the ways in which they can be contrasted?

¹³ The judge in Jesus' illustration was "unrighteous," whereas "God is a righteous Judge." (Psalm 7:11; 33:5) The judge had no interest whatsoever in the widow as a person, but Jehovah is interested in each individual. (2 Chronicles 6:29, 30) The judge was unwilling to help the widow, but Jehovah is willing—yes, eager—to come to the aid of those serving Him. (Isaiah 30:18, 19) What is the lesson? If the unrighteous judge listened to the requests of the widow and granted her justice, how much more so will Jehovah hear the prayers of his people and certainly

12, 13. (a) How does Jesus' illustration of the widow and the judge teach a lesson? (b) Why can we be certain that Jehovah will hear our prayers and cause justice to be done?

cause justice to be done for them!—Proverbs 15:29.

¹⁴ Therefore, those who lose faith in the coming of God's day of judgment commit a grave error. Why? By giving up their firm belief that "the great day of Jehovah" is near, they question, in effect, whether Jehovah can be trusted to keep his promises faithfully. But no one can rightfully question God's faithfulness. (Job 9:12) A valid question is, Will we personally remain faithful? And that is exactly the subject that Jesus raised at the end of the illustration about the widow and the judge.

"Will He Really Find This Faith on the Earth?"

¹⁵ Jesus posed the intriguing question: "When the Son of man arrives, will he really find this faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8, footnote) The expression "this faith" indicates that Jesus referred, not to faith in a general sense, but to faith of a particular kind—faith like that possessed by the widow. Jesus did not answer his question. He raised it so that his disciples would think about the quality of their own faith. Was it gradually

14. Why should we not lose faith in the coming of God's day of judgment?

15. (a) What question did Jesus pose, and why?
(b) What should we ask ourselves?

Do You Recall?

- What has caused some Christians to lose faith?
- Why can we have firm faith in the coming of Jehovah's day of judgment?
- What reasons do we have to persevere in prayer?
- How will persistent prayer help to prevent us from losing our faith?

weakening, so that they were in danger of returning to the things they had left behind? Or did they have the sort of faith exemplified by the widow? Today, we should likewise ask ourselves, 'What kind of faith does "the Son of man" find in my heart?'

¹⁶ For us to be among those who will receive the justice of Jehovah, we need to follow the course of that widow. What sort of faith did she have? She showed her faith by persistently "going to [the judge], saying, 'See that I get justice.'" That widow persisted in order to receive justice from an unrighteous man. Similarly, God's servants today can be confident that they will receive the justice of Jehovah—even if it takes more time than they had expected. Further, they show their confidence in God's promises by persistent prayers—yes, by 'crying out to Jehovah day and night.' (Luke 18:7) Indeed, if a Christian were to stop praying for justice to be done, he would show that he had lost confidence that Jehovah is going to act in behalf of his servants.

¹⁷ The particular circumstances of that widow show us that we have additional reasons for persevering in prayer. Consider some of the differences between her situation and ours. The widow kept approaching the judge even though no one gave her any encouragement to do so, but God's Word gives us much encouragement to "persevere in prayer." (Romans 12:12) The widow had no assurance that her requests would be granted, but Jehovah has assured us that justice will be done. By means of his prophet, Jehovah stated: "Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late." (Habakkuk 2:3; Psalm 97:10) The widow had no helper

16. What sort of faith did the widow have?

17. What reasons do we have to persevere in prayer and keep our faith in the certain coming of Jehovah's day of judgment?



*Millions today firmly believe
that God shall "cause
justice to be done"*

to plead for her in order to add force to her petition. But we have a powerful helper, Jesus, "who is on the right hand of God, who also pleads for us." (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25) Hence, if the widow, despite her challenging situation, kept pleading with the judge in hopes that justice would be done, how much more so should we keep our faith in the certain coming of Jehovah's day of judgment!

¹⁸ The illustration of the widow teaches us that there is a close link between prayer and faith and that our persistent prayers can counteract influences that could weaken our faith. Of course, this does not mean that a mere outward show of offering prayers is a remedy against loss of faith. (Matthew 6:7, 8) When we are moved to pray because we realize that we are fully dependent upon God, then prayer draws us close to God and strengthens our faith. And since faith is required for salvation, no wonder Jesus found it necessary to encourage his disciples "always to pray and not to give up"! (Luke 18:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:13) Granted, the coming

of "the great day of Jehovah" does not depend on our prayers—it will come whether we pray for it or not. But whether we will personally receive justice and survive God's war or not definitely does depend on the faith we have and the prayerful course we pursue.

