



THE WATCHTOWER
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

DECEMBER 1, 2011

Natural Disasters
PUNISHMENT FROM GOD?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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IS GOD Punishing Us?

"I think [it] is *tembatsu* (divine punishment), although I feel sorry for disaster victims," said a leading Japanese politician after that country was hit by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake and a tsunami in March 2011.

When more than 220,000 people were killed in the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, a prominent televangelist claimed that it was because they "swore a pact to the devil" and needed to have a "turning to god."

"God wants to awaken our deaden[ed] and indifferent conscience," declared a Catholic priest when 79 people died in a stampede in Manila, Philippines. A newspaper there reported that "twenty-one percent of adults believe God is unleashing his wrath with landslides, typhoons and other disasters" that frequently pummel the country.

THE belief that God brings about disasters to punish bad people is not new. In 1755, after some 60,000 people perished in an earthquake, a fire, and a tsunami that hit Lisbon, Portugal, well-known philosopher Voltaire queried: "Was then more vice in fallen Lisbon found, than Paris, where voluptuous joys abound?" Indeed, millions have wondered if God is using natural disasters to punish people. In many countries such disasters are in fact called acts of God.

In view of all of this, we need to ask: Has God really been using natural disasters to punish people? Is the recent barrage of disastrous events punishment from God?

In their rush to blame God, some point to Bible accounts where God brought destruction by natural elements. (Genesis 7:17-22; 18:20; 19:24, 25; Numbers 16:31-35) An examina-

tion of these Bible accounts shows, however, that in each case, there are three major distinguishing factors. First, there was warning beforehand. Second, unlike today's natural disasters, which kill good and bad people alike, destruction from God was selective. Only the incorrigibly wicked or those who refused to listen to warnings were destroyed. Third, God made a way for innocent people to escape.
—Genesis 7:1, 23; 19:15-17; Numbers 16:23-27.

In the countless disasters that have wreaked havoc on the lives of millions of people today, there is no evidence that God was behind them. What, then, accounts for the apparent increase in such disasters? How can we cope with them? And will there ever be a time when disasters are no more? You will find the answers in the following articles.



Natural Disasters

WHY SO MANY?

DISASTERS seem to be very much in the news. More people than ever before are the victims of one calamity or another. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, in Belgium, reports that in 2010 alone there were 373 disasters and that at least 296,000 people died as a result.

The number of reported disasters has also climbed noticeably over the past several decades. For example, between 1975 and 1999, well under 300 disasters were recorded each year. However, between 2000 and 2010, the average was close to 400 per year. Perhaps you are among those who wonder, 'Why are there so many disasters now?'

Although people often label such disasters as "acts of God," this is really a misnomer. God is not behind the calamities that affect so many people today. Nevertheless, the Bible did foretell that there would be disasters in our time. For example, at Matthew 24:7, 8, we read Jesus' words: "There will be food shortages and earthquakes in one place after

another. All these things are a beginning of pangs of distress." Why did Jesus foretell these events, and what meaning do they have for us?

God's Son, Jesus, was speaking in answer to the question posed to him: "What will be the sign . . . of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matthew 24:3) He told of various things that would happen, including calamities like those mentioned above. He then went on to make this significant statement: "When you see these things occurring, know that the kingdom of God is near." (Luke 21:31) Those natural disasters, therefore, have great significance for us. They point to a time of momentous changes just ahead.

Forces Contributing to Disasters

Nevertheless, many people still ask, If God is not responsible for the disasters, who or what is? We can understand the answer only if we recognize an important truth mentioned in the Bible: "The whole world is lying

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in the power of the wicked one." (1 John 5:19) This verse reveals that it is not God who is behind the distressing conditions in the world, but in many cases, it is his enemy, "the wicked one"—otherwise referred to in the Bible as "the Devil."—Revelation 12:9, 12.

Guided by his own self-serving objective, this enemy of God views people as disposable. Since he has the whole world under his control, he has promoted that same spirit among mankind. Indeed, the Bible points to this by foretelling that in "the last days," people will be "lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty." (2 Timothy 3:1, 2) Hence, it is no surprise that the Devil has created a global system that thrives on those and other ungodly traits. He encourages selfish and greedy exploitation that often puts people in harm's way.

In what way does today's greedy system promote disasters? A United Nations report on global disasters states: "Populations are too often being concentrated in risky areas such as flood plains. In addition, the destruction of forests and wetlands is harming the capacity of the environment to withstand hazards. Looming above all this is the threat of global climate change and rising sea levels as a result of increased greenhouse gas concentrations . . . caused by human activity."

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OVERCROWDING



DEFORESTATION



POLLUTION



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⁺ CD also available.

⁺ MP3 CD-ROM also available.

⁺ Audio recordings also available at www.jw.org.

Though much of this "human activity" is said to be for economic progress, it is in reality the work of the selfish and greedy spirit that permeates the world.

Consequently, many experts now recognize that indiscriminate human activity has intensified the devastating effects of the disasters that occur. In reality, humans have played into the Devil's hands by supporting a system that exacerbates disasters.

We see, then, that many disasters are the result of careless human activity. Some disasters would not have been as devastating were it not for where they occurred. In many parts of the world, the effects of natural disasters have been greatly aggravated by the underhanded dealings of unscrupulous individuals or by the fact that masses of people have been forced to live in hazardous areas as a result of the economic or social inequalities inherent in the world today. Of course, some people suffer in disasters, not because of any particular person's fault or negligence, but because "time and unforeseen occurrence befall them all."—Ecclesiastes 9:11.

Whatever the reason, should you be the victim of a natural disaster, how can you cope? We will now take a look at what can be done to lessen the impact when calamities occur.

Coping With Natural Disasters

In view of the increase in both the frequency and the destructiveness of natural disasters, what can a person do to cope? Let us take a look at several practical steps that can be taken.



Do you have an emergency kit prepared and ready to go?

Keep out of the path of calamity.

"Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself, but the inexperienced have passed along and must suffer the penalty," says the Bible. (Proverbs 22:3) This is wise counsel that can apply to disasters. If a warning is given about an impending volcanic eruption, probable flooding, or an approaching hurricane or typhoon, wisdom dictates that those in the affected area evacuate and get to safer ground. Life is more valuable than a house or other material things.

For some, it might be possible to choose not to live in an area of high risk. One authority says: "Disaster risk is geographically highly concentrated. A very small portion of the Earth's surface contains most of the risk and most future large-scale disasters will occur in these areas." This may be true, for example, in low-lying coastal regions or in areas near fault lines in the earth. If you can avoid living in such high-risk areas or can move to a safer location, you may greatly reduce your risk of suffering from disasters.

Have a plan of action. In spite of all precautions taken, you may still find yourself a

victim of an unexpected tragedy. Coping with it will be much easier if you have planned in advance. This is also in harmony with the advice at Proverbs 22:3, quoted earlier. Do you have an emergency kit prepared and ready to go? The publication *1-2-3 of Disaster Education* recommends including the following items: First-aid supplies, bottled water, non-perishable food, and important documents. It would also be wise to review with your family the types of disasters that could take place and what could be done in each case.

Maintain a close relationship with God.

This can help in any circumstance. The Bible speaks of God as "the Father of tender mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation." Another verse describes him as the God "who comforts those laid low." —2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; 7:6.

Yes, God is keenly aware of the circumstances coming upon those who put faith in him. He is a God of love and provides uplifting encouragement in various ways. (1 John 4:8) Prayers, not for miracles but for God's powerful holy spirit, can provide help in any situation. The holy spirit can bring to mind Bible



Prayer, not for miracles but for powerful holy spirit, can provide help in any situation



Fellow Christians help one another to deal with the effects of disasters

passages that can be comforting and soothing to those experiencing adversities. Truly, God's faithful servants can feel as did David, a king of ancient Israel, who said: "Even though I walk in the valley of deep shadow, I fear nothing bad, for you are with me; your rod and your staff are the things that comfort me."

—Psalm 23:4.

Fellow Christians help one another. In the first century, a Christian prophet named Agabus indicated that "a great famine was about to come upon the entire inhabited earth; which, for that matter, did take place in the time of Claudius." The famine severely affected many of Jesus' disciples in Judea. What did the disciples elsewhere do when they heard of their fellow Christians' plight? The account states: "Those of the disciples determined, each of them according as anyone could afford it, to send a relief ministration to the brothers dwelling in Judea." (Acts 11:28, 29) They lovingly responded by providing relief supplies.

