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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

SPECIAL ISSUE

The Man Who Changed the World

HIS MESSAGE AND YOU

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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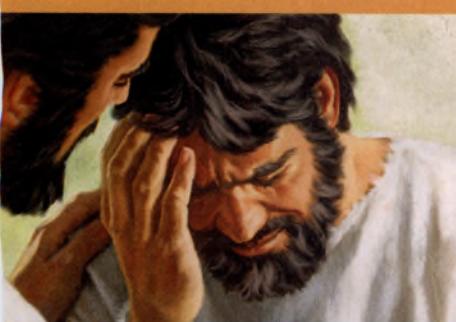
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The Man Who Changed the World

Billions of people have lived and died on this earth. Most have left no footprint on the sands of time. A few, however, have influenced the course of history—and likely your everyday life.

YOU get up in the morning and prepare to leave for work. You turn on the lights while you are getting ready. You grab a book or magazine to read on the bus. You remember to take the prescribed antibiotic that is helping you to fight an infection. Your day has hardly begun, and you already have benefited from the influence of a few notable men.

Michael Faraday Born in 1791, this English physicist was the inventor of the electric motor and the dynamo. His breakthroughs helped to make electricity more available for human use.

Ts'ai Lun An official at the imperial court of China, Ts'ai Lun is credited with developing a paper-making process in about 105 C.E. that led to the mass production of paper.

Johannes Gutenberg About 1450, this German inventor developed the first printing press using movable type. The press made possible inexpensive printing, thus providing widespread access to information on a vast array of topics.

Alexander Fleming In 1928, this Scottish researcher discovered an antibiotic substance he named penicillin. Antibiotics are now widely used to treat bacterial infections.

Without question, the discoveries and innovations of a few men have enabled billions of people to have certain advantages or to enjoy better health.

There is, however, one man who stands out above all others. He is not known for any scientific discovery or medical breakthrough. Rather, this man of humble background who died nearly 2,000 years ago left behind a message—a powerful message of hope and comfort. When measured by the degree to which his message has affected the lives of people earth wide, many would agree that he truly is the man who changed the world.

That man was Jesus Christ. What message did he preach? And what effect can that message have on your life?



JESUS CHRIST The Reach of His Message

"Surely the most enduring testament to the sage from Capernaum is that he continues to hold hearts and minds in his gentle grasp."*—AUTHOR GREGG EASTERBROOK.

WORDS have power. Well-chosen words of wisdom can move hearts, inspire hope, and change lives. No man has ever been more powerful in word than Jesus Christ. One who heard Jesus give the now well-known Sermon on the Mount later wrote: "When Jesus finished these sayings, the effect was that the crowds were astounded at his way of teaching."—Matthew 7:28.

To this day, many of Jesus' sayings are familiar to people the world over. Consider a few examples of sayings rich in meaning.

"You cannot slave for God and for Riches."
—Matthew 6:24.

* Capernaum was considered to be Jesus' home city in the district of Galilee.—Mark 2:1.

"All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them."—Matthew 7:12.

"Pay back . . . Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God."—Matthew 22:21.

"There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

But Jesus did more than utter memorable sayings. The message he preached had power because it conveyed the truth about God, taught people how to find real meaning in life, and clearly pointed to the remedy for all human suffering—God's Kingdom. As we examine this message on the pages that follow, we will see why Jesus continues to hold millions of "hearts and minds in his gentle grasp."

THE WATCHTOWER ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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What Jesus Taught About Himself

"Jesus had no doubt whatever as to who he was, from where he came, why he entered our world, and what the future held for him."—AUTHOR HERBERT LOCKYER.

BEFORE we can accept and put faith in the things Jesus taught, we need to know something about him. Who really was Jesus? Where did he come from? What was his purpose in life? In the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—we can hear the answers from Jesus' own lips, as it were.

He lived before he was born on earth Jesus once said: "Before Abraham came into existence, I have been." (John 8:58) Abraham lived some 2,000 years before Jesus' birth. Yet, Jesus lived even before that faithful patriarch walked the earth. Where, though, had Jesus existed? "I have come down from heaven," he explained.—John 6:38.

The Son of God Jehovah has many angelic sons. Jesus, however, is unique. He referred to himself as "the only-begotten Son of God." (John 3:18) That expression means that Jesus is the sole *direct* creation of God. The only-begotten Son is the one through whom God created all other things.—Colossians 1:16.

"The Son of man" Jesus used this expression more than any other to refer to himself. (Matthew 8:20) He thus showed that he was neither a materialized angel nor an incarnation. Rather, he was fully human. By his holy spirit, God transferred his Son's life from

heaven to earth, causing conception in the womb of the virgin girl Mary. As a result, Jesus was born as a perfect, sinless human.—Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35; John 8:46.

The promised Messiah "I know that Messiah is coming," said a Samaritan woman to Jesus. He replied: "I who am speaking to you am he." (John 4:25, 26) The word "Messiah," like the word "Christ," means "Anointed One." Jesus was anointed, or appointed by God, to fill a special role in the fulfillment of God's promises.

His primary mission Jesus once said: "I must declare the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this I was sent forth." (Luke 4:43) Although he performed many good deeds for people in need, preaching about God's Kingdom was his main focus in life. What he taught about that Kingdom will be discussed later.

Clearly, Jesus was no ordinary man.* As we will see, the life he had in heaven gave added meaning to the words he uttered on earth. Is it any wonder that he preached a message that would affect the lives of millions around the world?

* For more information about Jesus and his role in God's purpose, see chapter 4 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

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What Jesus Taught About God

"The only one who really knows the Father is the Son. But the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so that they can know him too."—LUKE 10:22, CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION.

IN HIS prehuman existence, God's first-born Son spent countless ages in close association with his Father. (Colossians 1:15) The Son thus came to know his Father's thoughts, feelings, and ways. When this Son later came to the earth as the man Jesus, he was eager to teach the truth about his Father. We can learn much about God by listening to what this Son had to say.

God's name The divine name, Jehovah, was of utmost importance to Jesus. This beloved Son wanted others to know and use his Father's name. Jesus' own name means "Jehovah is Salvation." On the night before his death, Jesus could say in prayer to Jehovah: "I have made your name known." (John 17:26) It is not surprising that Jesus used God's name and made it known to others. After all, how could Jesus' listeners understand the truth about Jehovah without even knowing His name and what it stands for?*

God's great love Jesus once said in prayer to God: "Father, . . . you loved me before the founding of the world." (John 17:24) Having experienced God's love in heaven, Jesus when on earth sought to reveal that love in its many beautiful facets.

Jesus showed that Jehovah's love is *expansive*. Jesus noted: "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) The Greek word rendered "world" does not mean "the earth." As used here, it refers to humans—really, to all humankind. So great is God's love for the human family that he gave his most precious Son in order that faithful humans might be freed from the grip of sin and death and have the prospect of everlasting life. We cannot begin to measure the breadth or plumb the depth of such a great love.—Romans 8:38, 39.

Jesus affirmed a most reassuring truth: Jehovah deeply loves his worshippers as *individuals*. Jesus taught that Jehovah is like a shepherd to whom each one of his sheep is distinct and precious. (Matthew 18:12-14) Jesus said that not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without Jehovah's knowledge. Jesus added: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:29-31) If Jehovah has the ability to take note that one sparrow is missing from a particular nest, how much more must he observe and care about each of his human worshippers? If each hair on our head can be numbered and noticed by Jehovah, then is there any detail about our life—our needs, our struggles, and our worries—that he cannot know?

Heavenly Father As we noted in the preceding article, Jesus is God's only-begotten Son. Not surprisingly, this beloved Son most often addressed Jehovah and spoke about

* The name Jehovah appears some 7,000 times in the original text of the Bible. The meaning associated with that name is "I shall prove to be what I shall prove to be." (Exodus 3:14) God can become whatever he deems necessary in order to accomplish his purpose. This name thus guarantees that God will always be true to himself and that whatever he promises will come to pass.



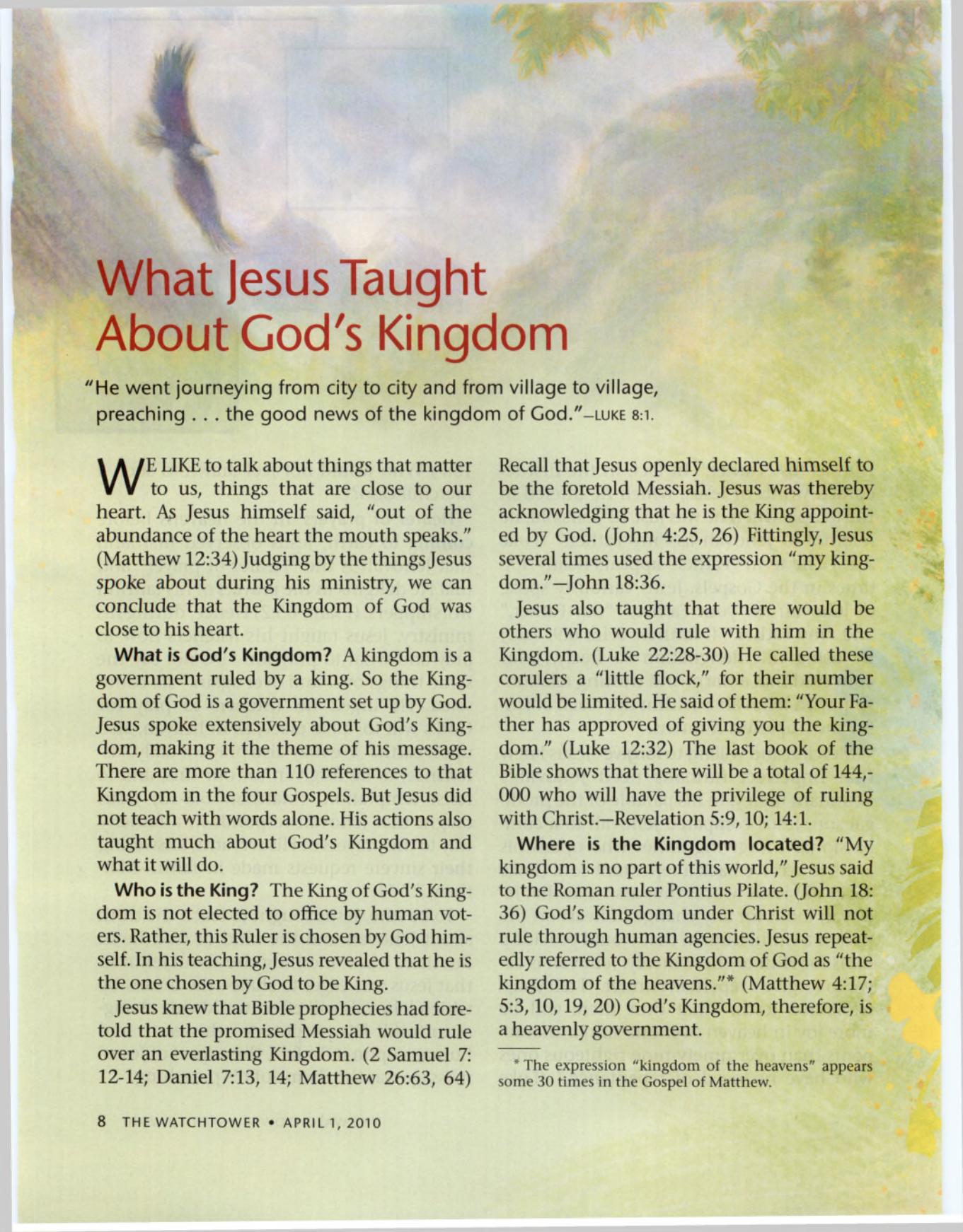
Him as his “Father.” In fact, in the first recorded words of Jesus, which he uttered in the temple when he was just 12 years old, he referred to Jehovah as “my Father.” (Luke 2:49) The term “Father” appears nearly 190 times in the Gospels. Jesus variously spoke of Jehovah as “your Father,” “our Father,” and “my Father.” (Matthew 5:16; 6:9; 7:21) By using this designation so freely, Jesus conveyed that a warm and trusting relationship with Jehovah is within the reach of sinful and imperfect humans.

