

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

DECEMBER 15, 2005



The Holiday Season

Will It Be All You Want?



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 The Holiday Season—Will It Be All You Want It to Be?
- 4 Christmastime—What Is Its Focus?
- 9 "Preach a Release to the Captives"
- 13 The Bible in Italian—A Troubled History
- 17 Helping Chinese People in Mexico
- 19 Whom Do You Obey—God or Men?
- 24 Now Is the Time for Decisive Action
- 30 Do You Remember?
- 31 Subject Index for *The Watchtower* 2005
- 32 New Year's Tree—Is It Russian? Is It Christian?

WATCHTOWER STUDIES

JANUARY 16-22:

Whom Do You Obey—God or Men?

Page 19. Songs to be used: 2, 47.

JANUARY 23-29:

Now Is the Time for Decisive Action.

Page 24. Songs to be used: 129, 146.

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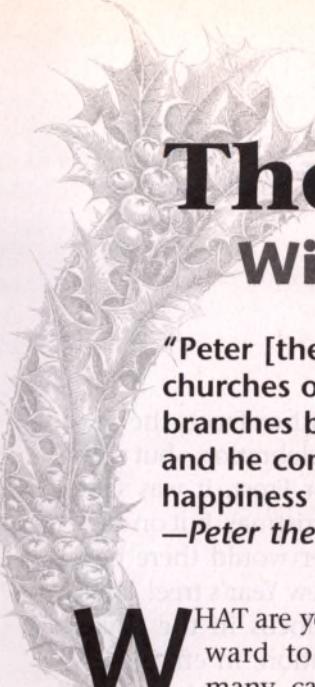
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The Holiday Season

Will It Be All You Want It to Be?

"Peter [the Great] ordered special New Year's services held in all the churches on January 1. Further, he instructed that festive evergreen branches be used to decorate the doorposts in interiors of houses, and he commanded that all citizens of Moscow should 'display their happiness by loudly congratulating' one another on the New Year."

—Peter the Great—*His Life and World*.

WHAT are you looking forward to during what many call the holiday season? People around the globe say that this season centers on Christmas, the traditional day of Christ's birth, but it also includes the New Year's celebration. So it is an extended holiday period. Both parents and children may be on vacation during this time, so it would seem to be an ideal occasion for families to spend time together. Others, though, refer to this season as "the Christmas season," since they wish to honor Christ at this time of year. Perhaps you too feel that this is the most important aspect of the season.

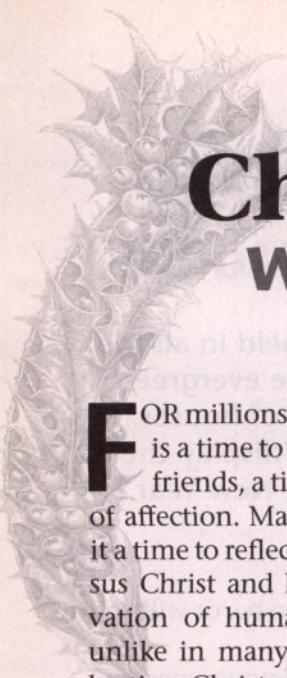
Whether it be to honor Christ, enjoy one's family, or both, millions of husbands, wives, and children worldwide await this time with keen anticipation. What about this year? Will it turn out to be that special time for the family, and is it special for God? If there is a family

gathering, will it be all you want it to be, or will you be disappointed?

Many who look forward to the religious aspect notice that both Christmas and New Year's are often celebrated with anything but the spirit of Christ. Rather, the holiday season becomes merely a time for receiving gifts, an excuse for a party that may include conduct that dishonors Christ, or primarily a reason for a family reunion. Many times, such a gathering is marred by one or more members overindulging in food and alcohol, sparking arguments that all too often provoke domestic violence. You may have noted that, or it may even have been your experience.

If so, it may seem to you that very little has changed since the time of the Russian Czar Peter the Great, described at the outset. Disturbed by the current trend, many wish that the holiday season could be a time for deep religious reflection and wholesome family association. Some even campaign for a change, employing such slogans as, Jesus is the reason for the season. But can a change be effected? And would this truly bring honor to Christ? Are there reasons for taking a different view of the holiday season?

To find satisfying answers, let us view the situation through the eyes of people of one nation who should have special reason to appreciate this time of year.



Christmastime

What Is Its Focus?

FOR millions the holiday season is a time to be with family and friends, a time to renew bonds of affection. Many others consider it a time to reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ and his role in the salvation of humankind. In Russia, unlike in many other lands, celebrating Christmas was not always something that people were free to do. Though for centuries those of the Russian Orthodox Church had openly celebrated Christmas, they were not allowed to do so for most of the 20th century. What was behind the change?

On the heels of the 1917 Bolshevik Communist revolution, Soviet authorities pursued an aggressive policy of statewide atheism. The entire Christmas holiday season with its religious overtones fell into disfavor. The State began waging a campaign against both Christmas and New Year's celebrations. There was even open condemnation of the local symbols of the season—the Christmas tree and Ded Moroz, or Grandfather Frost, the Russian equivalent of Santa Claus.

In 1935, a change occurred that profoundly altered the way Russians marked the holiday season.

The Soviets reinstated Grandfather Frost, the seasonal tree, and the New Year's celebration—but with a significant twist. Grandfather Frost, it was said, would bring presents, not at Christmas, but on New Year's Day. Similarly, no longer would there be a Christmas tree. It would be a New Year's tree! Thus, there was a major change of focus in the Soviet Union. The New Year's celebration, in effect, supplanted Christmas.

The Christmas season became a wholly secular festive occasion, officially bereft of any religious meaning. The New Year's tree was decorated, not with religious ornaments, but with secular ones depicting the progress of the Soviet Union. The Russian journal *Vokrug Sveta* (Around the World) explains: "It is possible to retrace the history of the establishing of a Communist society by the New Year's tree decorations of various years of the Soviet era. Along with commonplace bunnies, icicles, and round loaves of bread, decorations in the shape of sickles, hammers, and tractors were released. These were later replaced by figurines of miners and cosmonauts, oil rigs, rockets, and moon buggies."