When severe calamities occur today, God's servants respond similarly. Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for helping fellow believers.

For example, when a strong earthquake struck Chile on February 27, 2010, Jehovah's Witnesses quickly responded to help those affected. Karla, whose home was swept away by a

tsunami, related: "It was comforting and encouraging to see that the very next day [fellow Witnesses] arrived from other areas to help us. Without a doubt, Jehovah comforted us through the goodness of those volunteers. I felt loved and protected." Her grandfather, who is not a Witness, observed the help being given. He said: "This is completely different from what I have seen for years in my church." What he saw moved him to ask Jehovah's Witnesses to study the Bible with him.



"I felt loved and protected"

Being in association with those who love God can be a great aid during times of adversity. Even so, will there ever be a time when the earth will be rid of the curse of disasters? Let us see what the Bible has to say on this subject.



No More Disasters!

If SOMEONE told you, "There will soon be no more disasters," how would you react? You might reply, "You must be dreaming. Disasters are just a fact of life." Or you might just think to yourself, 'Whom does he think he's kidding?'

Even though natural disasters seem to be here to stay, there is a basis for real hope that this will change. The change, however, will not come through human efforts. Humans are not able to understand fully how and why things happen in nature, much less control or change them. King Solomon of ancient Israel, noted for his wisdom and keen observation, wrote: "Mankind are not able to find out the work that has been done under the sun; however much mankind keep working hard to seek, yet they do not find out. And even if they should say they are wise enough to know, they would be unable to find out." —Ecclesiastes 8:17.

If humans cannot control natural disasters, who can? The Bible identifies our Creator as the one to make this change. He is the One who put the earth's ecological systems, such as the water cycle, in place. (Ecclesiastes 1:7) And in sharp contrast with humans, God has unlimited power at his disposal. Testifying to

this fact, the prophet Jeremiah said: "O Sovereign Lord Jehovah! Here you yourself have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm. The whole matter is not too wonderful for you yourself." (Jeremiah 32:17) Since God made the earth and all its elements, logically he knows how to manage things so that people can dwell on it in peace and security. —Psalm 37:11; 115:16.

How, then, will God bring about the needed change? You will recall that the second of this series of articles mentioned that the many terrifying things taking place on the earth today make up a "sign" marking "the conclusion of the system of things." Jesus said: "When you see these things occurring, know that the kingdom of God is near." (Matthew 24:3; Luke 21:31) The Kingdom of God, a heavenly government of God's making, will bring about big changes on the earth, even bringing natural elements under control. Though Jehovah God has the power to do this himself, he has chosen to delegate the task to his Son. Speaking of this one, the prophet Daniel said: "To him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and

languages should all serve even him.”—Daniel 7:14.

God’s Son, Jesus Christ, has been given the power necessary to bring about all the changes needed to make the earth a delightful place. Two thousand years ago, when Jesus was on earth, he demonstrated on a small scale his ability to control the natural elements. On one occasion, when he and his disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee, “a great violent windstorm broke out, and the waves kept dashing into the boat, so that the boat was close to being swamped.” His disciples panicked. Fearing for their lives, they turned to Jesus. What did Jesus do? He simply “rebuked the wind and said to the sea: ‘Hush! Be quiet!’ And the wind abated, and a great calm set in.” His disciples were amazed and asked: “Who really is this, because even the wind and the sea obey him?”—Mark 4:37-41.

Since then, Jesus has been elevated to the spirit realm and has been given even greater power and authority. As the King of God’s Kingdom, he has the responsibility as well as the ability to administer all the changes necessary to give people a peaceful and secure life on earth.

However, as we have seen, many of the problems and disasters are man-made, caused or made worse by the exploits of selfish and greedy individuals. What will the Kingdom do about those who persist in such ways and refuse to change? The Bible speaks of the Lord Jesus coming “from heaven with his powerful angels in a flaming fire, as he brings vengeance upon those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news about our Lord Jesus.” Yes, he will “bring to ruin those ruining the earth.”—2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; Revelation 11:18.

Afterward, this “King of kings,” Jesus Christ, will assert full control of earth’s ele-

ments. (Revelation 19:16) He will make sure that the subjects of the Kingdom no longer suffer any calamities. He will use his power to regulate the meteorological elements so that the weather and seasonal cycles will work to the benefit of mankind. The result will be the realization of what Jehovah God long ago promised to his people: “I shall also certainly give your showers of rain at their proper time, and the land will indeed give its yield, and the tree of the field will give its fruit.” (Leviticus 26:4) People will be able to build houses without fear of losing them in some calamity: “They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage.”—Isaiah 65:21.

What Must You Do?

No doubt you, like many others, are attracted to the idea of living in a world with no more devastating disasters. What, though, do you have to do to be there? Since “those who do not know God” and “those who do not obey the good news” will not qualify to live in the disaster-free world to come, it is clear that one must now learn about God and support his arrangement for rulership of the earth. God requires that we come to know him and obey the good news of the Kingdom that he has set up through his Son.

The best way to learn to do this is through a careful study of the Bible. It contains the instructions for qualifying to live in the secure environment that will exist under Kingdom rulership. Why not ask Jehovah’s Witnesses to help you learn what the Bible teaches? They are at your bidding for that very purpose. One thing is sure—if you make the effort to know God and to obey the good news, then the words of Proverbs 1:33 will come true in your case: “As for the one listening to me, he will reside in security and be undisturbed from dread of calamity.”



OUR READERS ASK . . .

Will the earth survive 2012?

■ “French village faces influx of apocalypse believers . . . They believe the world will end on 21 December 2012, the end of a 5,125-year-long cycle in the ancient Maya calendar.”—BBC News.

Despite predictions from calamity-howling religious leaders, pseudoscientists, and any other 21st-century prognosticators, earth will be in existence for a very long time. Yes, the earth will survive 2012. As a matter of fact, planet Earth will survive not only that year but also every year thereafter.

The Bible tells us: “Generations come and generations go, while the earth endures for ever.” (Ecclesiastes 1:4, *The New English Bible*) Also, consider the implications of what is said at Isaiah 45:18: “This is what Jehovah has said, . . . the Former of the earth and the Maker of it, He the One who firmly established it, who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited: ‘I am Jehovah, and there is no one else.’”

Would a loving father spend many hours designing and building a toy boat for his son’s delight or a dollhouse for his daughter’s joy, only to destroy it moments after giving it to him or her? That would be cruel! In the same way, God created the earth primarily for the delight of his human creation. To the first human couple, Adam and Eve, God said: “Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it.” Thereafter, “God saw everything he had made and, look! it was very good.” (Genesis 1:27, 28, 31) God has not abandoned his purpose for



the earth; he will not allow the earth to be destroyed. Regarding all that he has promised, Jehovah emphatically stated: “It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it.”—Isaiah 55:11.

However, it is Jehovah’s will “to bring to ruin those ruining the earth.” (Revelation 11:18) In his Word, he makes this promise: “The upright are the ones that will reside in the earth, and the blameless are the ones that will be left over in it. As regards the wicked, they will be cut off from the very earth; and as for the treacherous, they will be torn away from it.”—Proverbs 2:21, 22.

When will this occur? No human knows. “Concerning that day or the hour nobody knows,” said Jesus, “neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father.” (Mark 13:32) Jehovah’s Witnesses do not try to predict when God will destroy the wicked. Though they are alert to “the sign” of the end and believe that humankind is living in the Biblical “last days,” they cannot know just when “the end” will occur. (Mark 13:4-8, 33; 2 Timothy 3:1) They leave that solely in the hands of their heavenly Father and his Son.

Meanwhile, Jehovah’s Witnesses occupy themselves with preaching the good news of God’s Kingdom, the heavenly government that will rule and transform planet Earth into a peaceful paradise, one that ‘the righteous themselves will possess and reside forever upon.’—Psalm 37:29.

Who Can Interpret Prophecy?