¹⁹ As we recall, Jesus asked: "When the Son of man arrives, will he really find this faith on the earth?" What is the answer to his intriguing question? How happy we are that millions of faithful servants of Jehovah around the earth today prove by their prayers, patience, and perseverance that they do have this faith! Thus, Jesus' question can be answered in the affirmative. Yes, despite the injustices that Satan's world presently inflicts upon us, we firmly believe that God shall "cause justice to be done for his chosen ones."

18. How will prayer strengthen our faith and help us to receive justice?

19. How do we prove that we firmly believe that God will "cause justice to be done"?

Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*?

Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

- **What can help a true Christian if a loved one leaves Jehovah?**

Build up yourself and other faithful family members. Stay absorbed in spiritual activities. Be available to help others. Never give up hope that the loved one may return. Do not blame yourself. Respect God's arrangement for discipline, and express your feelings to friends.—9/1, pages 18-21.

- **What are two ways that the Scriptures help to identify "the last days"?**

The Bible foretells events that would take place during "the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 24:3, 7, 8; Luke 21:11) It also describes changes in the attitudes and actions of people who live during "the last days." (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Significantly, the good news of the kingdom was to be preached during this time.—9/15, pages 4-6.

- **What is the congregation's responsibility if a Christian driving an automobile has an accident that results in the death of others?**

Elders looking into the matter may find that there is no bloodguilt because the driver had little or no control over what caused the fatality. But if there is bloodguilt and the guilty

person is repentant, he will receive Scriptural reproof and will be restricted as to privileges in the congregation.—9/15, page 30.

- **Why is everlasting life not dependent on scientific advancements?**

There are scientific efforts toward the lengthening of life, such as by attempting to overcome an apparent limit to the number of times that cells regenerate or by therapeutic cloning to provide patients with new, compatible organs. But the Bible shows that the only means by which humans can gain everlasting life is Jesus' ransom.—10/1, pages 3-5.

- **Was Jewish ritual bathing a forerunner of Christian baptism?**

It was not. The Jews performed cleansing rites upon themselves, which John's baptism did not call for. The cleansing required by the Mosaic Law had to be repeated, but Christian baptism is performed only once.—10/15, pages 12-13.

- **What is the Ministerial Training School?**

It is an eight-week course for congregation elders and ministerial servants who are single and are in a position to be assigned to serve where there is a great need. That might be with the congregation from which they came, elsewhere in that land, or in another country.—11/15, pages 10-11.

- **What or who is the antichrist mentioned at 1 John 2:18; 4:3?**

In a broad sense, "antichrist" refers to all who oppose or lyingly claim to be Christ or his representatives. The words of Jesus and John show that the antichrist is a composite entity made up of many individual antichrists who spread religious deception and reject God's Kingdom.—12/1, pages 4-6.

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Christmas Going Which Way?

THEN years ago this month, the magazine *U.S. News & World Report* featured the cover story "In Search of Christmas." The article focused on whether Christmas was becoming "purer, less commercial." Are things going that way?

The article offered insight into reasons why we should not expect that. It noted: "There is no record of official observance of Christ's birth until the fourth century, when Constantine . . . was emperor of Rome." That reflected "at least in part the fact that no one knew for sure when Jesus was born." The article admitted that "the gospels are silent on the year, let alone the exact month or day." According to a University of Texas historian, "the earliest Christians simply weren't interested in celebrating the Nativity."

Under the subhead "Matter of Conjecture," the article considered "how the church arrived at December 25." It acknowledged: "Most widely held is the view that the holiday was an intentional 'Christianization' of Saturnalia and other pagan festivals." "By assigning Christmas to late December, when people already were accustomed to celebrating, church leaders ensured widespread observance of the Savior's birth." In the mid-19th century, emphasis shifted to buying and giving gifts. "The new tradition of Christmas gift giving created an instant retail bonanza, and

merchants and advertisers soon began to promote the season."

There is thus no reason to expect that Christmas should go any way except away from pure Christianity. While modern Christmas abounds in "gaudy commercialism," the fact is that true Christians never expected to celebrate Jesus' birth. Rather, the Bible emphasizes the ransom that Christ provided by his death and resurrection to heaven. (Matthew 20:28) That will remain of importance through all time to come.

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