What about Christmas Day itself? It certainly was not recognized. Rather, the Soviet authority relegated it to the status of an ordinary workday. Those who wished to hold the religious celebration of Christmas could do so only very discreetly, risking the State's disfavor and unpleasant consequences. Yes, in 20th-century Russia, there was a shift in the focus of the holiday season, from religious observance to secular celebration.



A More Recent Shift

In 1991 the Soviet Union fell and greater freedoms were realized. Gone was the State policy of atheism. Various newly formed sovereign states were largely secular, with a separation of Church and State. Many religiously inclined people felt that they could now pursue their religious convictions. They reasoned that one way to do this would be to celebrate the religious holiday of Christmas. However, deep disappointment soon set in for many such ones. Why?

With each passing year, the holiday has become more commercialized. Yes, as in the West, the Christmas season has become one of the best ways for manufacturers, wholesalers, and merchants to make money. Christmas decorations are prominently displayed on storefronts. Western-style Christmas music and carols, hitherto unknown in Russia, emanate from shops. Salesmen carrying large bags of Christmas knickknacks ply their wares on commuter trains and other public transportation. That is what you find now.

Even those who see nothing wrong with this rank commercialism may be bothered by another disturbing element of the season—alcohol abuse with all its negative consequences. An emergency-room physician in a Moscow hospital explained: “For doctors, it’s a given that the New Year’s celebration will mean a slew of injuries ranging from bumps and bruises to knife and bullet wounds, most having been caused by domestic violence, drunken brawls, and car accidents.” A senior staff scientist of a branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences said: “There is a surge in the number of alcohol-related deaths. It was particularly high in the year 2000. The number of suicides and murders jumped as well.”

Unfortunately, any such behavior during the holiday season in Russia is aggravated by another factor. Under the headline “Russians Celebrate Christmas Twice,” the newspaper *Izvestiya* reports: “Almost 1 in 10 Russians celebrates Christmas twice. As witnessed by the survey of the ROMIR monitoring center, 8 percent of respondents admitted that they celebrate Christmas both on December 25, according to the Catholic Christmas calendar, and on January 7, according to Orthodoxy... For some, it is evidently not the religious essence of Christmas that is important as much as it is the opportunity to celebrate.”*

* Before the October 1917 revolution, Russia employed the older Julian calendar, but most countries had switched to the Gregorian calendar. In 1917 the Julian calendar was 13 days behind its Gregorian counterpart. After the revolution, the Soviets switched to the Gregorian calendar, bringing Russia into line with the rest of the world. The Orthodox Church, however, retained the Julian calendar for its celebrations, designating it the “Old Style” calendar. You may hear of Christmas in Russia being celebrated on January 7. Keep in mind, however, that January 7 on the Gregorian calendar is December 25 on the Julian calendar. Thus, many Russians organize their holiday season this way: December 25, Western Christmas; January 1, secular New Year’s; January 7, Orthodox Christmas; January 14, Old Style New Year’s.

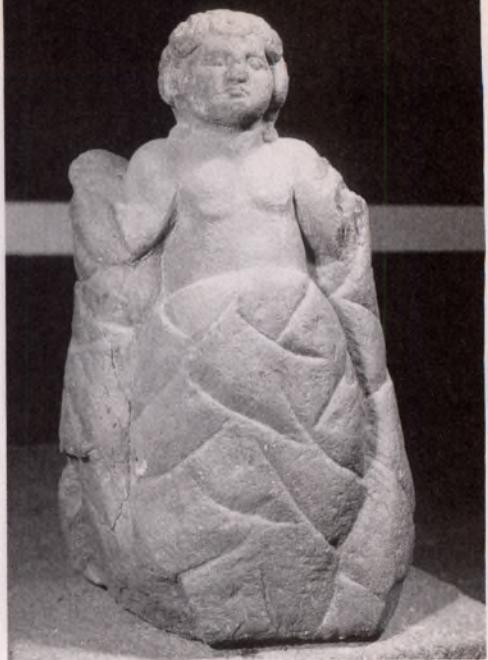
Does the Current Focus Really Honor Christ?

Clearly, much ungodly conduct accompanies the holiday season. As disturbing as this is, some may feel that they should observe the celebrations out of respect for God and Christ. A desire to please God is commendable. But are God and Christ actually pleased with the Christmas season? Consider its roots.

For instance, whatever one's view of the Soviet stance on Christmas, it would be hard to argue with the following historical facts set out in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*: "Christmas . . . was borrowed from the pre-Christian worship of gods 'dying and rising from the dead,' which was especially prevalent among agricultural peoples who, in a period usually confined to the winter solstice from December 21-25, annually celebrated the 'birth' of the God-Savior, who wakens nature to new life."

You may find significant what that encyclopedia accurately points out: "Christianity of the first centuries did not know the celebration of Christmas. . . . From the middle of the fourth century, Christianity assimilated the celebration of the winter solstice from the worship of Mithra, turning it into the Christmas celebration. The first to celebrate Christmas were the religious communities of Rome. In the tenth century, Christmas, along with Christianity, spread to Russia, where it became fused with the winter celebration of the ancient Slavs, honoring the spirits of the ancestors."

'What does God's Word, the Bible, say about Jesus' being born on December 25?' you may ask. Actually, the Bible specifies no date for Jesus' birth, and there is no record that Jesus himself spoke of it, much less directed that it be celebrated. However, the Bi-



Museum Wiesbaden

Christendom assimilated the worship of Mithra

ble does help us to determine the time of year when Jesus was born.