Merciful and willing to forgive Jesus knew that imperfect humans need Jehovah’s abundant mercy. In his parable of the prodigal son, Jesus compared Jehovah to a compassionate, forgiving father who opens his arms to receive back a repentant son. (Luke 15:11-32) Jesus’ words thus assure us that Jehovah looks for any change of heart on the part of a sinful human that would provide a basis for Him to show mercy. Jehovah is eager to forgive a repentant sinner. “I tell you,” explained Jesus, “that thus there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine righteous ones who have no need of repentance.” (Luke

15:7) Who would not feel drawn to such a merciful God?

Hearer of prayers In the heavens before coming to earth, Jesus observed firsthand that Jehovah is the “Hearer of prayer” and that He delights in the prayers of his faithful worshippers. (Psalm 65:2) Hence, during his ministry, Jesus taught his listeners how to pray and what to pray for. “Do not say the same things over and over again,” he counseled. He urged his listeners to pray for God’s will to “take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.” We may also pray for daily sustenance, to be forgiven for our sins, and to resist temptation. (Matthew 6:5-13) Jesus taught that Jehovah responds in a fatherly way to the prayers of His servants, answering their sincere requests made in faith.—Matthew 7:7-11.

To be sure, Jesus sought to teach the truth about Jehovah and the kind of God he is. But there was something else about Jehovah that Jesus was eager to share—the means by which Jehovah will effect worldwide changes to fulfill His purpose for this earth and humans upon it. In fact, this aspect of Jesus’ message was the theme of his preaching.



What Jesus Taught About God's Kingdom

"He went journeying from city to city and from village to village, preaching . . . the good news of the kingdom of God."—LUKE 8:1.

WE LIKE to talk about things that matter to us, things that are close to our heart. As Jesus himself said, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34) Judging by the things Jesus spoke about during his ministry, we can conclude that the Kingdom of God was close to his heart.

What is God's Kingdom? A kingdom is a government ruled by a king. So the Kingdom of God is a government set up by God. Jesus spoke extensively about God's Kingdom, making it the theme of his message. There are more than 110 references to that Kingdom in the four Gospels. But Jesus did not teach with words alone. His actions also taught much about God's Kingdom and what it will do.

Who is the King? The King of God's Kingdom is not elected to office by human voters. Rather, this Ruler is chosen by God himself. In his teaching, Jesus revealed that he is the one chosen by God to be King.

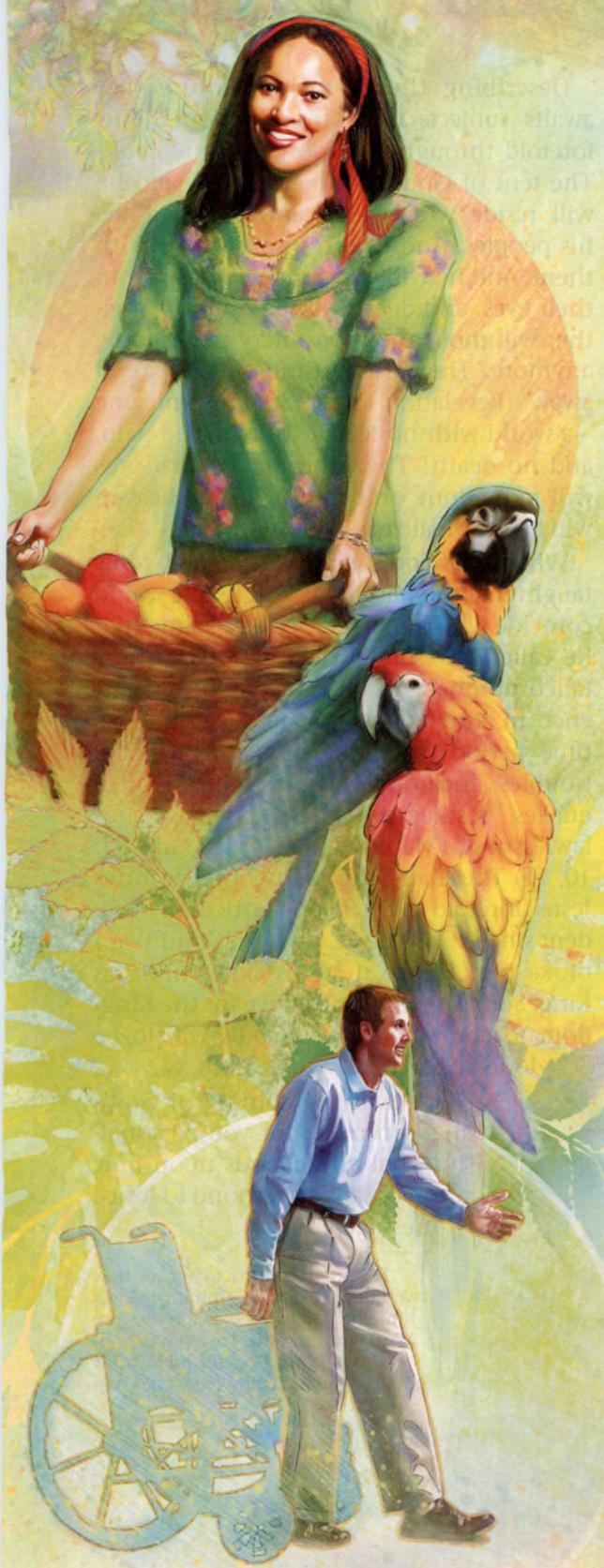
Jesus knew that Bible prophecies had foretold that the promised Messiah would rule over an everlasting Kingdom. (2 Samuel 7:12-14; Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 26:63, 64)

Recall that Jesus openly declared himself to be the foretold Messiah. Jesus was thereby acknowledging that he is the King appointed by God. (John 4:25, 26) Fittingly, Jesus several times used the expression "my kingdom."—John 18:36.

Jesus also taught that there would be others who would rule with him in the Kingdom. (Luke 22:28-30) He called these rulers a "little flock," for their number would be limited. He said of them: "Your Father has approved of giving you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) The last book of the Bible shows that there will be a total of 144,000 who will have the privilege of ruling with Christ.—Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1.

Where is the Kingdom located? "My kingdom is no part of this world," Jesus said to the Roman ruler Pontius Pilate. (John 18:36) God's Kingdom under Christ will not rule through human agencies. Jesus repeatedly referred to the Kingdom of God as "the kingdom of the heavens."* (Matthew 4:17; 5:3, 10, 19, 20) God's Kingdom, therefore, is a heavenly government.

* The expression "kingdom of the heavens" appears some 30 times in the Gospel of Matthew.



the world—will be transformed into a paradise of peace and joy.

Jesus fully expected to return to heaven following his sojourn on earth. There, he said, he would “prepare a place,” opening the way for his followers to join him.—John 14:2, 3.

What does the Kingdom accomplish? Jesus taught his listeners to pray to God: “Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.” (Matthew 6:9, 10) God’s will is being done in heaven. The Kingdom is the means by which God’s purpose for the earth is carried out. To accomplish that, the Kingdom will effect dramatic changes on this earth.

What will the Kingdom do on earth? Jesus taught that God’s Kingdom will eliminate evil by removing those who are bent on practicing it. (Matthew 25:31-34, 46) That will mean the end of all forms of corruption and wickedness. The earth, Jesus taught, will be filled with people who are “mild-tempered,” righteous, merciful, “pure in heart,” and peaceable.—Matthew 5:5-9.