The Gordian knot was said to be the greatest enigma in the days of Alexander the Great. Wise was the person—and great his conquest—who could unravel that complicated knot.* Alexander solved the enigma, so the legend goes, by one slash of his sword.

DOWN through the ages, wise men have sought not only to untie difficult knots but also to unravel riddles, interpret prophecies, and even predict the future.

More often than not, however, those tasks were beyond them. The wise men of Babylon, for example, were unable to interpret the handwriting that miraculously appeared on the wall of King Belshazzar's palace during a boisterous feast. Only Daniel—the aging prophet of Jehovah God, who had a reputation for “the untying of knots”—proved to be the one who could interpret the prophetic message. (Daniel 5:12) That prophecy, foretelling the doom of the Babylonian Empire, was fulfilled that very night!—Daniel 5:1, 4-8, 25-30.

* Greek legend has it that at Gordium, the capital of Phrygia, the chariot of the city's founder, Gordius, was tied to a pole with a complicated knot, which could be untied only by the future conqueror of Asia.

What Is Prophecy?

Prophecy has been defined as the future revealed, events in time recorded before they occur. True prophecy is an inspired message, written or spoken, a revelation of the divine will and purpose. In the Bible are found prophecies regarding the appearance and identity of the Messiah and “the conclusion of the system of things,” as well as judgment messages from God.—Matthew 24:3; Daniel 9:25.

The “wise men” of today—experts in science, economics, health, politics, environment, and many other fields—attempt to predict the future. Although many of such predictions are highly publicized by the media—and eagerly consumed by the public—they are, at best, educated guesses and personal opinions. In addition, for every opinion expressed, invariably there are numerous opposing opinions and counterarguments. The business of predicting the future is risky indeed.

The Source of True Prophecy

Where, then, do true prophecies originate, and who can interpret them? The apostle Peter wrote: “No prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation.” (2 Peter 1:20) The Greek word for “interpretation” has the meaning “solution, disclosure,” with the idea that “what is thus released or loosed was before bound.” Thus, *The Amplified New Testament* renders Peter’s words: “No prophecy of Scripture is [a matter] of any personal . . . loosening.”

Picture a sailor skillfully tying a rope into a complicated knot. When it is complete, the layman can see the strands going into the knot, but he is not sure how to loosen it. Similarly, people can observe current trends leading to a future bound up with complexity, but they are unsure of how that future will unravel or turn out.

The inspired prophets of old, such as Daniel, did not personally analyze the current trends of their time and then attempt to unravel a complicated future by uttering a prophecy. If they had tried to force the future to unfold in this way, such prophesying would have originated in their own imagination. It would then have been a human prediction, a forecast built upon an imperfect foundation. Instead, Peter went on to explain: “Prophecy was at no time brought by man’s will, but men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit.”—2 Peter 1:21.

“Interpretations Belong to God”

Some 3,700 years ago, two men were locked away in a prison in Egypt. Each received an intriguing dream. Having no access to the wise men of the land, they expressed their perplexity to a fellow inmate, Joseph, exclaiming: “We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter with us.” That servant of God encouraged them to relate their dreams to him, saying: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Genesis 40:8) Only Jehovah God has the ability to unravel prophecies, just as an experienced sailor can untie complicated knots. After all, it was God who made or tied up those prophecies in the first place. Logically, we must look to him for the loosening of their meaning. Yes, Joseph was right in giving the credit to God.

In what sense, then, do “interpretations belong to God”? There are a number of ways that this proves to be the case. Some Bible prophecies are recorded along with their fulfillment. These, then, are relatively simple to untie, as are some knots that the sailor freely explains how to undo.—Genesis 18:14; 21:2.

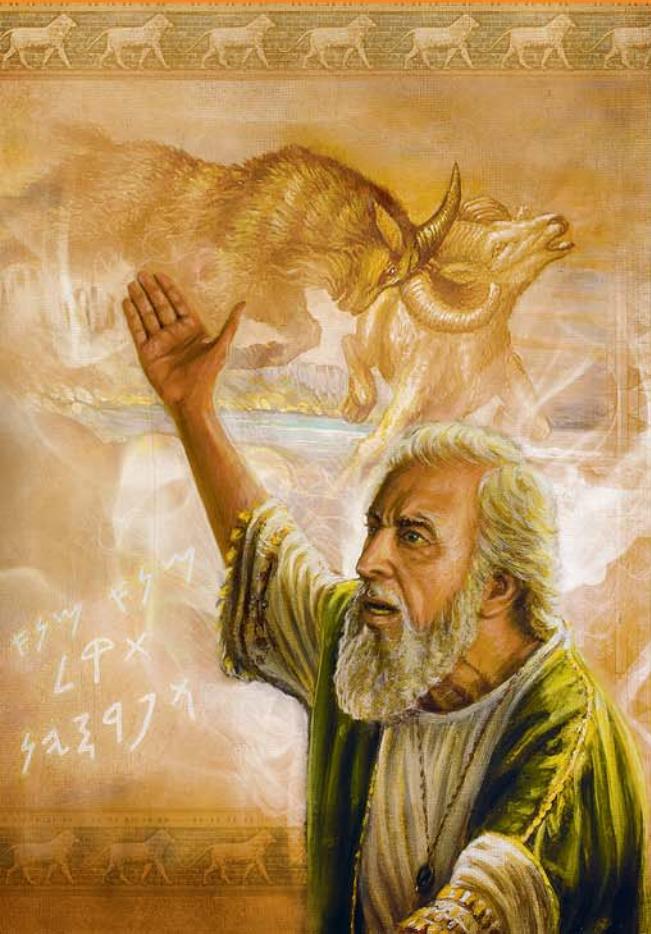
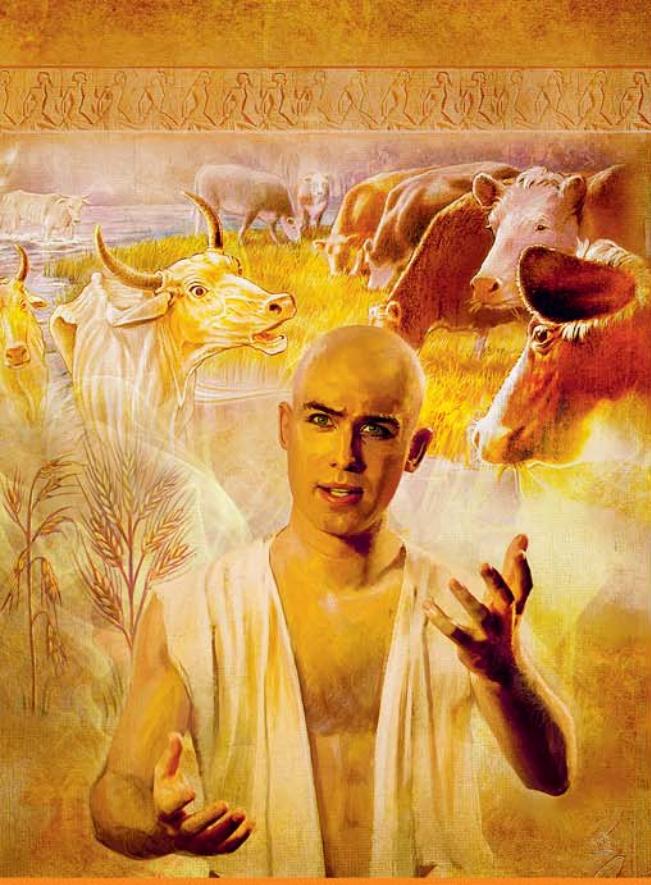
Other prophecies can be explained and unraveled by an examination of the context. The prophet Daniel had a prophetic vision of ‘a ram with two horns’ being decisive-

ly struck down by a “hairy he-goat” that had “a conspicuous horn between its eyes.” The context shows that the ram with the two horns represented “the kings of Media and Persia” and the goat, “the king of Greece.” (Daniel 8:3-8, 20-22) More than 200 years later, “the great horn”—Alexander the Great—began his conquest of Persia. The Jewish historian Josephus claimed that during Alexander’s military campaign in the vicinity of Jerusalem, he was shown this very prophecy and believed that it referred to him.