According to Matthew's Gospel, chapters 26 and 27, Jesus was executed on Nisan 14, late in the day of the Jewish Passover that had begun on March 31, 33 C.E. We learn from Luke's Gospel that Jesus was about 30 years old when he was baptized and began his ministry. (Luke 3:21-23) That ministry lasted three and a half years. Therefore, Jesus was about 33 1/2 years old when he died. He would have turned 34 about October 1, 33 C.E. Luke reports that at the time of Jesus' birth, shepherds were "living out of doors and keeping watches in the night over their flocks." (Luke 2:8) Shepherds would not have been out with their flocks in the cold of December, when it may even snow in the vicinity of Bethlehem. But they could have been there with their flocks about October 1, which according to the evidence is when Jesus was born.



Shepherds would not have been out with their flocks in the cold of December

Incidentally, what about the New Year's celebration? As we have seen, it is marked by debauched behavior. Despite attempts to secularize it, it too has dubious roots.

Clearly, in the light of the facts surrounding the holiday season, such slogans as, Jesus is the reason for the season ring hollow. If you are upset by the commercialism and disturbing conduct associated with the Christmas season, as well as its unsavory pagan origins, do not be discouraged. There is a fitting way in which we can show due

Roots of the New Year's Celebration A Georgian Orthodox Monk Speaks Out

"The New Year's holiday originates with a number of pagan holidays from ancient Rome. The 1st of January was a holiday dedicated to the pagan god Janus, and the name of the month comes from his name. Images of Janus had two faces on opposite sides, which meant that he saw both the past and the present. There was a saying that whoever greeted January 1st with fun, laughter, and plenty would pass the entire year in happiness and well-being. The very same superstition accompanies the celebrating of the new year for many of our compatriots . . . During certain pagan holidays, people would directly bring sacrifices to an idol. Some were notorious for immoral orgies, adultery, and fornication. On other occasions, for example during the Janus holiday, there were excesses in eating and drinking, drunkenness, and every sort of un-

cleanliness that accompanies them. If we remember how we ourselves in times past have celebrated New Year's, then we must admit that all of us have participated in this pagan celebration."—A Georgian newspaper.



reverence for God and honor Christ, at the same time strengthening family ties.

A Better Way to Honor God and Christ

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came "to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." (Matthew 20:28) He allowed himself to be executed, willingly dying for our sins. Some might like to honor Christ, feeling that they can do this during the Christmas season. But as we have seen, Christmas and New Year's have little to do with Christ and have their roots in pagan celebrations. Also, the Christmas season, however attractive it is to some, is marked by crass commercialism. Furthermore, it must be admitted that the Christmas holiday is associated with shameful conduct that displeases God and Christ.

How should one who is seeking to please God react? Rather than clinging to human traditions that may soothe feelings of reli-

giosity but that are contrary to the Scriptures, a sincere person would seek the true way to honor God and Christ. What is that true way, and what should we do?

Christ himself tells us: "This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) Yes, the truly sincere person seeks to take in accurate knowledge of how to honor God and Christ. He then applies this knowledge not just during a certain time of the year but in everyday life. God is well-pleased with such sincere efforts, which can lead to everlasting life.

Would you like your family to be among those who truly honor God and Christ in harmony with the Scriptures? Jehovah's Witnesses have helped millions of families worldwide to take in vital knowledge from the Bible. We warmly invite you to contact Jehovah's Witnesses in your area or to write to them at the appropriate address found on page 2 of this magazine.



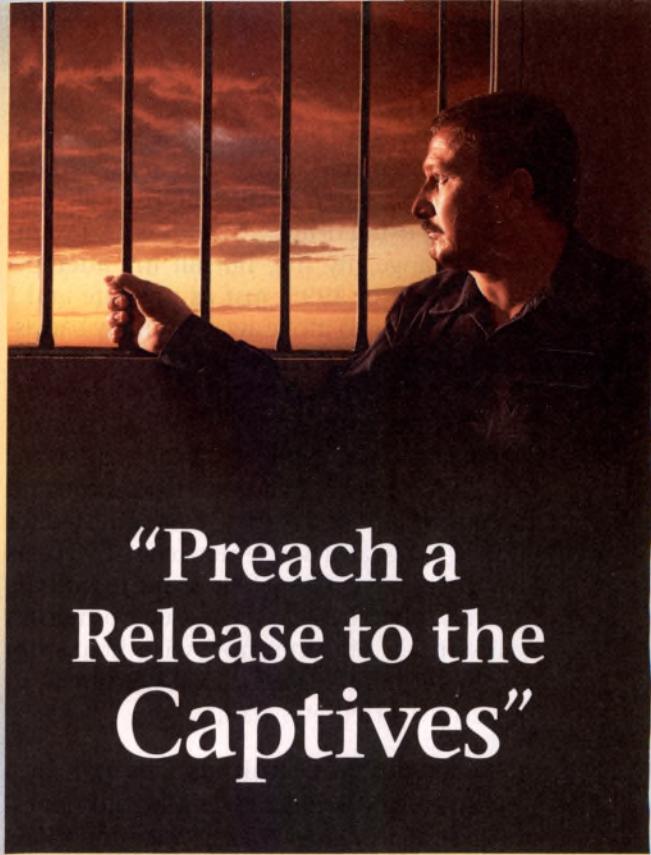
AT THE beginning of his ministry, Jesus declared that part of his commission was "to preach a release to the captives." (Luke 4:18) Following the example of their Master, true Christians preach the Kingdom good news to "all sorts of men," bringing them release from spiritual captivity and helping them to improve their life.—1 Timothy 2:4.

Today, this work includes preaching to literal captives—people who are imprisoned for various crimes and who appreciate a spiritual release. Enjoy this encouraging report about the preaching activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in the prisons of Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe.