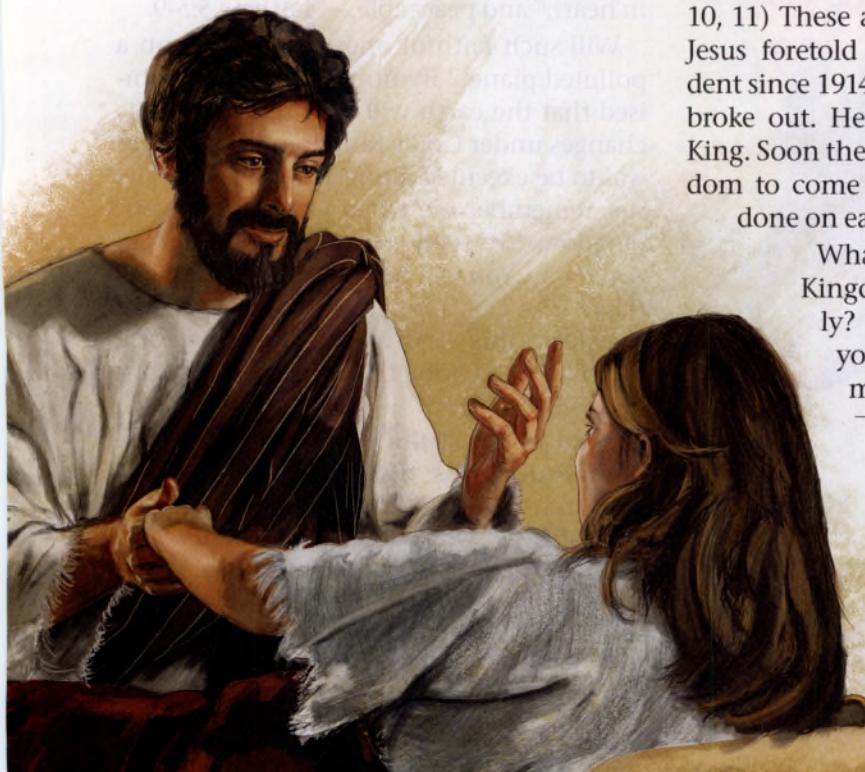
Will such faithful ones have to live on a polluted planet? By no means! Jesus promised that the earth will undergo marvelous changes under God’s Kingdom. A man who was to be executed alongside Jesus said: “Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom.” In reply, Jesus said: “Truly I tell you today, You will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:42, 43) Yes, God’s Kingdom will transform this earth into a global paradise—similar to the one that existed in the garden of Eden.

What else will the Kingdom do for humankind? Jesus did more than *promise* what God’s Kingdom will do. He also *showed* what it will do. Jesus performed many miraculous healings, thus

demonstrating on a small scale what he will do on a far greater scale in the future during his Kingdom rule. The inspired Gospel record says of Jesus: “He went around throughout the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom and curing every sort of disease and every sort of infirmity among the people.”—Matthew 4:23.

Jesus performed a wide variety of cures. He “opened the eyes of one born blind.” (John 9:1-7, 32, 33) With a gentle touch, Jesus healed a man afflicted with the loathsome disease of leprosy. (Mark 1:40-42) When “a man deaf and with a speech impediment” was brought to him, Jesus demonstrated that he could make “the deaf hear and the speechless speak.”—Mark 7:31-37.

Not even death itself could stay the hand of God’s appointed King. On three recorded occasions, Jesus restored life to the dead. He resurrected the only son of a widow, a 12-year-old girl, and his dear friend Lazarus.—Luke 7:11-15; 8:41-55; John 11:38-44.



Describing the marvelous future that awaits subjects of God’s Kingdom, Jesus foretold through the apostle John: “Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.” (Revelation 1:1; 21:3, 4) Just imagine—a world with no tears of sorrow, no pain, and no death! Then the prayer for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven will be fully realized.

When will God’s Kingdom come? Jesus taught that the start of his kingly rule would coincide with a marked period of time that he called his “presence.” Jesus gave a detailed prophecy to indicate when his presence in kingly power would begin. This time period would be marked by global troubles, including wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences, and an increasing of lawlessness. (Matthew 24:3, 7-12; Luke 21:10, 11) These and the many other features Jesus foretold have been particularly evident since 1914, the year when World War I broke out. Hence, Jesus is now ruling as King. Soon the time will arrive for the Kingdom to come and cause God’s will to be done on earth.*

What will the coming of God’s Kingdom mean for you personally? That all depends upon how you choose to respond to Jesus’ message.

* For a detailed discussion of how we know that the coming of God’s Kingdom is near, see chapter 9, “Are We Living in ‘the Last Days’?,” of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

JESUS CHRIST His Message and You

"I have come that they might have life and might have it in abundance."

—JOHN 10:10.

JESUS CHRIST came to the earth primarily to give, not to receive. By means of his ministry, he gave a priceless gift to humankind—a message that revealed the truth about God and His will. Those who respond to that message can enjoy a better life now, as millions of true Christians can testify.* But at the core of the message Jesus preached is the most precious gift of all—the perfect life that he gave in our behalf. Our eternal welfare depends upon our response to this key aspect of his message.

What God and Christ gave Jesus knew that he was to die a painful death at the hands of his enemies. (Matthew 20:17-19) Yet, in his well-known words found at John 3:16, he said: "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." Jesus also said that he came "to give his soul [or, life] a ransom in exchange for many." (Matthew 20:28) Why did he say that his life would be *given* rather than *taken*?

Motivated by unsurpassed love, God made provision for humans to be rescued from inherited sin and its consequences—imperfection and death. God did this by sending his only-begotten Son to the earth to die a sacrificial death. Jesus willingly complied, giving his perfect human life in our behalf. This provision, called the ransom, is God's great-

est gift to humankind.* It is a gift that can lead to everlasting life.

What you need to do Is the ransom a gift to you personally? That is up to you. To illustrate: Imagine that someone holds out to you a gift-wrapped box. Really, it does not become *your* gift until you reach out and accept it. Similarly, Jehovah extends the ransom to you, but this gift is not yours personally unless you reach out and accept it. How?

Jesus said that it is those "exercising faith" in him who will receive everlasting life. Faith involves the way you live your life. (James 2:26) Exercising faith in Jesus means bringing your life into harmony with the things he said and did. To do that, you must know Jesus and his Father well. "This means everlasting life," Jesus said, "their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." —John 17:3.

Some 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ shared a message that has changed the lives of millions of people the world over. Would you like to know more about that message and how you and your loved ones can benefit from it, not just now, but forever? Jehovah's Witnesses would be happy to help you.

The articles that follow will further acquaint you with Jesus Christ, the man who preached a message that could change your life forever.

* Not everyone who claims to be Christian is a genuine follower of Christ. Jesus' true followers are those who live in harmony with the truths he taught about God and His will.—Matthew 7:21-23.

* For more information about the Scriptural teaching of the ransom, see chapter 5, "The Ransom—God's Greatest Gift," of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



**WHAT DO YOU THINK?
ARE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS FACT OR MYTH?**

Jesus was born on December 25.

Three wise men visited Jesus at the time of his birth.

Jesus was an only child.

Jesus was God incarnate.

Jesus was more than simply a good man.

MYTH VERSUS FACT

THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS

MANY would respond that all those statements are factual. Others might say that it is difficult—even impossible—to know for sure. Perhaps they feel that as long as you believe in Jesus, the answer does not really matter.

The Bible, however, says otherwise. It encourages us to have “*accurate knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:8) We gain that knowledge by examining the Gospels. They reveal the truth about Jesus, enabling us to separate myth from fact. So let us consider what the Gospels indicate regarding the above-mentioned beliefs.

BELIEF: *Jesus was born on December 25.*

STATUS: MYTH.

There is no direct statement in the Bible concerning the month or day of Jesus’ birth. Where, then, did the date of December 25 come from? According to *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, some who called themselves Christians “wished the date to coincide with the pagan Roman festival marking . . . the winter solstice, when the days again begin to lengthen and the sun begins to climb higher in the sky.” That same reference work notes that many Christmas customs originated with “pagan agricultural and solar observances at midwinter.”

Would Jesus approve of the celebration of his birth on December 25? Consider: The day of Jesus' birth is unknown. Nowhere do the Scriptures direct us to celebrate that birth, nor is there any evidence that early Christians did so. In contrast, the Bible provides the exact day of Jesus' death, and he commanded his followers to observe that day.* (Luke 22:19) Clearly, Jesus wanted emphasis to be placed, not on his birth, but on the value of his sacrificial death.—Matthew 20:28.

BELIEF: *Three wise men (or kings in some traditions) visited Jesus at the time of his birth.*

STATUS: MYTH.

Perhaps you have seen paintings or nativity scenes that depict the infant Jesus lying in a manger, surrounded by three wise men bearing gifts. This image, however, is fiction, not fact.

It is true that a delegation from the East paid homage to young Jesus. These visitors, though, were really astrologers. (Matthew 2:1, *The New English Bible; The Bible—An American Translation*) And did they find Jesus nestled in a manger? No; they visited him in a house. Evidently, they arrived some months after Jesus' birth.—Matthew 2:9-11.

As to the number of visitors, were there 2? 3? 30? The Bible does not say. Perhaps the traditional number of three arose from their three types of gifts.* (Matthew 2:11) Some have even proposed that each of the so-called wise men represented a different race

* Jesus died on Passover Day, or Nisan 14, according to the Jewish calendar.—Matthew 26:2.

* Matthew reports that the foreigners "opened their treasures" and presented Jesus with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Interestingly, those expensive gifts may have come at just the right time, since Jesus' family—evidently of little means—were soon forced to flee as refugees.—Matthew 2:11-15.

of mankind. But that idea is not found in the Scriptures. Rather, as one Gospel commentary notes, this particular myth is the product of "an eighth-century historian with a vivid imagination."

BELIEF: *Jesus was an only child.*

STATUS: MYTH.

That Jesus had siblings is clearly indicated in the Gospels. Luke's Gospel refers to Jesus as Mary's "firstborn," implying that she later bore other children.* (Luke 2:7) Mark's Gospel reports that some in the city of Nazareth equated Jesus with his siblings, regarding him as nothing special. They asked: "Aren't James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon his brothers? Don't his sisters still live here in our town?"—Mark 6:3, *Contemporary English Version*; Matthew 12:46; John 7:5.

Despite what the Gospels say, many theologians maintain that Jesus was an only child. Some suggest that the brothers and sisters in question were actually Jesus' cousins.* Others speculate that these siblings were Mary's stepchildren. But consider: If Jesus were Mary's only child, would those Nazarenes have said what they did? On the contrary, some of them likely witnessed Mary's pregnancies with their own eyes. They knew firsthand that Jesus was one of many children born to Mary.

BELIEF: *Jesus was God incarnate.*

STATUS: MYTH.

The idea that God came to earth and lived as the man Jesus, which is central to the

* While Jesus' conception was miraculous, the rest of Mary's children were conceived naturally with her husband, Joseph.—Matthew 1:25.