“Interpretations belong to God” in another sense. Guided by holy spirit, Joseph, a faithful servant of Jehovah God, was able to understand the meaning of the perplexing dreams his fellow prisoners related to him. (Genesis 41:38) When present-day servants of God are unsure of the meaning of a certain prophecy, they pray for God’s spirit and then diligently study and search the spirit-inspired Word of God. With God’s guidance they can locate scriptures that open up the meaning of some prophecies. The interpretation does not come miraculously through any humans. It comes from God because it is by means of his spirit and his Word that the meaning becomes clear. The interpretation is not introduced from outside the Bible by human forecasters.—Acts 15:12-21.

“Interpretations belong to God” also in that he determines and directs when a prophecy is to be understood by his faithful servants on earth. The meaning of a prophecy can be discerned before, during, or after its fulfillment. Since God tied up the prophecies, he will unravel them at the right time—his time.

In the account of Joseph and the two prisoners, he interpreted the dreams three days before they were fulfilled. (Genesis 40:13, 19) Later, when Joseph was brought before mighty Pharaoh to explain Pharaoh’s dreams, seven years of plenty were about to



start. With God's spirit, Joseph unraveled the meaning of Pharaoh's dreams, so that arrangements could be made to take in the foretold bumper crops.—Genesis 41:29, 39, 40.

Other prophecies are fully understood by servants of God only after their fulfillment. Many events in Jesus' life had been prophesied centuries before his birth, but this was not fully understood by his disciples until after his resurrection. (Psalm 22:18; 34:20; John 19:24, 36) Finally, according to Daniel 12:4, certain prophecies were to be 'sealed up' "until the time of the end," when, Daniel said, "the true knowledge will become abundant." We are living in the very time when those prophecies are in the course of fulfillment.*

Bible Prophecies and You

Joseph and Daniel stood before the kings of their day and delivered prophetic messages that affected nations and kingdoms. Christians in the first century stood before the people of their day as spokesmen of Jehovah, the God of prophecy, and brought great benefit to those who responded to their messages.

Today, Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide are sounding forth a prophetic message—the good news of God's Kingdom—and telling people that Jesus' prophecy on "the conclusion of the system of things" is undergoing fulfillment. (Matthew 24:3, 14) Do you know what that prophecy is and how it will affect you? Jehovah's Witnesses are happy to help you understand and benefit from what is surely one of the grandest of all Bible prophecies.

* See the cover series "Six Bible Prophecies You Are Seeing Fulfilled," in the May 1, 2011, issue of this magazine.



A LETTER FROM NORWAY



A Visit to a Vast White Wilderness

IT IS an early winter morning. We peek through the curtains to see what the weather is like. How exciting to see a clear blue sky! We are going to spend three days preaching on Finnmarksvidda—a large mountain plateau north of the Arctic Circle.

Wintertime is cold in Norway, so we are a bit apprehensive about going to the northern wilderness. Happily, we are traveling with three of Jehovah's Witnesses who live in the area. They know what to expect and have given us good advice.

Roads are few here. The best way to reach people who live in remote places is by snowmobile. We pack our clothing, food supply, and extra fuel onto our snowmobiles and sledge. A vast white mountain plateau lies ahead as far as the eye can see. The snow sparkles like diamonds in the sunshine. The sight is breathtakingly beautiful!

Finnmarksvidda is home to reindeer, moose, lynx, hares, foxes, wolverines, and a small population of bears. But what we are

most excited about is the prospect of reaching the people living in this remote area. We are especially keen on meeting some of the Sami people, who make a living herding reindeer or working at the mountain lodges.

Outside the first mountain lodge, we meet several young people who are cross-country skiing with their school class. They stop to talk with us, asking us what we are doing. We, of course, are happy to explain. "All the best with the Bible!" one of them says to us as we depart. Back on our snowmobiles again, we cross big frozen lakes and white wasteland. Will we see a reindeer herd?

As we drive up to a small cottage, a man greets us warmly. He is one of the few permanent residents here. When he notices that our sledge is broken, he kindly offers to repair it. He takes his time; people do not rush here. His manner makes us feel relaxed too. After he repairs the sledge, we thank him and show him a few points from the Bible about why





God permits suffering. He listens attentively. Before we leave, he accepts the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* and the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines. He smiles and says, "Thank you for visiting me."

After a few more visits, evening begins to fall, and we head toward the cabin where we will spend the night. Suddenly we catch sight of a fox. Its red fur glimmers in beautiful contrast with the white snow. The fox stops for a moment, looks at us curiously, and then moves on. Now it's starting to snow, making it difficult for us to see where we are going. What a relief when we finally see the cabin! We make a fire in the stove, and the place slowly warms up. Though we are worn out after a long day of bumping up and down on the snowmobile, we feel happy.

Morning comes all too soon. We reload our snowmobile and drive down to the lowland, follow a riverbed, and come to another mountain lodge. Here we meet a young man, and we share several upbuilding thoughts

from the Bible with him. Kindly, he shows us the easiest way to get back to the trail.

The last day of our visit arrives. As we enter the Stabbursdalen National Park, a fantastic landscape opens up around us, with distant snow-covered mountains gleaming in the sunshine. Before us appears a large herd of reindeer! They are calmly feeding, using their large hooves to dig up lichen and moss hidden beneath the snow. Farther away, we spot a Sami, sitting on his snowmobile. He is quietly watching his reindeer. His dog is carefully tending the herd and keeping them together. For a moment, the dog pauses to sniff in our direction. Quickly, though, it is back at its job. We present our message to the herder. He is friendly and listens to us.

On our way back home, we think of all those whom we met on our 200-mile (300 km) journey. We feel privileged that we have had a small part in reaching out to the people in this vast white wilderness.

Norway Post®





LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

How Can We Choose Good Friends?

This article considers questions you may have raised and shows where you can read the answers in the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to discuss these answers with you.



1. Why should we select friends carefully?

Most people like to be accepted by others. This desire often makes us imitate those around us. So our friends have a powerful influence on the attitudes that develop in our heart. Thus, our choice of friends can influence the sort of person we will become.—*Read Proverbs 4:23; 13:20.*

The inspired Bible writer David selected his friends wisely. He associated with those who helped him keep his integrity as a servant of God. (Psalm 26:4, 5, 11, 12) For example, David enjoyed Jonathan's friendship because Jonathan encouraged him to trust Jehovah.—*Read 1 Samuel 23:16-18.*

2. How can you be God's friend?

Although Jehovah is almighty, we can actually become his friends. For example, Abraham became a friend of God. Abraham trusted and obeyed Jehovah, so Jehovah considered him as a friend. (Genesis 22:2, 9-12; James 2:21-23) If we trust Jehovah and do what he tells us to do, we can also become friends of God.—*Read Psalm 15:1, 2.*



3. How can you benefit from good friends?

True friends are loyal and help you to do what is right. (Proverbs 17:17; 18:24) For example, although Jonathan was likely 30 years older than David and would normally have been heir to the throne of Israel, he loyally supported David as the one chosen by God to be king. True friends also have the courage to correct you if they see that you are acting foolishly. (Psalm 141:5) Friends who love God will help you develop good habits.—*Read 1 Corinthians 15:33.*

You can meet people who share your love for what is right at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. There you will find friends who will encourage you in your efforts to please God.—*Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.*

However, even friends who love God may sometimes disappoint us. Do not be easily of-



fended by their mistakes. (Ecclesiastes 7:9, 20-22) Remember, no friend is perfect and friends who love God are valuable to us. God's Word urges us to overlook the faults of fellow Christians.—*Read Colossians 3:13.*

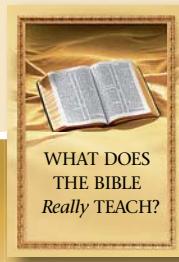
4. What if “friends” oppose you?

Many people find that when they start receiving help to understand God's Word, some of their old friends oppose them. Perhaps such friends do not understand the practical counsel or the sure hope that you have found in the Bible. Maybe you can help them.—*Read Colossians 4:6.*

In other cases, “friends” may ridicule the good news presented in God's Word. (2 Peter 3:3, 4) Some may ridicule your efforts to do what is right. (1 Peter 4:4) If that happens to you, you may have to choose between being their friend and being God's friend. If you choose to be a friend of God, you will have chosen the best friend anyone can have.—*Read James 4:4, 8.*



For more information, see chapters 12 and 19 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



The Divine Name AND ALFONSO DE ZAMORA'S QUEST FOR TEXTUAL ACCURACY

IN THE year 1492, Ferdinand and Isabella, the king and queen of Spain, issued a decree: "We order all Jews and Jewesses . . . that by the end of July of this year, they leave all of our stated kingdoms and dominions with their sons and daughters and male servants and maids and all Jewish familiars, both great and small, regardless of age, and that they dare not return to them."