From Drug Addicts to Christians

Of the 38 years of Serhii's* life, 20 have been spent behind bars. He even finished school in prison. He says: "Years ago, I was imprisoned for murder, and I still have time to serve. In prison I acted like a tyrant, and other prisoners were afraid of me." Did this make him feel liberated? No. For many years, Serhii was enslaved to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

Then a fellow prisoner shared Bible truth with him. It was like a beam of light in the dark. Within a few months, he freed himself from his addictions, became a preacher of the good news, and was baptized. Serhii now leads a busy life in prison, serving as a full-time minister of Jehovah. He has helped sev-



"Preach a Release to the Captives"

en criminals to change their ways and become his spiritual brothers. Six of them have been released, but Serhii remains behind bars. He is not upset at this because he is happy that he can help others to receive a release from spiritual captivity.—Acts 20:35.

One of Serhii's students in prison was Victor, a former drug dealer and addict. After his release from prison, Victor continued to make spiritual progress and eventually graduated from the Ministerial Training School

* Some names have been changed.

Prison wall,
L'viv, Ukraine

in Ukraine. Now he serves as a special pioneer minister in Moldova. Victor says: "I began smoking when I was 8, abusing alcohol at 12, and using drugs when I was 14. I wanted to change my life, but all my attempts failed. Then in 1995, just as my wife and I were planning to move away from my bad associates, she was stabbed to death by a homicidal maniac. My life became absolutely dismal. 'Where is my wife now? What happens when a person dies?' I kept asking questions but could find no answers. I took more and more drugs to fill the void. I was arrested for dealing drugs and was sentenced to five years in prison. There, Serhii helped me to find the answers. I had tried to break free from drugs many times, but only now with help from the Bible did I succeed. God's Word is so powerful!"—Hebrews 4:12.

Hardened Criminals Change

Vasyl never used drugs, but he did not escape captivity. "Kickboxing was my addiction," he explains. "I trained myself to beat up people without leaving any marks." Vasyl used his violent ways to rob people. "I was in prison three times, which led my wife to divorce me. During the last five-year term, I got acquainted with the literature of Jehovah's Witnesses. This motivated me to read the Bible, but I was still involved in what I really loved—fights without rules.

"After six months of Bible reading, however, something changed within

me. Winning a fight no longer brought me the satisfaction it once did. So I started to analyze my life in the light of Isaiah 2:4 and realized that unless I adjusted my thinking, I would spend the rest of my life in prison. So I threw out all my fighting gear and began to work on my personality. It was not easy, but meditation and prayer gradually helped me to kick my bad habits. At times, I tearfully begged Jehovah to give me the strength to break free from my addiction. Finally, I succeeded.

"After release from prison, I was reunited with my family. Now I work in a coal mine. This gives me enough time to share in the preaching work along with my wife and to

*Vasyl with his
wife, Iryna*



Mykola

Victor

fulfill my responsibilities in the congregation."

Mykola and his friends robbed several banks in Ukraine. This resulted in a ten-year prison term for him. Before his incarceration, he had been to church only once—to prepare to rob that church. Things did not work out, but that visit made Mykola believe that the Bible must be full of boring stories about Orthodox priests, candles, and religious holidays. He says: "I do not know exactly why, but I began reading the Bible. I was amazed to discover that it was nothing like what I had imagined!" He asked for a Bible study and was baptized in 1999. Looking at him now, it is hard to believe that this humble ministerial servant was once a malicious armed bank robber!

Vladimir was given a death sentence. While awaiting execution, he prayed to God and promised to serve Him if he was spared. Meanwhile, the law was changed, and his death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment. To keep his promise, Vladimir began looking for the true religion. He enrolled in a correspondence course and received a diploma from an Adventist church, but he was not satisfied.

However, after reading the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines in the prison library, Vladimir wrote to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Ukraine, asking for a visit. When local brothers visited him, he already considered himself a Witness and was preaching in the prison. He was helped to qualify as a Kingdom publisher. As of this writing, Vladimir and seven others in that prison are awaiting baptism. But they have a problem. Since inmates with life sentences are kept in cells according to their religious beliefs, Vladimir and his cell mates are of the same faith. So to whom can they preach? They share the good news with prison guards and by writing letters.

Nazar moved from Ukraine to the Czech Republic, where he joined a gang of thieves. This led to three and a half years of imprisonment. While in prison, he responded to the visits of Jehovah's Witnesses from the city of Karlovy Vary, learned the truth, and was fully rehabilitated. Seeing this, one of the security guards said to Nazar's cell mates: "If all of you would be like that Ukrainian, I could finally change my profession." Another said: "These Jehovah's Witnesses are real experts. Into prison comes a criminal; out goes a decent man." Now Nazar is back home. He learned carpentry and got married, and he and his wife are in the full-time ministry. How thankful he is for the prison visits of the Witnesses!

Official Recognition

Prisoners are not the only ones who are grateful for the service provided by Jehovah's Witnesses. Miroslaw Kowalski, a spokesman for one of the prisons in Poland, said: "We appreciate their visits very much. Some prisoners have sad backgrounds. Probably they were never treated as human beings. . . . The help [of the Witnesses] is very valuable because we have a shortage of personnel and educators."

The warden of another prison in Poland wrote to the branch office, asking the Witnesses to increase their activity in his prison. Why? He explained: "More frequent visits by Watchtower representatives may help the prisoners to develop socially desirable qualities, suppressing aggression among them."

A Ukrainian newspaper reported on a depressed prisoner who attempted to commit suicide but then received help from Jehovah's Witnesses. "Presently, this man is on the way to emotional recovery," says the report. "He sticks to the prison routine and is an example to other prisoners."

Benefits Beyond Prison Gates

The benefits of the work done by Jehovah's Witnesses do not stop at the prison gate. They continue after the prisoners are released. Two Christians, Brigitte and Renate, have been helping people in this way for some years. A German newspaper, *Main-Echo Aschaffenburg*, reports about them: "They look after prisoners for three to five months after their release, encouraging them to find a purpose in life.... They have been officially recognized as volunteer probation officers. ... They also have constructive and positive dealings with the prison personnel." A number of people have dedicated their life to Jehovah as a result of this kind of help.