* This notion, asserted by Jerome about 383 C.E., is popular among those who believe that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life. Jerome later expressed misgivings about his theory, but in the minds of many—and in the official position of the Catholic Church—the thought persists.

doctrine of the Trinity, has been around for a long time—but it does not date back to Jesus. Rather, *The Encyclopædia Britannica* observes: “Neither the word Trinity nor the explicit doctrine appears in the New Testament . . . The doctrine developed gradually over several centuries and through many controversies.”

Religion actually degrades Jesus when it teaches that he was God in the flesh.* How so? Consider an illustration. Some workers make a request of their supervisor, but he says that he does not have the authority to grant it. If his statement is true, the supervisor has wisely displayed an awareness of his limitations. If it is not true—if he *can* grant the request but simply chooses not to—he has been deceptive.

Now, how did Jesus respond when two of his apostles desired positions of prominence? He told them: “This sitting down at my right hand and at my left is not mine to give, but it belongs to those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” (Matthew 20:23) If Jesus were really God, would that not have been a lie? Instead, by deferring to the

* For a full discussion of the Trinity doctrine, see the brochure *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.

One with greater authority, Jesus set a beautiful example in modesty—and he showed that he was not equal to God.

BELIEF: Jesus was more than simply a good man.

STATUS: FACT.

Jesus plainly stated that he was more than a good man. He said: “I am God’s Son.” (John 10:36) Of course, anyone could *claim* to be the Son of God. But if Jesus’ claim were false, what would that make him? Really, not a good man, but a great fraud!

The most reliable testimony came from God himself. He twice said concerning Jesus: “This is my Son.” (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) Just think: The Scriptures report only a few occasions when God’s own voice was heard on earth—yet on two of them he affirmed Jesus as his Son! This is by far the best proof that Jesus was who he said he was.

Has this article uncovered any facts about Jesus that you did not previously know? If so, why not examine the inspired Gospels further? Such study can be both enjoyable and rewarding. After all, Jesus himself said that learning the truth about him and his Father “means everlasting life.”—John 17:3.



Additional Facts That May Surprise You

What was Jesus like as a person? Was he so austere, so cold and aloof, that he could not relate to common people? Some would answer yes. Perhaps that is why they are surprised to learn that Jesus . . .

- attended joyous social events.—John 2:1-11.
- gave commendation.—Mark 14:6-9.
- enjoyed the company of children.—Mark 10:13, 14.
- wept openly.—John 11:35.
- felt compassion.—Mark 1:40, 41.



DID YOU KNOW?

What evidence exists outside the Bible that Jesus was a real historical figure?

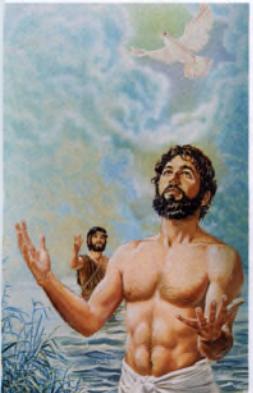


■ A number of secular writers who lived close to the time of Jesus made specific mention of him. Among them was Cornelius Tacitus, who recorded the history of Rome under the emperors. Regarding a fire that devastated Rome in 64 C.E., Tacitus relates that it was rumored that Emperor Nero was responsible for the disaster. Nero, says Tacitus, tried to place the blame on a group whom the populace called Christians. Tacitus writes: "Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius."—*Annals*, XV, 44.

ARTIST'S RENDERING
OF FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus also mentions Jesus. In discussing events that took place between the death of Festus, the Roman governor of Judea about 62 C.E., and the arrival of his successor, Albinus, Josephus says that High Priest Ananus (Annas) "convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others."—*Jewish Antiquities*, XX, 200 (ix, 1).

Why was Jesus called Christ?



■ The Gospel accounts relate that when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she would become pregnant, he told her that she should name her son Jesus. (Luke 1: 31) This was a fairly common name among the Jews in Bible times. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote of 12 people, other than those mentioned in the Scriptures, who bore that name. Mary's son was called "the Nazarene," which served to identify him as the Jesus who came from Nazareth. (Mark 10:47) He also came to be known as "the Christ," or Jesus Christ. (Matthew 16:16) What does this mean?

The English word "Christ" comes from the Greek *Khri-stos'*, the equiva-

lent of the Hebrew *Ma-shi'ach* (Messiah). Both words literally mean "Anointed One." This term was properly applied to others before Jesus. For example, Moses, Aaron, and King David were all said to be anointed, meaning that they were appointed to God-given positions of responsibility and authority. (Leviticus 4:3; 8:12; 2 Samuel 22:51; Hebrews 11:24-26) Jesus, the foretold Messiah, was the preeminent representative of Jehovah. Hence, Jesus appropriately received the designation "Christ, the Son of the living God."—Matthew 16:16; Daniel 9:25.

THE SYNAGOGUE

Where Jesus and His Disciples Preached

"Then he went around throughout the whole of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom."—MATTHEW 4:23.

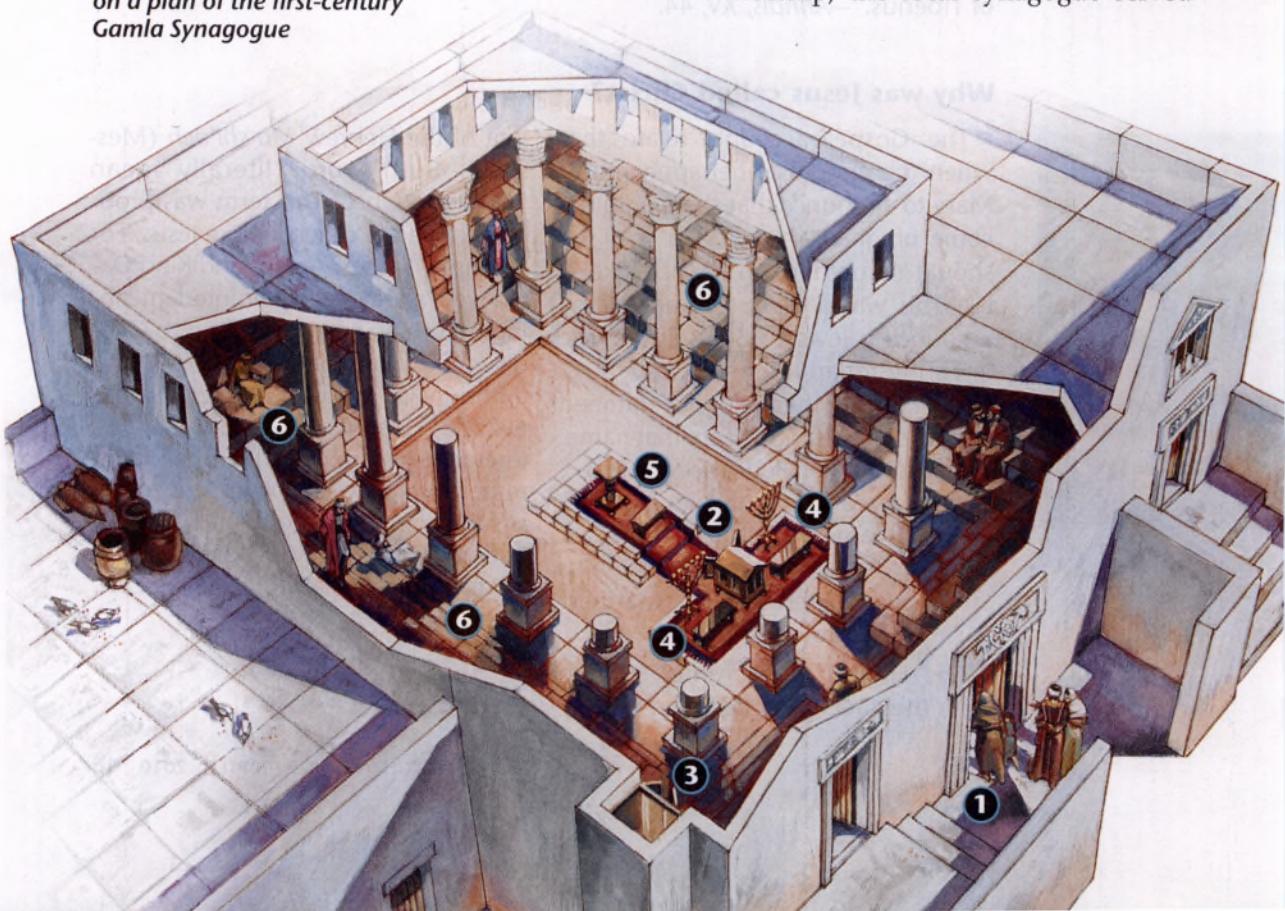
AGAIN and again in the Gospel record, we find Jesus in a synagogue. Whether in Nazareth, the town where he was reared, or in Capernaum, the city that came to be his home base, or in any of the towns and villages that he visited during the busy three and a half years of his ministry, Jesus often chose the synagogue as the place to preach and teach about God's Kingdom. In fact, looking back on his ministry, Jesus said: "I always taught in a synagogue and in the temple,

where all the Jews come together."—John 18:20.

Likewise, Jesus' apostles and other early Christians often taught in Jewish synagogues. How, though, did the Jews come to worship in synagogues? And what were those houses of worship like back in Jesus' day? Let us take a closer look.

A Central Feature of Jewish Life Three times in the year, Jewish males would travel to Jerusalem for the festivals held at the sacred temple there. But for their day-to-day worship, the local synagogue served

*This reconstruction is based
on a plan of the first-century
Gamla Synagogue*



their needs, whether they lived in Palestine or in one of the many Jewish colonies that were established abroad.

When did the synagogue come into use? Some believe it was about the time of the exile of the Jews to Babylon (607-537 B.C.E.), a period when the temple of Jehovah lay in ruins. Or it might have been soon after the Jews returned from exile, when Ezra the priest urged his people to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of God's Law.
—Ezra 7:10; 8:1-8; 10:3.

Originally, the word for "synagogue" simply meant "assembly" or "congregation." It was used that way in the *Septuagint*, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In time, though, the word came to refer to the building where people assembled for worship. By the first century C.E., virtually every town Jesus visited had its own synagogue; cities had several; Jerusalem had many. What were those buildings like?