Under that expulsion order, every Jewish family in Spain was given a choice either to go into exile or to renounce their religion. A rabbi by the name of Juan de Zamora may have felt that it was a better option to convert to Catholicism and remain in Spain, where his ancestors had lived for generations. In view of his Jewish background, it is possible that Juan sent his son Alfonso to the renowned school of Hebrew studies in Zamora. Later, Alfonso became versed in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. After finishing his studies, he started teaching Hebrew at the University of Salamanca. Soon thereafter, his linguistic expertise was put to good use in behalf of Bible scholars all over Europe.

In 1512 the new University of Alcalá de Henares elected Alfonso de Zamora to



DECREE FROM THE KING AND QUEEN OF SPAIN, 1492



UNIVERSITY OF ALCALÁ DE HENARES

the chair of Hebrew studies. Since Zamora was one of the foremost scholars of his day, cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros, the university founder, enlisted his help in preparing the monumental Complutensian Polyglot. This six-volume Bible contains the sacred text in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, as well as portions in Aramaic.*

About this project, Bible scholar Mariano Revilla Rico notes: "Of the three Jewish converts that participated in the work of the Cardinal [Cisneros], the most celebrated is Alfonso de Zamora, grammarian, philosopher and expert on the Talmud, apart from being a scholar of Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic." Zamora's studies led him to the conclusion that accurate Bible translation required a comprehensive knowledge of the original ancient languages. In fact, he became one of the main promoters of the renaissance in Biblical scholarship that began to flower at the beginning of the 16th century.

Nevertheless, Zamora lived at a difficult time and in a dangerous place for the

* For a discussion of the significance of the Complutensian Polyglot, see the April 15, 2004, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 28-31.

cap. 4.

Translating the Divine Name

It is of special interest to note how Alfonso de Zamora, a learned man of Hebrew background, transliterated the divine name. As

can be seen in the accompanying photograph, a marginal note in his Hebrew-Latin interlinear translation of Genesis contains God's name written as "*jehovah*".

Evidently, Zamora accepted this translation of the divine name into Latin. During the 16th century, when the Bible was translated into principal European languages, this spelling or a very similar one was adopted by many Bible translators, including William Tyndale (English, 1530), Sebastian Münster (Latin, 1534), Pierre-Robert Olivétan (French, 1535) and Casiodoro de Reina (Spanish, 1569).

Thus Zamora became one of the first of many 16th-century Bible scholars who helped shed light on the divine name. The ignorance regarding God's name occurred first as a result of Jewish superstition that did not allow the name to be pronounced. Under the influence of this Jewish tradition, Bible translators of Christendom—Jerome, the translator of the Latin *Vulgate*, for example—replaced the divine name with such terms as "Lord" or "God."

promotion of Bible scholarship. The Spanish Inquisition was at its height, and the Catholic Church venerated the Latin Vulgate translation as the only “authorized” version of the Bible. However, since the Middle Ages, Catholic scholars had already noted that the Latin text of the *Vulgate* was far from perfect. By the early 16th century, Alfonso de Zamora and others embarked on the task of doing something about it.

‘Salvation Required Translation’

Among the projects that Zamora worked on, the Hebrew edition of what is commonly called the Old Testament, along with its translation into Latin, was undoubtedly the most significant. He probably intended that this material be used extensively for the projected Complutensian Polyglot. One of his manuscripts is in El Escorial library near Madrid, Spain. Cataloged as G-I-4, it contains the complete book of Genesis in Hebrew, along with an interlinear, or word-for-word, translation into Latin.

In the prologue is this acknowledgment: “Salvation of the nations required the translation of the Holy Scriptures into other languages. . . . We have considered it . . . absolutely necessary that the faithful have a *word-for-word* Bible translation, done in such a way that for each Hebrew word there is an equivalent one in Latin.” Alfonso de Zamora had the qualifications needed to undertake such a new translation into Latin because he was a recognized scholar of Hebrew.

‘My Spirit Cannot Find a Resting Place’

In one respect, 16th-century Spain was the ideal place for scholars like Zamora to work. During the Middle Ages, Spain had become a center of Jewish culture. *The Encyclopædia Britannica* explains: “With its large Muslim and Jewish populations, medieval Spain was the only multiracial and multireligious

country in western Europe, and much of the development of Spanish civilization in religion, literature, art, and architecture during the later Middle Ages stemmed from this fact.”

Since there was a large Jewish population in Spain, Hebrew Bible manuscripts abounded. Jewish scribes in many parts of Spain had laboriously copied those manuscripts for use in the public reading of the Scriptures in the synagogues. L. Goldschmidt, in his book *The Earliest Editions of the Hebrew Bible*, notes that “not only the Spanish-Portuguese prints of the Pentateuch enjoyed the highest reputation for accuracy amongst Jewish Scholars, but also the manuscripts from which these and the scholarly polyglots were printed.”

Despite the advantages Spain offered, dark clouds of opposition loomed over would-be Bible translators. In 1492, the Catholic armies of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella conquered the final Moorish enclave in Spain. As mentioned earlier, in that same year the monarchs decreed that all those holding to the Jewish religion be expelled from Spain. A similar edict banished the Muslims ten years later. From that time on, Catholicism became the State religion of Spain, and other religions were no longer permitted.

How would this new religious climate affect the translation of the Bible? The experience of Alfonso de Zamora is a case in point. Although this scholarly Jew had become a Catholic convert, the Spanish hierarchy refused to overlook his background. Some opposers criticized Cardinal Cisneros for using the expertise of Jewish converts in the preparation of his Polyglot Bible. These attacks caused Zamora much suffering. In a comment in a manuscript that can be found at the University of Madrid, Zamora laments: “I. . . abandoned and hated by all my friends —who have become my enemies—cannot



FRONTISPICE OF ZAMORA'S
INTERLINEAR TRANSLATION

find a resting place either for my spirit or the soles of my feet."

One of his principal enemies was Juan Tavera, the archbishop of Toledo, who later held the post of chief inquisitor. Zamora became so disheartened by Tavera's attacks that he even appealed to the pope. His letter said in part: "We request and beg that Your Holiness help us . . . and preserve us from our enemy the bishop of Toledo, Don Juan Tavera. Every day, without letup, he causes us numerous, unpleasant afflictions. . . . We certainly find ourselves in great anguish, since we are just like beasts for the slaughter house in his eyes. . . . If Your Holiness heeds this petition directed to you, 'Yahweh will be your security and he will preserve your foot from capture.' (Prov. 3:23)"*

* It is interesting that Zamora used the divine name, not a title, in his appeal to the pope of Rome. In a Spanish translation of Zamora's petition, the name appears as "Yahweh." It is uncertain in what form it appeared in the original Latin. Regarding Zamora's translation and use of the divine name, see the box "Translating the Divine Name" on page 19.

Alfonso de Zamora's Legacy

Despite these attacks, Zamora's work continued and prospered for the benefit of many Bible students. Although he never translated the Scriptures into the vernacular languages of his day, he rendered an invaluable service to other translators. To understand his contribution, we must remember that Bible translation invariably depends on two types of scholars. First, there must be scholars who study copies of the sacred text in the original languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—to produce a refined and accurate text in these languages. Then a translator can use this work as a starting point for his translation into a vernacular language.

Alfonso de Zamora was the principal scholar who prepared and refined the Hebrew text that was finally published in the Complutensian Polyglot in 1522. (His Hebrew-Latin vocabulary and Hebrew grammar that appeared in the same work also facilitated the efforts of translators.) Erasmus, a contemporary of Zamora, performed a similar task for the Christian Greek Scriptures, commonly called the New Testament. Once these refined texts in Hebrew and Greek became available, other translators could embark on the vital task of putting the Bible into the language of the people. When William Tyndale translated the Bible into English, he was one of the first translators to take advantage of the Hebrew text of the Complutensian Polyglot.