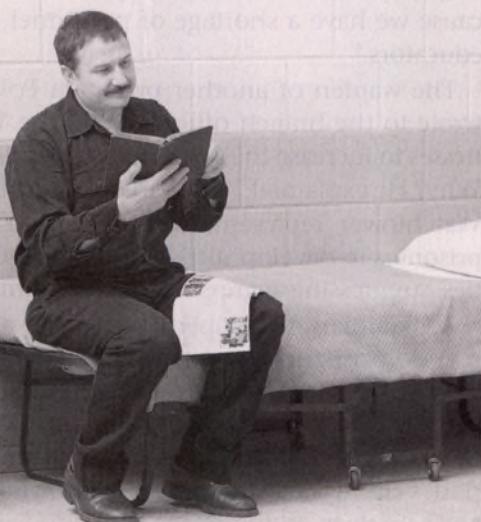
Even prison officials benefit from the Bible education work of Jehovah's Witnesses. For example, Roman was a military major and a psychologist in a Ukrainian prison. When the Witnesses visited his home, he agreed to a Bible study. Then he learned that the Witnesses were not permitted to contact the inmates where he worked. So he asked the warden for permission to use the Bible in his work with the prisoners. His request was granted, and

about ten prisoners showed interest. Roman regularly shared his growing Bible knowledge with these prisoners, and his efforts produced excellent results. After being released, some continued to make progress and became baptized Christians. Seeing the power of God's Word, Roman took his study more seriously. He left the military and continued in his Bible education activities. Now he shares in the preaching work with a former prisoner.

"Here we live on the Bible, Bible publications, and Bible study," wrote one prisoner. These words well describe the need that exists in some prisons for Bible literature. One congregation in Ukraine reports about the Bible education work in a local prison: "The administration is thankful for the literature we provide. We supply them with 60 copies of each issue of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*" Another congregation writes: "We care for a correctional facility that has 20 small libraries. We provided each library with our main publications. This amounted to 20 boxes of literature." In one prison, the guards maintain a file of our magazines in the library so that prisoners can benefit from every issue.

In 2002 the branch office in Ukraine established a Prison Desk. Thus far, the desk has contacted about 120 correctional facilities and has assigned congregations to care for them. Every month about 50 letters from prisoners are received, most of them requesting literature or asking for a Bible study. The branch sends books, magazines, and brochures to them until local brothers can contact them.

"Keep in mind those in prison bonds," wrote the apostle Paul to his fellow Christians. (Hebrews 13:3) He was referring to those who were imprisoned for their faith. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses keep in mind those who are incarcerated, visit prisons, and "preach a release to the captives."—Luke 4:18.



THE BIBLE IN ITALIAN

A Troubled History

THE Bible is among the most widely circulated books in our country [Italy], but it is perhaps among the least read as well. The faithful still receive little encouragement to get acquainted with the Bible and little help to read it as the Word of God. There are those who want to know the Bible, but often there is no one to break the bread of the Word for them."

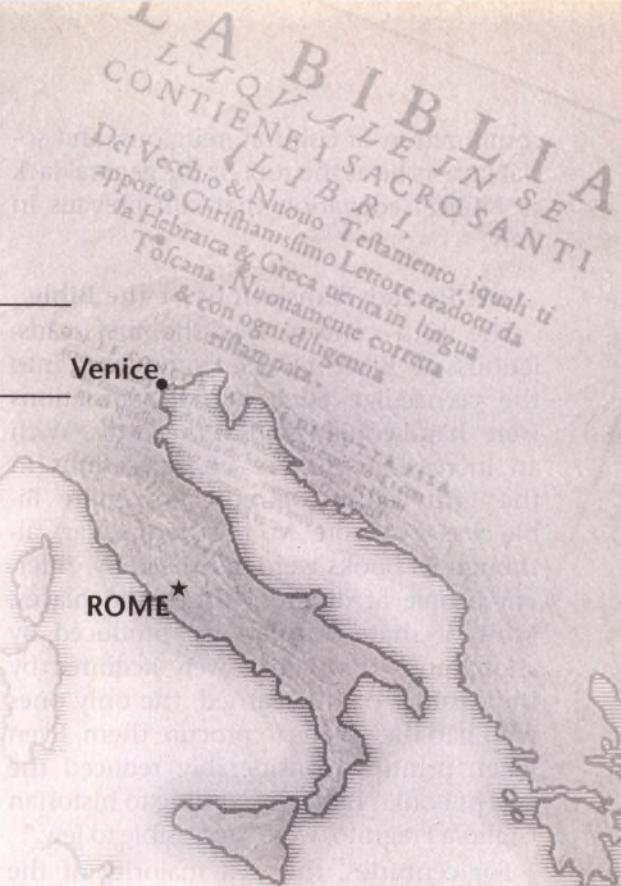
This statement, made in 1995 by a body of the Italian Bishops' Conference, raises a number of questions. How widely read was the Bible in Italy in centuries past? Why did its circulation lag behind that in other countries? Why is it still among the least read books in Italy? An examination of the history of Italian-language versions of the Bible offers some answers.

It took centuries for Romance languages—French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and so on—to develop from Latin. In various European countries with a Latin background, the vernacular, the tongue of the common people, gradually acquired a new dignity and was even used in literary works. Development of the vernacular had a direct bearing on Bible translation. How? At a certain point, the gulf between Latin, the sacred ecclesiastical language, and the vernacular, with its dialects and local variants, became so wide that Latin was no longer understood by those who had no formal education.

Venice

ROME*

Bible title page: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma



By the year 1000, most inhabitants of the Italian peninsula would have found it difficult to read the Latin *Vulgate*, even if they could obtain a copy. For centuries, the ecclesiastical hierarchy monopolized education, including that at the few universities that existed. Only a privileged few benefited from it. Hence, the Bible eventually became "an unknown book." Yet, many desired to gain access to the Word of God and understand it in their own language.