A Modest House of Worship When setting out to build a synagogue, the Jews would generally seek an elevated spot and plan the building so that its entrance (1) would face Jerusalem. It seems that such standards were fairly flexible, though, for they could not always be met.

When finished, the synagogue was often modest, the furnishings fairly sparse. A central feature, though, was an ark (2), or repository, that contained the community's most prized possession—the scrolls of the Sacred Scriptures. When meetings were held, the portable ark was placed in position, to be returned to a secure room afterward (3).

Near the ark and facing the congregation were the front seats (4) for the presiding officers of the synagogue and any distinguished guests. (Matthew 23:5, 6) Near the center of the

hall was a raised platform with a stand and a seat for the speaker (5). Facing the platform on three sides were benches for the congregation (6).

Usually, the synagogue was operated and supported by the local congregation. Voluntary contributions by all, wealthy and poor alike, kept the building maintained and in good repair. What, though, were synagogue meetings like?



Worship at the Synagogue The worship program at the synagogue included praise, prayer, the reading of Scripture, as well as teaching and preaching. The congregation would begin by reciting the Shema, what amounted to the Jewish confession of faith. It received its name from the first word of the first scripture recited: "Listen [Shema], O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah."
—Deuteronomy 6:4.

Next, there was a reading and exposition from the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, which were penned by Moses. (Acts 15:21) Another reading would follow, using excerpts from the writings of the prophets (haftarahs) and offering explanation and application. At times, visiting speakers carried



out this part of the program, as Jesus did on the occasion described at Luke 4:16-21.

Of course, the scroll that was handed to Jesus at that meeting was not marked with chapters and verses the way our modern Bibles are. So we can picture Jesus unrolling the scroll with his left hand while rolling it up with his right until he found the passage he sought. After the reading, the scroll was rewound to the beginning.

Most often, these readings were in the original Hebrew and translated into Aramaic. In Greek-speaking congregations, the *Sepuagint* was used.

Central to Daily Life So central to daily Jewish life was the synagogue that it, along with other buildings attached to it or located in the same complex of buildings, served a variety of purposes. Sometimes court hearings were held there, as well as community meetings and even assemblies with meals served in connected dining rooms. Travelers were sometimes put up in rooming facilities in the synagogue complex.

In virtually every town, the synagogue also featured a school, often within the same building. We may picture a room full of young students learning to read the large letters written on a wax tablet by a teacher.

Synagogue schools taught boys from about age 6 to 13

Such schools were an important reason why ancient Jewish society was literate, even the common people being familiar with the Scriptures.

The main purpose of the synagogue, though, was to provide a setting for regular worship. It is not surprising, then, that the meetings of first-century Christians had much in common with those Jewish synagogue meetings. In Christian meetings, the purpose was likewise to worship Jehovah by means of prayer, songs of praise, and readings and discussions of God's Word. The similarities did not end there. In both places of worship, various needs and expenses were met by voluntary contributions; in neither was the privilege of reading and discussing God's Word restricted to a clergy class; in both cases, the meetings were organized and directed by responsible older men.

Jehovah's Witnesses today endeavor to adhere to the model laid down by Jesus and his first-century followers. Their Kingdom Hall meetings thus have some features in common with those ancient synagogue meetings. Above all, the Witnesses assemble with the same objective that lovers of truth have always held in common—to "draw close to God."—James 4:8.



Is Jesus the Archangel Michael?

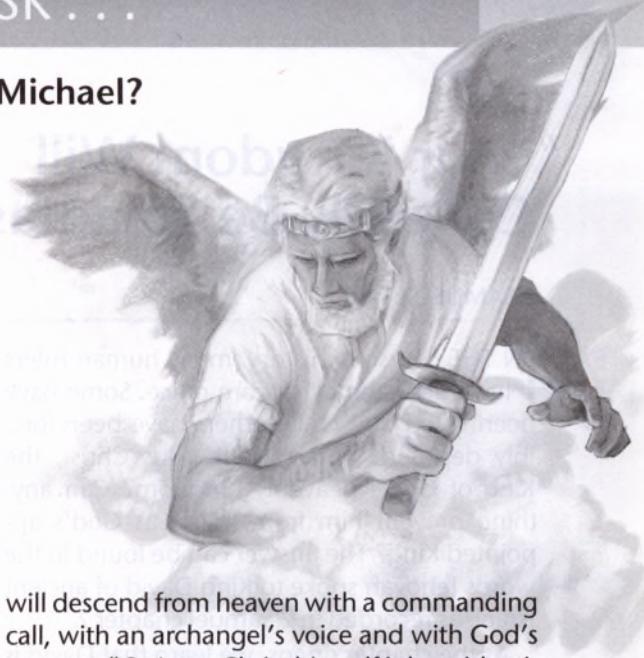
■ Put simply, the answer is yes. The custom of being called by more than one name is common in many cultures. The same situation occurs with names in the Bible. For example, the patriarch Jacob is also named Israel. (Genesis 35:10) The apostle Peter is named in five different ways—Symeon, Simon, Peter, Cephas, and Simon Peter. (Matthew 10:2; 16:16; John 1:42; Acts 15:7, 14) How can we be sure that Michael is another name for Jesus? Consider the following Scriptural evidence.

The Bible contains five references to the mighty spirit creature Michael. Three occurrences are in the book of Daniel. At Daniel 10:13, 21, we read that a dispatched angel is rescued by Michael, who is called “one of the foremost princes” and “the prince of you people.” Next, at Daniel 12:1, we learn that in the time of the end, “Michael will stand up, the great prince who is standing in behalf of the sons of your people.”

A further mention of Michael occurs at Revelation 12:7, which describes “Michael and his angels” as fighting a vital war that results in the ousting of Satan the Devil and his wicked angels from heaven.

Notice that in each of the above-mentioned cases, Michael is portrayed as a warrior angel battling for and protecting God’s people, even confronting Jehovah’s greatest enemy, Satan.

Jude verse 9 calls Michael “the archangel.” The prefix “arch” means “principal” or “chief,” and the word “archangel” is never used in the plural form in the Bible. The only other verse in which an archangel is mentioned is at 1 Thessalonians 4:16, where Paul describes the resurrected Jesus, saying: “The Lord [Jesus] himself



will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangel’s voice and with God’s trumpet.” So Jesus Christ himself is here identified as the archangel, or chief angel.

In view of the foregoing, what can we conclude? Jesus Christ is Michael the archangel. Both names—Michael (meaning “Who Is Like God?”) and Jesus (meaning “Jehovah Is Salvation”—focus attention on his role as the leading advocate of God’s sovereignty. Philippians 2:9 states: “God exalted him [the glorified Jesus] to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name.”

It is important to note that the human birth of Jesus was not the beginning of his life. Before Jesus was born, Mary was visited by an angel who told her that she would conceive a child by means of holy spirit and that she should name the child Jesus. (Luke 1:31) During his ministry, Jesus often spoke of his pre-human existence.—John 3:13; 8:23, 58.

So Michael the archangel is Jesus in his pre-human existence. After his resurrection and return to heaven, Jesus resumed his service as Michael, the chief angel, “to the glory of God the Father.”—Philippians 2:11.



DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

Jesus the Archangel Michael

"Your Kingdom Will Certainly Be Steadfast"

2 SAMUEL 7:1-16

IN THE course of history, many human rulers have been removed from office. Some have been voted out, while others have been forcibly deposed. What about Jesus Christ, the King of God's heavenly Kingdom? Can anything prevent him from ruling as God's appointed King? The answer can be found in the words Jehovah spoke to King David of ancient Israel, as recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 7.

As the chapter opens, we learn that David is embarrassed, for he, a mere human king, dwells in a beautiful palace, while the ark of God resides in a modest tent.* David expresses his desire to build a worthy house, or temple, to Jehovah. (Verse 2) But David will not be the one to build the house. Through the prophet Nathan, Jehovah tells David that a son of his will build the temple.—Verses 4, 5, 12, 13.

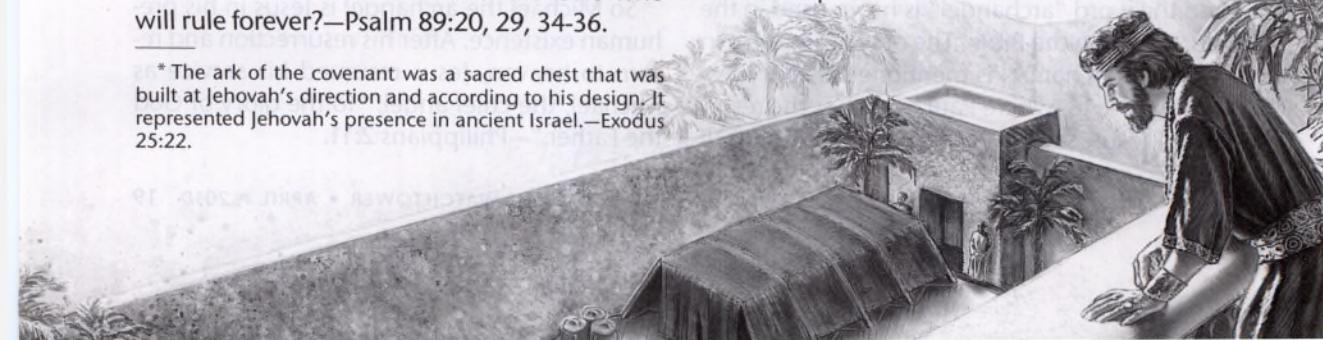
Jehovah is touched by David's heartfelt desire. In response to David's devotion and in line with prophecy, God makes a covenant with David that He will raise up someone in David's royal line who will rule forever. Nathan conveys God's solemn promise to David: "Your house and your kingdom will certainly be steadfast to time indefinite before you; your very throne will become one firmly established to time indefinite." (Verse 16) Who is the permanent Heir of this covenant—the One who will rule forever?—Psalm 89:20, 29, 34-36.

* The ark of the covenant was a sacred chest that was built at Jehovah's direction and according to his design. It represented Jehovah's presence in ancient Israel.—Exodus 25:22.