The wide distribution of the Bible today is a fitting tribute to the labors of men like Zamora, who dedicated their lives to improving our knowledge of the Scriptures. As Zamora realized, salvation depends on people's understanding God's Word and following it. (John 17:3) That, in turn, requires translation of the Bible into languages that people can understand, for only then can its message touch the hearts and minds of millions.



DID YOU KNOW?

What is the “coccus scarlet material” often referred to in the book of Exodus?



INSECTS USED IN PREPARING THE DYE

Courtesy of SDC Colour Experience (www.sdc.org.uk)

■ According to the Bible account, the tent cloths forming the walls and gate of the tabernacle, Israel's ancient center of worship, were made of “blue thread and wool dyed reddish purple and coccus scarlet material and fine twisted linen.” (Exodus 26:1; 38:18) “The holy garments” of the priests were also to be made using “coccus scarlet material.”—Exodus 28:1-6.

Coccus scarlet, also known as kermes, was a dye that yielded a brilliant-red, or scarlet, color. The dye was extracted from the bodies of female insects of the Coccidae family. These wingless insects live on the

kermes oak tree (*Quercus coccifera*), native to the Middle East and the Mediterranean Coast. The scarlet color is contained in the eggs carried inside the body of the female. In that state, the insect resembles a berry, about the size and form of a pea, attached to the leaves and twigs of the kermes oak. After being handpicked and crushed, the insects yield a scarlet color, soluble in water and suitable for dyeing cloth. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder mentioned coccus scarlet and counted it among the highly esteemed colors of his day.

Which of the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures were present at Pentecost 33 C.E.?

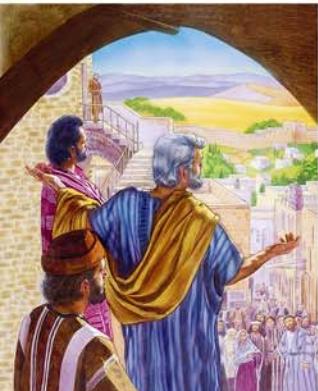
■ It is possible that six of the eight men who wrote this portion of the Scriptures were present.

According to the Acts account, Jesus instructed his disciples: “Do not withdraw from Jerusalem, but keep waiting for what the Father has promised.” (Acts 1:4) The same account indicates that the future Bible writers **Matthew**, **John**, and **Peter** obeyed this instruction and gathered “at the same place,” with other disciples. Jesus’ half brothers were also there. (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4) Two of them, **James** and **Jude** (Judas), later wrote the two Bible books that bear their names.—Matthew 13:55; James 1:1; Jude 1.

In his Gospel, **Mark** speaks of a young man who fled on the night of Je-

sus’ arrest. He was evidently referring to himself, since all the other disciples had already abandoned Jesus. (Mark 14:50-52) Therefore, Mark seems to have been an early disciple, and it is possible that he was present at Pentecost.

The two remaining writers of the inspired Christian Greek Scriptures were Paul and Luke. At Pentecost 33 C.E., Paul was not yet a follower of Christ. (Galatians 1:17, 18) Apparently, Luke was not present either, since he excluded himself from the “eyewitnesses” of Jesus’ ministry.—Luke 1:1-3.



PETER SPEAKING AT PENTECOST 33 C.E.

"A Time to Love AND A TIME TO HATE"

GOD is love." In some lands people frame those words and hang them on a wall in their home. Indeed, it is a beautiful expression that describes what God is—the personification of love.

Many people, though, do not know that those words are from the Bible. It was the apostle John who wrote: "He that does not love has not come to know God, because *God is love*." (1 John 4:8) John also wrote about God's love for the world of redeemable mankind: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life."—John 3:16.

With that in mind, some may think that God is always willing to overlook anything that we do. The way many people live shows that they think that no matter how they conduct themselves, God will not call them to account for their behavior. But is that really true? Does God love everyone, both the good and the evil? Is there ever a time when God hates?

God's Love Versus His Hatred

Wise King Solomon made this declaration: "For everything there is an appointed time, even a time for every affair under the heavens . . . a time to love and a time to hate." (Ec-

clesiastes 3:1, 8) According to this principle, although God is very loving and kind, there are times when he hates.

First, what does "hate" mean as used in the Bible? One reference work answers: "In the Scriptures the word 'hate' has several shades of meaning. It may denote intense hostility, sustained ill will often accompanied by malice. Such hate may become a consuming emotion seeking to bring harm to its object." This is the meaning we are most familiar with, and we see the effects of this kind of hate all over the world. But the same work goes on to say: "'Hate' may also signify a strong dislike but without any intent to bring harm to the object."

This second meaning is what we are considering here. It is an intense aversion, an utter abhorrence—not malice, spite, or a desire to inflict injury. Can God have this kind of hatred? Note what is expressed at Proverbs 6: 16-19: "There are six things that Jehovah does hate; yes, seven are things detestable to his soul: lofty eyes, a false tongue, and hands that are shedding innocent blood, a heart fabricating hurtful schemes, feet that are in a hurry to run to badness, a false witness that launches forth lies, and anyone sending forth contentions among brothers."

As we can see, there are certain practices that God hates. Yet, he does not necessarily

"There are six things that Jehovah does hate; yes, seven are things detestable to his soul: lofty eyes, a false tongue, and hands that are shedding innocent blood, a heart fabricating hurtful schemes, feet that are in a hurry to run to badness, a false witness that launches forth lies, and anyone sending forth contentions among brothers."—PROVERBS 6:16-19



A loving parent disciplines his child in order to help him

hate the person who commits such things. He takes into consideration extenuating circumstances, such as fleshly weaknesses, environment, upbringing, and ignorance. (Genesis 8:21; Romans 5:12) The writer of Proverbs explains this with a fine example: "The one whom Jehovah loves he reproves, even as a father does a son in whom he finds pleasure." (Proverbs 3:12) A child's disobedient acts may be hated, but the parent still loves his child and does all he can to help him recover from his bad conduct by disciplining him. In his love, Jehovah takes a similar course when there is hope of saving the sinful person.

When Hatred Is Justified

What, though, if someone comes to know the will of God but refuses to do it? That person is gaining, not God's love, but his disfavor. If he willfully practices the things Jehovah hates, he incurs His hatred. For example, the Bible says: "Jehovah himself examines

"If we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left, but there is a certain fearful expectation of judgment."—HEBREWS 10:26, 27

the righteous one as well as the wicked one, and anyone loving violence His soul certainly hates." (Psalm 11:5) For such an unrepentant one there is no forgiveness, as the apostle Paul makes clear in his letter to the Hebrews: "If we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left, but there is a certain fearful expectation of judgment and there is a fiery jealousy that is going to consume those in opposition." (Hebrews 10:26, 27) Why does a God of love take that position?

When a person practices a grave sin willfully, the wickedness can become so firmly entrenched that there is no separating it from the person. He may become depraved, incorrigible, irreformable. The Bible compares such a person to a leopard that cannot change its spots. (Jeremiah 13:23) Beyond repentance, the individual commits what the Bible calls "everlasting sin," for which there is no forgiveness.—Mark 3:29.

This was true of Adam and Eve and also of Judas Iscariot. Since Adam and Eve were created perfect and since God's command to them was explicit and understood by both, it is evident that their sinning was willful and deliberate and therefore inexcusable. God's words to them afterward offered no invitation to repent. (Genesis 3:16-24) Judas, although imperfect, had lived in close association with God's own Son and yet turned traitor. Jesus himself referred to him as "the son of destruction." (John 17:12) The

Bible also shows that the Devil is an inveterate sinner who can only expect destruction. (1 John 3:8; Revelation 12:12) These individuals have incurred God's hatred.

It is reassuring to know, however, that not everyone who has sinned is beyond recovery. Jehovah is very patient and takes no delight in punishing those who have sinned on account of ignorance. (Ezekiel 33:11) He invites them to repent and be forgiven. We read: "Let the wicked man leave his way, and the harmful man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will forgive in a large way."—Isaiah 55:7.