In general, the clergy opposed Bible translation, fearing that it would encourage the spread of so-called heresies. According to historian Massimo Firpo, "use of the vernacular [would mean] demolition of a language barrier [the use of Latin] that safeguarded the clergy's exclusive dominion over religious matters." Hence, a

combination of cultural, religious, and social factors lie at the root of the general lack of Biblical education that still prevails in Italy.

First Partial Translations of the Bible

The 13th century saw the first translations of Bible books from Latin into the vernacular. Such partial translations were hand-copied and very costly. With an increasing number of translations in the 14th century, almost the entire Bible was available in the vernacular, although its books were translated by different people at different times and places. Most of these translations, produced by anonymous translators, were acquired by the wealthy or the learned, the only ones who had the means to procure them. Even when printing considerably reduced the cost of books, Bibles, according to historian Gigliola Fragnito, were "accessible to few."

For centuries, the vast majority of the population remained illiterate. Even at the time of the unification of Italy in 1861, 74.7 percent of the population were illiterate. Incidentally, when the new Italian government prepared to make free and mandatory public education available for all, Pope Pius IX wrote to the king in 1870 urging him to oppose the law, which the pope described as a "plague" aimed at "totally destroying Catholic schools."

The First Bible in Italian

The first complete Bible in Italian was printed in Venice in 1471, some 16 years after movable type was first used in Europe. Nicolò Malerbi, a Camaldolese monk, produced his translation in eight months. He drew heavily on the existing translations, edited them on the basis of the Latin *Vulgate*, and replaced some words with those

typical of his area, Venetia. His translation was the first printed edition of the Bible in Italian to attain a significant circulation.

Another man who published a version of the Bible in Venice was Antonio Brucioli. He was a humanist with Protestant leanings, but he never broke away from the Catholic Church. In 1532, Brucioli translated the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek. This was the first Bible to be translated from the original texts into Italian. Though not in fine literary Italian, the translation's faithfulness to the original texts is remarkable, given the knowledge of ancient languages in those days. In some places and editions, Brucioli restored God's name in the form "Ieova." For nearly a century, his Bible was very popular among Italian Protestants and religious dissidents.

Other Italian translations—in reality revisions of Brucioli's Bible—were published, some by Catholics. None of them achieved any notable circulation. In 1607, Giovanni Diodati, a Calvinist pastor whose parents had fled to Switzerland to avoid religious persecution, published in Geneva another translation into Italian from the original languages. His version became the Bible of Italian Protestants for centuries. For the period in which it was produced, it is considered an excellent Italian translation. Diodati's Bible helped Italians to grasp the Bible's teachings. But clerical censorship stood in the way of this and other translations.

The Bible—"An Unknown Book"

"The Church has always fulfilled its duty to keep books under surveillance, but until the invention of printing, it did not feel the need to compile a catalog of prohibited books because those writings considered dangerous were burned," states the *Encyclopedia Cattolica*. Even af-

, Molte, et
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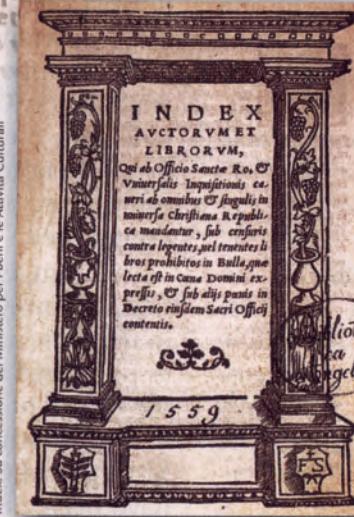
Promissione della liberazione, genealogie di
Ruben, Simeon & Levi. Cap. VI.

T disse il Signore à Mose, hora ve-
drai quelle cose che io farò à Pharaon
ne, pche per mano forte ne gli man-
dera, et per mano potente scacciera quegli
della terra sua. Et parlò Iddio à Mose, et
disse à quello, o il Signore. Et apparsì à A-
braham, à Isaac, & Jacob in Dio omnipotente,
et nel nome mio Ieoua non sono
noto à quegli. Et anchora **conferma** il pat-
to mio con quegli, ~~in dare loro la terra di~~
Chenahan, terra de le loro peregrinationi,
ne laquale hanno peregrinato. Et anchora
io ho vđito il clamore de figliuoli di Israel,
i quali fanno seruire gli Egittii, et sommi ri-
cordato del patto mio, per laqual cosa di à
figliuoli di Israel, io Signore, et
da pesi de g' i Egittii, et cauero

ter the onset of the Protestant Reformation, the clergy of several European countries did their utmost to limit circulation of so-called heretical books. A turning point came after the Council of Trent in 1546, when the question of vernacular translations was considered. Two distinct positions emerged. Those favoring prohibition held that the Bible in the common tongue was "the mother and origin of all heresies." Those against the prohibition stated that their "adversaries," the Protestants, would argue that the church prohibited the Bible in the vernacular to hide "fraud and deceit."

Lack of agreement meant that the Council took no definite stand on the issue but limited itself to sanctioning the authenticity of the *Vulgata*, which became the standard text for the Catholic Church. However, Carlo Buzzetti, teacher at the Pontifical University Salesianum, Rome, notes that pronouncing the *Vulgata* "authentic" favored the idea that, in practice, it was to be the

Brucioli's translation used the
divine name Ieoua in its text



The index of prohibited books listed translations of the Bible into the vernacular as dangerous

only legitimate form of the Bible." Ensuing developments bore this out.

In 1559, Pope Paul IV published the first index of prohibited books, a list of works that Catholics were forbidden to read, sell, translate, or possess. These volumes were considered evil and dangerous to faith and moral integrity. The index forbade the reading of vernacular translations of the Bible, including Brucioli's. Transgressors were excommunicated. The 1596 index was even more restrictive. Authorization was no longer to be given to translate or print Bibles in the vernacular. Such Bibles were to be destroyed.