Jesus of Nazareth was a descendant of David. When announcing Jesus' birth, an angel said: "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." (Luke 1:32, 33) So the covenant with David finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Hence, he rules, not by human choice, but through a solemn promise of God that gives him the right to rule forever. Let us remember that God's promises always come true.—Isaiah 55:10, 11.

There are two valuable lessons to learn from 2 Samuel chapter 7. First, we can be confident that nothing and no one can prevent Jesus Christ from ruling. Thus, we can be sure that he will carry out the stated purpose of his rule, namely, to accomplish fully God's will on earth as it is in heaven.—Matthew 6:9, 10.

Second, this account teaches us a heart-warming lesson about Jehovah. Recall that Jehovah saw and valued the intention of David's heart. It is reassuring to know that Jehovah appreciates our devotion to his worship. In some cases, circumstances beyond our control, such as declining health or advancing age, may prevent us from fulfilling all that our heart yearns to do in serving God. If so, may we draw comfort from the fact that Jehovah sees even the intentions of a heart that is filled with devotion to his worship.



He Learned Forgiveness From the Master

PETER would never forget that terrible moment when their eyes met. Did he see in Jesus' gaze some hint of disappointment or reproach?

We cannot venture so far; the inspired record says only that "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." (Luke 22:61) But in that one glance, Peter saw the depth of his own failure. He realized that he had just done the very thing that Jesus had foretold, the one thing that Peter had insisted he would never do—he had disowned his beloved Master. It was a low point for Peter, perhaps the worst moment of the worst day of his life.

All was not lost, though. Because Peter was a man of great faith, he still had an opportunity to recover from his mistakes and to learn one of Jesus' greatest lessons. It had to do with forgiveness. Each of us needs to learn the same lesson, so let us follow Peter on this difficult journey.

A Man With Much to Learn

About six months earlier in his hometown of Capernaum, Peter approached Jesus and asked: "Lord, how many times is my brother to sin against me and am I to forgive him? Up to seven times?" Peter likely thought that he was being generous. After all, the religious leaders of the day taught that one had to forgive only three times! Jesus replied: "Not, Up to seven times, but, Up to seventy-seven times."—Matthew 18:21, 22.

Was Jesus suggesting that Peter keep a running tally of a transgressor's actions? No; rather, by turning Peter's 7 into a 77, he was saying that there is no arbitrary limit on forgiveness. Jesus showed that Peter had been influenced by a hardhearted and unforgiv-

ing spirit that was prevalent in those days, one that meted out forgiveness as if by an accountant's ledger. However, divine forgiveness is expansive, generous.

Peter did not argue with Jesus. But did Jesus' lesson really reach his heart? Sometimes we learn the most about forgiveness when we realize how desperately we need it ourselves. So let us return to the events leading up to Jesus' death. In those difficult hours, Peter gave his Master many things to forgive.

A Growing Need for Forgiveness

It was a momentous evening—the final night of Jesus' earthly life. Jesus had much still to teach his apostles—for instance, about humility. Jesus set an example by humbly washing their feet, a job normally assigned to the lowliest of servants. At first, Peter questioned Jesus' actions. Then he refused the service. Next he insisted that Jesus wash not only his feet but also his hands and head! Jesus did not lose his patience but calmly explained the importance and meaning of what he was doing.—John 13:1-17.

Shortly thereafter, though, the apostles fell to bickering over who of them was the greatest. Peter surely played a part in that shameful display of human pride. Nonetheless, Jesus corrected them kindly and even commended them for what they had done well—showing faithfulness in sticking to their Master. He foretold, though, that they would all abandon him. Peter countered that he would stick with Jesus even in the face of death. Jesus prophesied that, on the contrary, Peter would deny his Master three times that very night before a cock crowed twice. Peter then not only contradicted Jesus but boasted that he would prove more faithful than all the other apostles! —Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:24-28.

Was Jesus close to losing his patience with Peter? In fact, throughout this difficult time, Jesus kept looking for the good in his imperfect apostles. He knew that Peter would fail him, yet he said: “I have made supplication

Peter gave his Master much to forgive, but who of us does not need forgiveness every day?

“...for you that your faith may not give out; and you, when once you have returned, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32) Jesus thus expressed confidence in Peter’s spiritual recovery and return to faithful service. What a kind, forgiving spirit!

Later, in the garden of Gethsemane, Peter needed correction more than once. Jesus asked him, as well as James and John, to keep on the watch while He prayed. Jesus was in emotional agony and in need of support, but Peter and the others fell asleep repeatedly. Jesus made this empathetic and forgiving observation: “The spirit, of course, is eager, but the flesh is weak.”—Mark 14:32-38.

Before long, a mob arrived, bearing torches and armed with swords and clubs. Here was a time to act with caution and discretion. Yet, Peter rashly leaped into action, swinging a sword at the head of Malchus, a slave of the high priest, and lopping off one of the man’s ears. Jesus calmly corrected Peter, healed the wound, and explained a principle of nonviolence that guides his followers to this day. (Matthew 26:47-55; Luke 22:47-51; John 18:10, 11) Peter had already given his Master much to forgive. His case may remind us that “we all stumble many times.” (James 3:2) Who of us does not need divine forgiveness every single day? For Peter, though, the night was far from over. Worse lay ahead.

Peter’s Worst Failure

Jesus reasoned with the mob that if they were looking for him, they should let his apostles go. Peter watched helplessly as the mob bound Jesus. Then Peter fled, as did his fellow apostles.

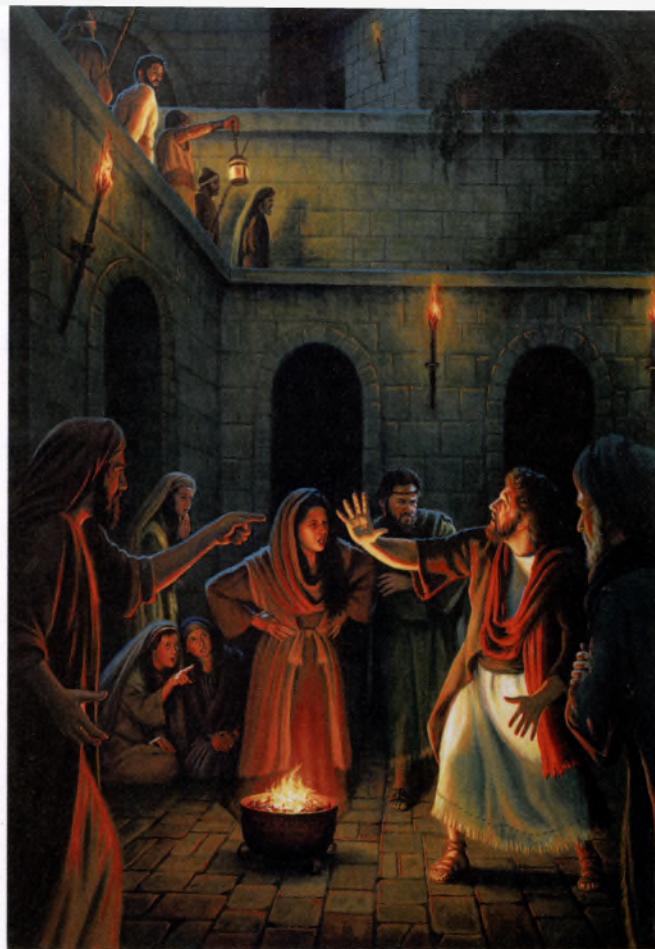
Peter and John stopped in their flight, perhaps near the house of the former High Priest Annas, where Jesus was first taken for questioning. As Jesus was led from there, Peter and John followed but “at a good distance.” (Matthew 26:58; John 18:12, 13) Peter was no coward. It surely took a measure of courage to follow at all. The mob was armed, and Peter had already wounded one of them. Still, we do not here see in Peter’s example the kind of loyal love that he himself had professed—a willingness to die by his Master’s side if need be.—Mark 14:31.

Like Peter, many today seek to follow Christ “at a good distance”—in such a way that no one else will notice. But as Peter himself later wrote, the only way to follow Christ properly is to stick as close to him as we can, imitating his example in all things, regardless of the consequences.—1 Peter 2:21.

Peter's cautious steps finally brought him up to the gate of one of Jerusalem's most imposing mansions. It was the home of Caiaphas, the wealthy and powerful high priest. Such homes were usually built around a courtyard, with a gate in the front. Peter reached the gate and was refused entrance. John, who was already inside, came and got the gatekeeper to admit Peter. It seems that Peter did not stick close to John; nor did he try to get inside the house to stand at his Master's side. He stayed in the courtyard, where some slaves and servants were passing the chilly night hours in front of a bright fire, watching as the false witnesses against Jesus paraded in and out of the trial going on inside.—Mark 14:54-57; John 18:15, 16, 18.

In the firelight, the girl who had admitted Peter at the gate was able to see him better. She knew him. She said, accusingly: "You, too, were with Jesus the Galilean!" Caught off guard, Peter denied knowing Jesus—or even understanding what the girl was talking about. He went to stand near the gateway, trying to be inconspicuous, but another girl noticed him and pointed out the same fact: "This man was with Jesus the Nazarene." Peter swore: "I do not know the man!" (Matthew 26:69-72) Perhaps it was after this second denial that Peter heard a cock crowing, but he was too distracted to be reminded of the prophecy Jesus had uttered just hours earlier.