A Balanced View of Love and Hate

Clearly, as imitators of God, true Christians need to understand when it is "a time to love" and when it is "a time to hate." Sentimentality can cause one's view of love and mercy to become unbalanced. But the words of the disciple Jude can help us to keep the proper balance between showing mercy and hating sin: "Continue showing mercy to others, doing so with fear, while you hate even the inner garment that has been stained by the flesh." (Jude 22, 23) We should therefore hate what is bad but not the person who does what is bad.

Christians are also commanded to show love for their enemies by doing good to them. "Continue to love your enemies and to pray for those persecuting you," said Jesus. (Matthew 5:44) That is why Jehovah's Witnesses do not cease preaching the good news of God's Kingdom again and again to

"Let the wicked man leave his way, and the harmful man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, who will have mercy upon him . . . He will forgive in a large way."—ISAIAH 55:7

their neighbors, even though some do not respond to that message. (Matthew 24:14) Looking at matters from the Bible's point of view, the Witnesses consider every person a potential recipient of Jehovah's love and mercy. When their efforts to help people are not appreciated or when they are rejected or even persecuted, the Witnesses follow the apostle Paul's counsel: "Keep on blessing those who persecute; be blessing and do not be cursing . . . Return evil for evil to no one." (Romans 12:14, 17) They bear in mind that Jehovah will determine who merits his love and who deserves his hatred. He is the final Judge in matters of life and death.—Hebrews 10:30.

Yes, "God is love." As for us, we should show appreciation for his love and make an effort to find out what his will is and then do it. Jehovah's Witnesses in your locality will be pleased to help you learn from your own copy of the Bible what God's will is and how to apply it in your life. Doing so, you will avoid God's hatred and enjoy his love.

Many prison inmates have benefited from God's love and mercy





"Holy, Holy, Holy Is Jehovah"

If YOU had to choose a single word to describe Jehovah God—his essence, or nature—what word would you select? In the eighth century B.C.E., the prophet Isaiah was given a vision in which he heard spirit creatures extolling Jehovah, using a word that describes a key aspect of His very essence—holiness. What Isaiah saw and heard should both fill us with awe and draw us closer to Jehovah. As we consider the words at Isaiah 6:1-3, imagine yourself there.

What does Isaiah see? "I . . . got to see Jehovah, sitting on a throne lofty and lifted up," reports Isaiah. (Verse 1) Isaiah is not actually viewing the Sovereign Lord Jehovah. Physical eyes cannot peer into the spirit realm. The Bible plainly states: "No man has seen God at any time." (John 1:18) What Isaiah sees is a vision.* Still, the vision is especially vivid—so real that Isaiah is awestruck, reacting as if he were seeing Jehovah himself.

Isaiah next observes what perhaps no other human has been privileged to see in vision. He writes: "Seraphs were standing above him [Jehovah]. Each one had six wings. With two he kept his face covered, and with two he kept his feet covered, and with two he would fly about." (Verse 2) Seraphs are spirit creatures of very high rank. Isaiah is the only Bible writer who mentions them. The seraphs are standing ever ready to move and to act in carrying out the divine will for them. They are covering their face and feet, showing due reverence and respect for the One in whose presence they are privileged to serve.

* *Insight on the Scriptures* explains: "When a person received a vision from God during waking hours, it appears that the impression was made upon the conscious mind. The vision could later be recalled and described or recorded by the recipient, in his own words."—Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Isaiah is awed not only by what he *sees* but also by what he *hears*. Forming a heavenly choir, the seraphs lift up their voices in song. Isaiah writes: "This one called to that one and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of armies.'" (Verse 3) The Hebrew word rendered "holy" conveys the idea of cleanliness and purity. The word also includes "the thought of complete freedom and separation from what is sinful." In

Knowing that Jehovah is holy should move us to draw close to him

what is perhaps a continuous antiphonal song, the seraphs sing the word "holy" three times, emphasizing that Jehovah is holy to the superlative degree. (Revelation 4:8) Holiness, then, is a distinguishing characteristic of his nature. Through and through, Jehovah is pure, clean, and blameless.

Knowing that Jehovah is holy should move us to draw closer to him. Why? Unlike human rulers who may become corrupt and abusive, Jehovah is completely free of what is sinful. His holiness thus guarantees that he will always be the ideal Father, a righteous Ruler, and an impartial Judge. We have every reason to be confident that the God whose very essence is holy will never disappoint us.

SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR DECEMBER:
■ **Isaiah 1-23**



I WANTED TO BE LIKE JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

AS TOLD BY JOANNA SOANS

When I was still a teenager, I developed a strong desire to be like Jephthah's daughter. Let me explain what I had in mind and how I eventually became much like her.

IN 1956, I attended my first assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, and that changed my life. I was deeply moved by a talk I heard there about Jephthah's daughter.

As you may have read in the Bible, Jephthah's daughter, when apparently only a teenager, agreed not to marry. This made it possible for her father to fulfill a vow he had made. So she served as a single woman at Jehovah's house, or tabernacle, for the rest of her life.—Judges 11:28-40.

Oh, how I wanted to be like her! But I faced a big problem—remaining unmarried was contrary to our culture in India at the time.

My Family Background

I was the fifth of six children born to Benjamin and Marcelina Soans in Udupi, a city on the west coast of India. Our mother tongue is Tulu, a language spoken by about two million people. However, like most people in Udupi, our education was in the Kannada language.

Marriage and childbearing have always dominated life in this area. Growing up, I do not ever recall learning the Tulu expressions for "singleness," "loneliness," or "homesickness." It was as if these conditions did not exist. Our family, for example, shared a home

with my grandparents, uncles, aunts, and a dozen cousins!

Traditionally, we had been part of a matri-lineal system, in which children were considered part of the mother's family. Lineage was traced through her, and daughters received the larger share of the inheritance. In some Tulu communities, a girl continued to live with her mother after marriage, and her husband would join her.

Since our family had become nominal Christians, some things were different. Each evening, my grandfather led the family in worship, praying and reading aloud from the Bible in the Tulu language. Whenever he opened his tattered copy of the Bible to read to us, it was as if he were opening a box of jewels. It was exciting! Psalm 23:1 intrigued me: "Jehovah is my Shepherd. I shall lack nothing." I wondered, 'Who is this Jehovah, and why is he called a shepherd?'

The "Scales" Fell From My Eyes

As a result of economic hardships following World War II, we moved to Bombay, over 550 miles (900 km) away. There, in 1945, two of Jehovah's Witnesses visited my father and gave him a Bible booklet. Father drank in its message the way parched soil drinks in the rain, and he began to share its message with other Kannada-speaking people. By the

early 1950's, a small study group had grown into the first Kannada-language congregation in Bombay.

Father and Mother taught us children to be keen Bible students and good teachers. Each day, they found opportunities to pray and study with us. (Deuteronomy 6: 6, 7; 2 Timothy 3:14-16) One day while I was reading the Bible, scales, as it were, fell from my eyes. I learned that Jehovah is likened to a shepherd because he guides, feeds, and protects his worshippers.—Psalm 23:1-6; 83:18.

Jehovah Has Held My Hand

I was baptized shortly after the memorable Bombay convention in 1956. Six months later, I followed the example of my older brother Prabhakar and became a full-time evangelizer. Although I was eager to share Bible truths with others, my mouth went dry as soon as I tried to speak about what I believed. I stuttered, and my voice trembled. 'I can do this work only with Jehovah's help!' I cried to myself.

Help from Jehovah came in the form of missionaries Homer and Ruth McKay from Canada, who had attended the missionary school of Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, U.S.A., in 1947. They held my hand, so to speak, as I clumsily took my first steps when I began in the ministry. Ruth regularly practiced door-to-door presentations with me. She knew exactly how to calm my nerves. Holding my trembling hands, she would say: "Don't worry, dear. Let us try the next house." Her reassuring tone gave me heart.



My father giving a public talk in Bombay in the 1950's

One day, I was informed that Elizabeth Chakranarayan, an older, experienced Bible teacher, would be my partner in the ministry. My initial reaction was: 'How will I manage to live with this sister? She is so much older than I am!' But she turned out to be exactly the partner I needed.

"We Are Never Really Alone"

Our first assignment was to the historic city of Aurangabad, nearly 250 miles (400 km) east of Bombay. It quickly dawned on us that we were the only two Witnesses in a city of nearly a million people. Besides, I had to learn Marathi, the predominant language spoken in the city.