As a result, Bible burnings in church squares multiplied after the end of the 16th century. In the minds of the people in general, the Scriptures became a book of the heretics, and that image is still

very much alive. Almost all Bibles and Bible commentaries in public and private libraries were destroyed, and for the next 200 years, no Catholic would translate a Bible into Italian. The only Bibles that circulated on the Italian peninsula—in secret, for fear of confiscation—were those translated by Protestant scholars. Thus, historian Mario Cignoni states: "In practice, Bible reading by laymen ceased completely for centuries. The Bible became virtually an unknown book, and millions of Italians lived their lives without ever reading a page of it."

Prohibition Relaxed

Later, Pope Benedict XIV, in a decree on the index dated June 13, 1757, modified the previous rule, "permitting readings of vernacular versions approved by the Holy See and published under the direction of bishops." As a consequence, Antonio Martini, who later became archbishop of Florence, prepared to translate the *Vulgate*. The first part was published in 1769, and the work was completed in 1781. According to one Catholic source, Martini's translation was "the first truly worthy of particular mention." Until then, Catholics who did not understand Latin were unable to read a Bible authorized by the church. For the next 150 years, Martini's was the only version approved for Italian Catholics.

A turning point was reached at the ecumenical council Vatican II. In 1965 the document *Dei Verbum* for the first time encouraged "suitable and correct translations . . . into various languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books." Shortly be-

fore, in 1958, the Pontificio istituto biblico (Pontifical Biblical Institute) published "the first complete Catholic translation from the original texts." This version restored a few occurrences of the divine name in the form "Jahve."

Opposition to Bibles in the vernacular has been devastating, and its effects are still felt. As stated by Gigliola Fragnito, it has had the effect of "inculcating in believers distrust of their own freedom of intellect and conscience." In addition, there has been an imposition of religious traditions, which many Catholics view as more important than the Bible. All of this has caused people to become estranged from the Scriptures, even though illiteracy has virtually disappeared.

The evangelizing work of Jehovah's Witnesses, however, has aroused new interest in the Bible in Italian. In 1963 the Witnesses published the *New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures* in Italian. In 1967 the whole Bible became available. More than 4,000,000 copies of this version have been distributed in Italy alone. The *New World Translation*, which restores the divine name, Jehovah, in its text, distinguishes itself for its scrupulous adherence to the sense of the original texts.

Jehovah's Witnesses go from house to house, reading and explaining the Scriptural message of hope to all who will listen. (Acts 20:

20) The next time you meet Jehovah's Witnesses, why not ask them to show you what your own Bible says concerning God's marvelous promise that soon he will establish "a new earth" in which "righteousness is to dwell"?—2 Peter 3:13.



HELPING CHINESE PEOPLE IN MEXICO

"TEN men out of all the languages of the nations will take hold, yes, they will actually take hold of the skirt of a man who is a Jew, saying: 'We will go with you people, for we have heard that God is with you people.' " (Zechariah 8:23) Today, this beautiful prophecy is being fulfilled throughout the world. People "out of all the languages of the nations" are clinging to the spiritual Israelites in order to worship Jehovah God. Jehovah's Witnesses are keenly interested in the fulfillment of this prophecy. Many of them are learning another language in order to share in the worldwide preaching work.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Mexico are no exception. An estimated 30,000 Chinese-speaking people live in Mexico. In 2003, 15 of them attended the Memorial of Christ's death held in Mexico City. Thus Witnesses in Mexico became aware of the potential for spiritual growth in the Chinese field. In order to have more preachers to care for these Chinese-speaking people, a three-month course was established to teach Mexican Witnesses simple presentations in Mandarin Chinese. Altogether, 25 Witnesses took the course. At its completion, an official from the Mandarin-speaking community in Mexico City attended the graduation, showing the impact of the class on the Chinese-speaking populace. A local Chinese institution offered three of the students scholarships to go abroad to polish up their Chinese.

The language course involved practical training. After learning some very basic phrases, the students immediately began preaching in Chinese in the business district of Mexico City. The zealous students started 21 Bible studies. The brochure *What Does God Require of Us?* in Chinese with text rendered in the Roman alphabet, called Pinyin, was of great help.

How did the Witnesses who had just started to take the course in Chinese conduct Bible studies? At first, they could say only, "*Qing Du* [Please read]" and point to a paragraph and then to the question. After the person read and answered in Chinese, they would say, "*Shei shei* [Thank you]" and, "*Hen Hao* [Very good]."

One such Bible study was started with a woman who was a nominal Christian. After the third study, the Witness wondered if the

A Chinese language class in Mexico City



woman really understood the information. So the Witness took along a brother whose native tongue was Chinese. When he asked the woman if she had any questions, the woman asked: "To get baptized, do I have to be able to swim?"

Before long, a Congregation Book Study was established with an average attendance of 9 Chinese-speaking persons and 23 local Mexican Witnesses. Among those attending was a Chinese doctor, who had received the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines in Spanish from one of his patients. Since he did not read Spanish, he had someone translate a few lines for him. Realizing that the magazines dealt with the Bible, he asked the patient if she could obtain the magazines in Chinese. She did, and through the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mexico, arrangements were made for a Chinese-speaking Witness to call on him. His mother in China had a Bible, and the doctor had enjoyed reading it. When he decided to go to Mexico, his mother told him not to stop reading the Bible. So he had been praying for someone who could help him learn more about the God of the Bible. He exclaimed: "God has listened to my prayer!"



A Mexican Witness
conducting a Bible
study in Chinese



Door-to-door ministry in
Chinese, Mexico City

Also attending the book study was a Chinese family who rented living quarters from a Mexican woman who was studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. Although the Chinese family understood very little Spanish, they would sit in on the Bible discussions. In time, the family asked the Witness conducting the study if she had any publications in Chinese. Soon a Bible study in Chinese was conducted with them. Before long, the family expressed a desire to preach to their fellow countrymen and to dedicate their lives to Jehovah.