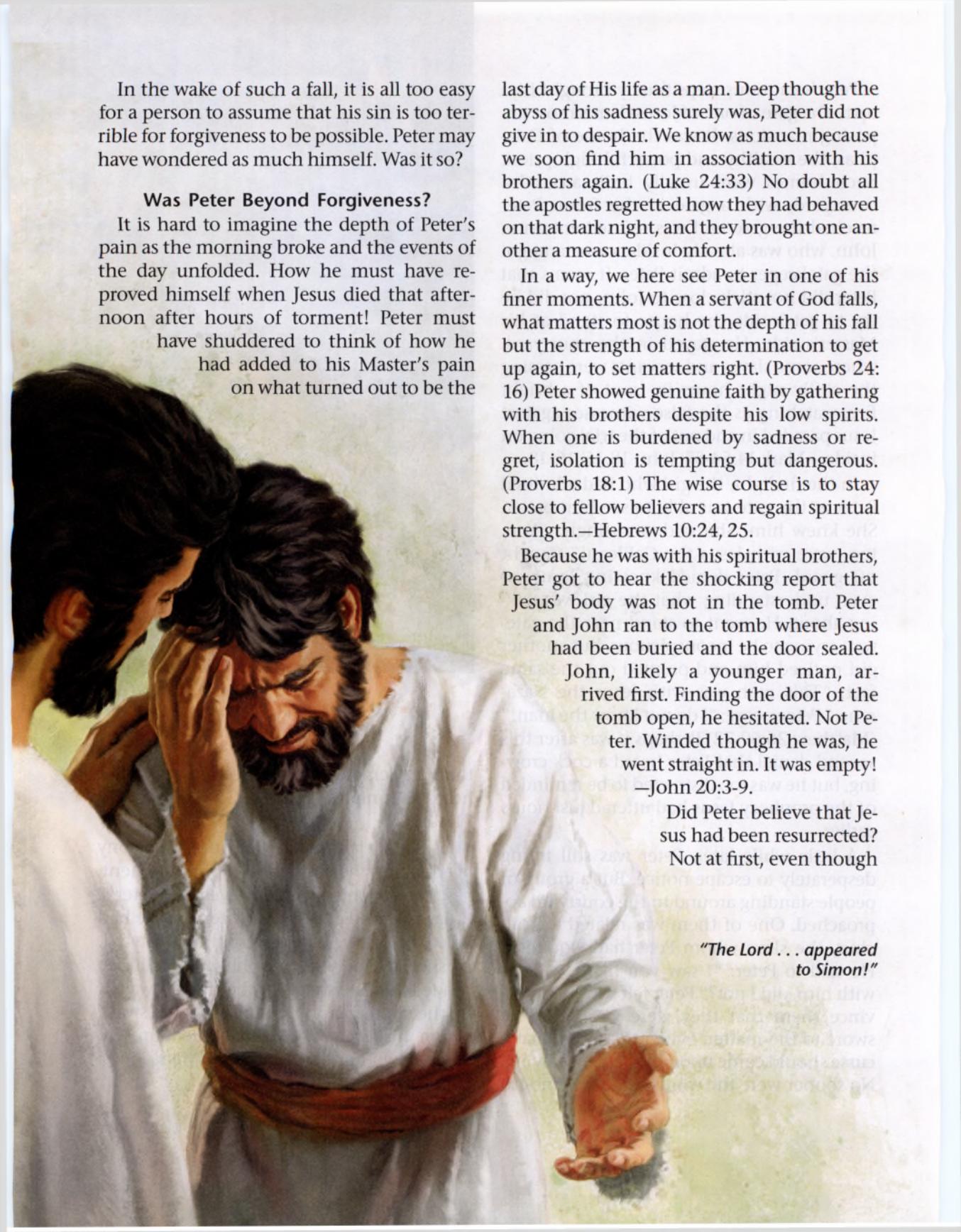
A little while later, Peter was still trying desperately to escape notice. But a group of people standing around in the courtyard approached. One of them was related to Malchus, the slave whom Peter had wounded. He said to Peter: "I saw you in the garden with him, did I not?" Peter felt driven to convince them that they were wrong. So he swore to the matter, evidently saying that a curse should come upon him if he was lying. No sooner were the words out of his mouth



"The Lord turned and looked upon Peter"

than a cock crowed—the second one Peter heard that night.—John 18:26, 27; Mark 14:71, 72.

Jesus had just come out onto a balcony overlooking the courtyard. In that moment, described at the outset, his eyes met Peter's. It dawned on Peter just how terribly he had failed his Master. Peter left the courtyard, crushed by the weight of his own guilt. He headed into the streets of the city, his way lit by the sinking full moon. The sights swam before his eyes. The tears welled up. He broke down and wept bitterly.—Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61, 62.



In the wake of such a fall, it is all too easy for a person to assume that his sin is too terrible for forgiveness to be possible. Peter may have wondered as much himself. Was it so?

Was Peter Beyond Forgiveness?

It is hard to imagine the depth of Peter's pain as the morning broke and the events of the day unfolded. How he must have reproved himself when Jesus died that afternoon after hours of torment! Peter must have shuddered to think of how he had added to his Master's pain on what turned out to be the

last day of His life as a man. Deep though the abyss of his sadness surely was, Peter did not give in to despair. We know as much because we soon find him in association with his brothers again. (Luke 24:33) No doubt all the apostles regretted how they had behaved on that dark night, and they brought one another a measure of comfort.

In a way, we here see Peter in one of his finer moments. When a servant of God falls, what matters most is not the depth of his fall but the strength of his determination to get up again, to set matters right. (Proverbs 24:16) Peter showed genuine faith by gathering with his brothers despite his low spirits. When one is burdened by sadness or regret, isolation is tempting but dangerous. (Proverbs 18:1) The wise course is to stay close to fellow believers and regain spiritual strength.—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

Because he was with his spiritual brothers, Peter got to hear the shocking report that Jesus' body was not in the tomb. Peter and John ran to the tomb where Jesus had been buried and the door sealed.

John, likely a younger man, arrived first. Finding the door of the tomb open, he hesitated. Not Peter. Winded though he was, he went straight in. It was empty!

—John 20:3-9.

Did Peter believe that Jesus had been resurrected? Not at first, even though

"The Lord . . . appeared to Simon!"

faithful women reported that angels had appeared to them to announce that Jesus had risen from the dead. (Luke 23:55–24:11) But by the end of that day, all traces of sadness and doubt in Peter's heart had melted away. Jesus lived, now a mighty spirit! He appeared to all his apostles. He did something else first, though, something private. The apostles said that day: "For a fact the Lord was raised up and he appeared to Simon!" (Luke 24:34) Similarly, the apostle Paul later wrote about that remarkable day that Jesus "appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:5) Cephas and Simon are other names for Peter. Jesus appeared to him that day—evidently when Peter was alone.

In the Bible, the details of that touching reunion are left between Jesus and Peter. We can only imagine how moved Peter was to see his beloved Lord alive again and to have an opportunity to express his sorrow and repentance. More than anything in the world, he wanted forgiveness. Who can doubt that Jesus extended it, and in abundance at that? Christians today who fall into sin need to remember Peter's case. Never should we assume that we are beyond the reach of divine forgiveness. Jesus perfectly reflected his Father, who "will forgive in a large way."—Isaiah 55:7.

Further Proof of Forgiveness

Jesus told his apostles to go to Galilee, where they would meet him again. When they arrived, Peter decided to go out fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Several others accompanied him. Once again, Peter found himself on the lake where he had spent much of his earlier life. The creaking of the boat, the lapping of the waves, the feel of the coarse nets in his hands must all have seemed comfortingly familiar. Did he wonder that night just how he should direct his life now that

Jesus' earthly ministry was over? Did the simple life of a fisherman beckon? In any case, they caught no fish all that night.—Matthew 26:32; John 21:1-3.

At dawn, though, a figure called from the shore and urged them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. They complied and pulled in a great catch of 153 fish! Peter



knew who that person was. He leaped from the boat and swam ashore. On the beach, Jesus gave them a meal of fish cooked over charcoal. He focused on Peter.

Jesus asked Peter if he loved his Lord "more than these"—evidently pointing to the large haul of fish. In Peter's heart, would love for the fishing business compete with love for Jesus? Just as Peter had denied his Lord three times, Jesus now gave him the opportunity to affirm his love three times before his fellows. As Peter did so, Jesus told him how to show that love: by putting sacred service ahead of all else, feeding and shepherding Christ's flock, his faithful followers.—John 21:4-17.

Jesus thus confirmed that Peter was still useful to him and to his Father. Peter would

fill a valuable role in the congregation under Christ's direction. What powerful proof of Jesus' full forgiveness! Surely that mercy touched Peter, and he took it to heart.

Peter faithfully carried out his assignment for many years. He strengthened his brothers, as Jesus had commanded on the eve of His death. Peter worked kindly and patiently at shepherding and feeding Christ's followers. The man called Simon came to live up to the name Jesus gave him—Peter, or Rock—by becoming a steady, strong, reliable force for good in the congregation. Much evidence to

that effect is found in the two warm, personal letters Peter wrote that became valuable books of the Bible. Those letters show, too, that Peter never forgot the lesson he learned from Jesus about forgiveness.—1 Peter 3:8, 9; 4:8.

May we learn that lesson as well. Do we daily ask God's forgiveness for our many errors? Do we then accept that forgiveness and believe in its power to cleanse us? And do we extend forgiveness to those around us as well? If we do, we will imitate the faith of Peter—and the mercy of his Master.

Does the Bible Tell Us the Whole Story About Jesus?

Could it be that Jesus did not die at Golgotha, as the Bible says he did, but survived? Is it possible that he married Mary Magdalene and fathered children by her? Or might he have been an ascetic mystic who rejected all pleasures of earthly life? Is it possible that he taught doctrines that differ from what we read in the Bible?

SUCH speculations have flourished in recent years, a resurgence that is due, in part, to popular movies and novels. Besides fanciful fiction, there have also been many books and articles that focus attention on apocryphal writings from the second and third centuries C.E. that claim to reveal facts

about Jesus omitted from the Gospels. Could such claims be valid? Can we be sure that the Bible tells us the whole, truthful story about Jesus?

To answer such questions, it is helpful to consider three basic subjects. First, we need to know important information about the

LIFE OF JESUS



WRITING OF THE GREEK PART OF THE BIBLE



2 B.C.E.

33 C.E.

41

98

130

300



WRITING OF THE APOCRYPHAL WORKS

Kenneth Garrett/National Geographic Image Collection

men who wrote the Gospel accounts and when they wrote them; second, we need to learn who established the canon of the Scriptures and how; and third, we need some background on the apocryphal writings and how they differ from canonical writings.*

When Were the Christian Greek Scriptures Written, and by Whom?

According to some sources, the Gospel of Matthew was written as early as the eighth year after Christ's death, that is, about 41 C.E. Many scholars favor a somewhat later date, but there is general agreement that all the books of the Christian Greek Scriptures were written during the first century C.E.