At times, waves of loneliness came over me, and I would sob like a motherless child. But Elizabeth's motherly tone encouraged me. "We may feel lonely at times, but we are never really alone," she would say. "Though you are far away from your friends and family, Jehovah is always with you. Make him your friend, and your loneliness will soon fly away." I treasure her advice to this day.

When funds for transportation were low, we walked up to 12 miles (20 km) daily through dust and mud, heat and cold. In the summer, temperatures often reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit (40°C). During the monsoon season, parts of the territory remained muddy for months. Yet, we often found that the cultural views of the people were more challenging than the weather.

Women did not communicate with men in public unless they were related, and women rarely taught men. So we faced ridicule and abuse. During the first six months, just the two of us met for the weekly Bible meet-



With Elizabeth shortly before her death

ings. In time, interested people joined us. Soon a small group was to form. Some even joined us in the ministry.

"Keep Sharpening Your Skills"

After about two and a half years, we were reassigned to Bombay. While Elizabeth continued in the preaching work, I was asked to help my father, who was then the only translator of our Bible literature into the Kannada language. He welcomed my help, since he had many responsibilities in the congregation.

In 1966, my parents decided to return to Udupi, our former home. As he left Bombay, Father said: "Keep sharpening your skills, my girl. Translate simply and clearly. Avoid overconfidence, and remain humble. Rely on Jehovah." This was his final advice to me, for he passed away soon after returning to Udupi. I have endeavored to do just that in my translation work even today.

"Don't You Want to Be Settled?"

Traditionally, Indian parents arrange for their children to get married while their sons and daughters are quite young, and they encourage them to raise a family. So I was often asked: "Don't you want to be settled? Who will look after you in your old age? Won't you feel lonely?"

At times I felt emotionally suffocated by such repeated comments. Although I hid my feelings in public, I poured out my heart to

Advertising a Bible discourse in Bombay in 1960



Jehovah as soon as I was alone. I was comforted in knowing that he did not view me as lacking because I was single. To renew my resolve to serve him without distraction, I thought of Jephthah's daughter as well as Jesus—both of whom remained single and were absorbed in doing the will of God.
—John 4:34.

A Gift From Jehovah

Elizabeth and I remained close friends for almost 50 years. She died in 2005, at the age of 98. Unable to read the Bible in later years because of failing eyesight, she spent much of each day in intimate, extended prayers to God. I thought at times that she was discussing a scripture with someone in her room, only to find that she was talking to Jehovah. He was a real Person to her, and she lived as if she were in his very presence. I have learned that this is the key to remaining steadfast in serving God, as Jephthah's daughter did. I am so thankful to Jehovah for providing an older, mature sister to mentor me during my younger days and through all my struggles.
—Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10.

What blessings I have enjoyed serving Jehovah as Jephthah's daughter did! Remaining single and following Bible counsel have enabled me to live a rich, rewarding life, while maintaining "constant attendance upon the Lord without distraction."—1 Corinthians 7:35.

With fellow workers in our translation office





TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

They Were Called “Sons of Thunder”



DURING stormy weather, you may hear loud thunder. *Has it ever scared you?** Well, Jesus calls two of his followers “Sons of Thunder.” Let’s figure out why he does.

These two followers of Jesus are James and John. They are brothers, sons of Zebedee and his wife, Salome. Salome is probably a sister of Jesus’ mother, Mary. So Jesus, James, and John may be cousins and may have been good friends as they grew up.

Zebedee is a fisherman, and James and John are too. The two are among the first ones Jesus chooses to be his followers. When he invites them, right away they leave their fishing business and follow him. Later Jesus picks 12 of his followers to be his apostles. James and John are two of these.

A few months before Jesus is killed, he and his apostles are going through the mountain territory of Samaria. It is getting late, and they are all very tired. But the Samaritans say they don’t want Jesus and his apostles to stay overnight with them in their city. *Do you know why?*— Let’s see.

Jesus and his apostles are Jews, and most Jews are mean to Samaritans. Of course, Jesus never is. He treats them kindly, as James and John should too. But the two disciples become angry with the Samaritans who

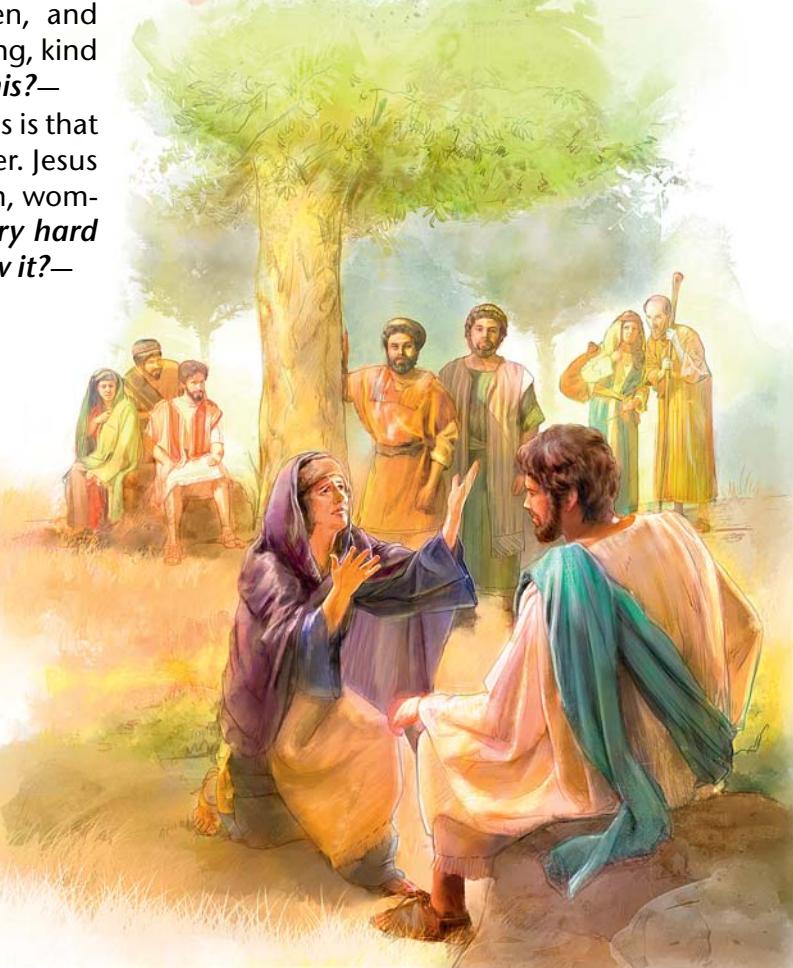
* If you are reading with a child, the dash provides a reminder to pause and encourage the child to express himself.

didn't welcome them, and they ask Jesus: 'Do you want us to tell fire to come down and kill them?' ***What do you think Jesus says?***— He tells them that they are wrong to say such a bad thing! James and John need to learn more about mercy.

Another big problem James and John have is that they want to be first, to be the most important. Shortly before Jesus' death, they send their mother to him to say: "Give the word that these my two sons may sit down, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." Well, when the ten other apostles hear what James and John have done, they are angry. ***Would you be angry too?***—

Probably so. We don't like it when others want to be first and try to be the most important. Later James and John learn how wrong and unkind they have been, and they change. They become very loving, kind apostles. ***What can we learn from this?***—

A lesson we should learn from Jesus is that we too should be kind to one another. Jesus treated people nicely, including men, women, and children. ***Will you always try hard to remember his example and follow it?***—



READ IN YOUR BIBLE

Mark 3:17

Matthew 27:55, 56; Mark 15:40, 41

Matthew 4:18-22

John 4:4-15, 21-26; Luke 9:51-55

Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-37, 41



What can help us to cope should natural disasters strike? SEE PAGES 6-7.

Will there ever be a time when disasters are no more? SEE PAGES 8-9.

Can anyone really interpret Bible prophecies?
SEE PAGES 11-13.

Would you like to know what can help you to find true friends? SEE PAGES 16-17.

What is the meaning when the Bible says that there is "a time to love and a time to hate"?
SEE PAGES 23-25.

Would you welcome a visit?