Eyewitnesses of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection were still living then; they could verify the Gospel accounts. They could also easily expose any inaccuracies. Professor F. F. Bruce observes: "One of the strong points in the original apostolic preaching is the confident appeal to the knowledge of the hearers; they not only said, 'We are witnesses of these things,' but also, 'As you yourselves also know' (Acts 2:22)."

Who were the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures? They included some of Jesus' 12 apostles. These and other Bible writers, such as James, Jude, and probably Mark, were present on the day of Pentecost in 33 C.E. when the Christian congregation was formed. All the writers, including Paul, were closely united with the original governing body of the early Christian congregation, consisting of the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem.—Acts 15:2, 6, 12-14, 22; Galatians 2:7-10.

* The word "canon" refers to the collection of Bible books that give convincing proof of being inspired of God. There are 66 books that are generally recognized as canonical and are an integral and indispensable part of God's Word.

Jesus commissioned his followers to carry on the preaching and teaching work that he had started. (Matthew 28:19, 20) He even said: "He that listens to you listens to me too." (Luke 10:16) Further, he promised them that God's holy spirit, or active force, would give them the power they needed to do that work. So when writings came from the apostles or their close fellow workers—men who gave clear evidence of being blessed by God's holy spirit—the early Christians naturally accepted such books as authoritative.

Some Bible writers testified to the authority and divine inspiration of their fellow writers. For example, the apostle Peter referred to the letters of Paul and put them on par with "the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Peter 3:15, 16) Paul, for his part, recognized that the apostles and other Christian prophets were inspired by God.—Ephesians 3:5.

The Gospel records therefore have a strong claim to reliability and authenticity. They are not mere legends and tales. They are carefully recorded history, based on eyewitness testimony, written by men who were inspired by God's holy spirit.

Who Selected the Canon?

Some authors have claimed that the canon of the Christian Greek Scriptures was chosen centuries after the fact by a church that was an established power under the direction of the Emperor Constantine. However, the facts show otherwise.

For example, note what Professor of Church History Oskar Skarsaune states: "Which writings that were to be included in the New Testament, and which were not, was never decided upon by any church council or by any single person . . . The criteria were quite open and very sensible: Writings from the first century C.E. that were



The apostle Paul performed miracles, even a resurrection, giving powerful evidence that God's spirit was backing him and his writings

regarded as written by apostles or by their fellow workers were regarded as reliable. Other writings, letters, or 'gospels' that were written later were not included... This process was essentially completed a long time before Constantine and a long time before his church of power had been established. It was the church of martyrs, not the church of power, that gave us the New Testament."

Ken Berding, an associate professor whose field of study is the Christian Greek Scriptures, gives this comment about how the canon emerged: "The church did not estab-

lish a canon of its choosing; it is more proper to speak of the church recognizing the books that Christians had always considered to be an authoritative Word from God."

However, was it merely those humble first-century Christians who selected the canon? The Bible tells us that something far more important—and powerful—was at work.

According to the Bible, one of the miraculous gifts of the spirit that were given in the early decades of the Christian congregation was "discernment of inspired utterances." (1 Corinthians 12:4, 10) So some of those Christians were given a superhuman ability to discern the difference between sayings that were truly inspired by God and those that were not. Christians today may thus be confident that the Scriptures included in the Bible were recognized as inspired.

Evidently, then, the canon was established at an early stage under the guidance of holy spirit. From the latter part of the second century C.E., some writers commented on the canonicity of the Bible books. These writers, however, did not establish the canon; they merely testified to what God had already accepted through his representatives, who were guided by his spirit.

Ancient manuscripts also provide compelling evidence to support the canon that is generally accepted today. There are more than 5,000 manuscripts of the Greek Scriptures in the original language, including some from the second and third centuries. It was these writings, not the apocryphal writings, that were regarded as authoritative during the early centuries C.E. and therefore were copied and widely distributed.

However, the internal evidence is the most important proof of canonicity. The canonical writings are in harmony with "the pattern of healthful words" that we

find in the rest of the Bible. (2 Timothy 1:13) They urge readers to love, worship, and serve Jehovah, and they warn against superstition, demonism, and creature worship. They are historically accurate and contain true prophecy. And they encourage readers to love their fellow humans. The books of the Christian Greek Scriptures have such distinctive marks. Do the apocryphal writings measure up?

How Are the Apocryphal Writings Different?

The apocryphal writings are quite different from the canonical writings. These apocryphal books date from about the middle of the second century, much later than the canonical writings. They paint a picture of Jesus and Christianity that is not in harmony with the inspired Scriptures.

For example, the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas ascribes a number of strange utterances to Jesus, such as saying that he would transform Mary into a male to make it possible for her to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. The Infancy Gospel of Thomas describes young Jesus as a mean-spirited child who deliberately caused another child's death. The apocryphal Acts of Paul and Acts of Peter emphasize complete abstinence from sexual relations and even depict the apostles as urging women to separate from their husbands. The Gospel of Judas depicts Jesus as laughing at his disciples for praying to God in connection with a meal. Such notions are at odds with what is found in the canonical books.—Mark 14:22; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Galatians 3:28; Hebrews 7:26.

Many of the apocryphal writings reflect beliefs of the Gnostics, who held that the Creator, Jehovah, is not a good God. They also believed that the resurrection is not literal, that all physical matter is evil, and that

Satan was the source of marriage and procreation.

A number of the apocryphal books are attributed to Bible characters but falsely so. Did some dark conspiracy exclude these books from the Bible? One expert on the apocrypha, M. R. James, said: "There is no question of any one's having excluded them from the New Testament: they have done that for themselves."

Bible Writers Warned About an Apostasy to Come

In the canonical writings, we find a number of warnings about an imminent apostasy that would corrupt the Christian congregation. In fact, this apostasy had already started in the first century, but the apostles restrained its spread. (Acts 20:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 6, 7; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18, 19; 4:1-3) Such warnings shed light on writings that began to crop up after the death of the apostles, writings that contradicted Jesus' teachings.

Granted, such documents may appear old and venerable to some scholars and historians. But consider: What if scholars were to collect a pile of dubious writings printed today, perhaps gleaned them from gossip magazines and the publications of radical religious cults, and then were to seal the papers in a vault? Would the passage of time render those writings truthful and reliable? After 1,700 years, would the lies and nonsense in those papers become true simply because the documents were very old?

Of course not! It is similar with claims that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and other outlandish statements from the apocryphal books. Why trust such unreliable sources, especially when reliable ones are at hand? Everything that God wants us to know about his Son is right there in the Bible—a record we can count on.

Jesus Learned to Be Obedient

DO YOU sometimes find it hard to be obedient?—* It is not surprising if you do. Everyone at times finds it hard to obey. Did you know that even Jesus had to learn to be obedient?—

Do you know whom all young ones should obey?—Yes, our father and mother. “Be obedient to your parents in union with the Lord,” the Bible says. (Ephesians 6:1) Who is Jesus’ father?—Jehovah God, and he is our Father too. (Matthew 6:9, 10) But if you said that Joseph was Jesus’ father and Mary was his mother, you would also be right. Do you know how they became his parents?—

The angel Gabriel told Mary how she would become a mother even though she had had no sexual intercourse with a man. Jehovah made this pregnancy possible by performing a great miracle. Gabriel explained to Mary: “Power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason also what is born will be called holy, God’s Son.”—Luke 1:30-35.

God took the life of his Son in heaven and put it inside Mary. Then that life grew inside her just as other babies do inside their mothers. About nine months later, Jesus was born. In the meantime, Joseph married Mary, and most people assumed that Joseph was

Jesus’ real father. Actually, Joseph was his adoptive father. So, in a way, Jesus had two fathers!

When Jesus was only 12, he did something that showed how much he loved his heavenly Father, Jehovah. At that time, Jesus’ family, as was their custom, made the long trip to Jerusalem for the Passover. Afterward, on the way home to Nazareth, Joseph and Mary failed to notice that Jesus was not with them. Do you wonder how they could have forgotten him?—

Well, by then Joseph and Mary had other children. (Matthew 13:55, 56) They probably also had relatives traveling with them, such as James and John along with their father, Zebedee, and mother, Salome, who may have been Mary’s sister. So Mary may have assumed that Jesus was with other relatives in the group.—Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25.

When Joseph and Mary realized that Jesus was missing, they rushed back to Jerusalem. They searched frantically for their son. On the *third day*, they found him in the temple. Mary said to him: “Why did you treat us this way? Here your father and I in mental distress have been looking for you.” But Jesus replied: “Why did you have to go looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?”—Luke 2: 45-50.

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



Why do you think that Joseph and Mary should first have looked for Jesus in the temple?

Do you think it was wrong for Jesus to answer his mother that way?— Well, his parents knew that he loved to worship at God's house. (Psalm 122:1) So wasn't it right for Jesus to think that God's temple would be the *first place* they would look for him?— Later, Mary kept thinking about what Jesus had said.

What was Jesus' attitude toward Joseph and Mary?— The Bible says: “[Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and he *continued subject to them*.” (Luke 2:51, 52) What can we

learn from Jesus' example?— Yes, we too need to be obedient to our parents.

Yet, it wasn't always easy for Jesus to obey—even his heavenly Father.

The night before he died, Jesus asked Jehovah if He would change His mind regarding what He wanted him to do. (Luke 22:42) But Jesus obeyed God even though it was not easy. The Bible says that “he learned obedience from the things he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8) Do you think that we too can learn that lesson?—

QUESTIONS:

- How did Mary become Jesus' mother, and how did Jesus come to have two fathers, in a way?
- Why did Jesus' parents fail to realize that he had been left behind?
- Where did Jesus expect his parents to look for him?
- What can you learn from the example of Jesus?

SPECIAL PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Real Peace and Security —When?

For thousands of years, humans have sought peace and security. But real peace has eluded mankind. Why? The Bible gives two basic reasons why attaining peace has been so elusive. It also contains this heartwarming assurance: God has promised real and lasting worldwide peace and security for mankind.

How and when will this peace and security become a reality? What do you need to do in order to enjoy these blessed conditions? These questions will be answered in the public discourse “Real Peace and Security—When?” This Bible-based talk will be given worldwide in over 230 lands. In most places, it will be delivered at the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses on **Sunday, April 18, 2010**. The Witnesses in your area will be glad to provide you with the time and address. You are cordially invited to attend.