True, Chinese is a difficult language to learn. As seen in the foregoing experiences, however, with Jehovah's help people of many languages, including Chinese, are learning God's will in Mexico, as well as in other parts of the earth.

WHOM DO YOU OBEY —GOD OR MEN?

"We must obey God as ruler rather than men." —ACTS 5:29.

THE judges of the Jewish supreme court must have been furious. The prisoners were missing. They were apostles of Jesus Christ, a man the high court had condemned to death a few weeks earlier. Now the court was ready to deal with his closest followers. But when the guards went to fetch them, they discovered that their cells were empty, although the doors had been locked. The guards soon learned that the apostles were at the temple in Jerusalem, fearlessly teaching the people about Jesus Christ—the very activity for which they had been arrest-

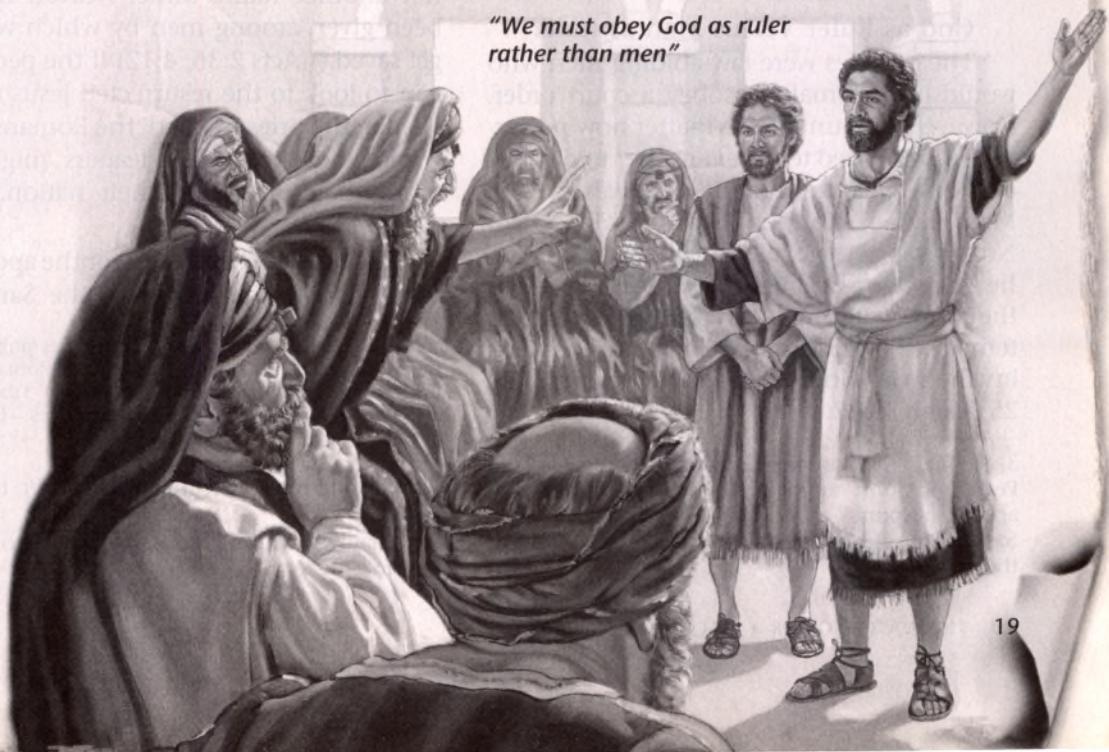
1. (a) What is the theme text for this study?
(b) Why were the apostles taken into custody?

ed! The guards went straightaway to the temple, took the apostles back into custody, and brought them to court.—Acts 5:17-27.

² An angel had released the apostles from prison. Was this to spare them further persecution? No. It was in order that the inhabitants of Jerusalem should hear the good news about Jesus Christ. The angel's instruction to the apostles was that they "keep on speaking to the people all the sayings about this life." (Acts 5:19, 20) So it was that when the temple guards caught up with them, they found the apostles obediently carrying out that command.

2. What did an angel command the apostles to do?

*"We must obey God as ruler
rather than men"*



³ Two of those tenacious preachers, the apostles Peter and John, had been in court before, as the chief justice, Joseph Caiaphas, sternly reminded them. He said: "We positively ordered you not to keep teaching upon the basis of [the name of Jesus], and yet, look! you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." (Acts 5:28) Caiaphas should not have been surprised to see Peter and John back in court. When ordered to stop preaching the first time, the two apostles answered: "Whether it is righteous in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves. But as for us, we *cannot* stop speaking about the things we have seen and heard." Like the ancient prophet Jeremiah, Peter and John could not hold back from carrying out their commission to preach.—Acts 4:18-20; Jeremiah 20:9.

⁴ Now, not only Peter and John but all the apostles—including the newly selected Matthias—had the opportunity to go on record with the court. (Acts 1:21-26) When ordered to stop preaching, they too boldly replied: "We *must* obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

God as Ruler Versus Man as Ruler

⁵ The apostles were law-abiding men who would not normally disobey a court order. However, no human, no matter how powerful, is authorized to order another to disobey one of God's commands. Jehovah is "the Most High over all the earth." (Psalm 83:18) Not only is he "the Judge of all the earth" but he is also the Supreme Lawgiver, as well as the King of eternity. Any court order that attempts to override one of God's commands is invalid from God's standpoint.—Genesis 18:25; Isaiah 33:22.

3, 4. (a) When ordered to stop preaching, how did Peter and John respond? (b) How did the other apostles respond?

5, 6. Why did the apostles not obey the order of the court?

⁶ This fact has been acknowledged by some of the finest legal minds. For example, the noted 18th-century English jurist William Blackstone wrote that no human law should be allowed to contradict "the law of revelation" as found in the Bible. Thus, the Sanhedrin crossed the line when it ordered the apostles to stop preaching. The apostles simply could not comply with that order.

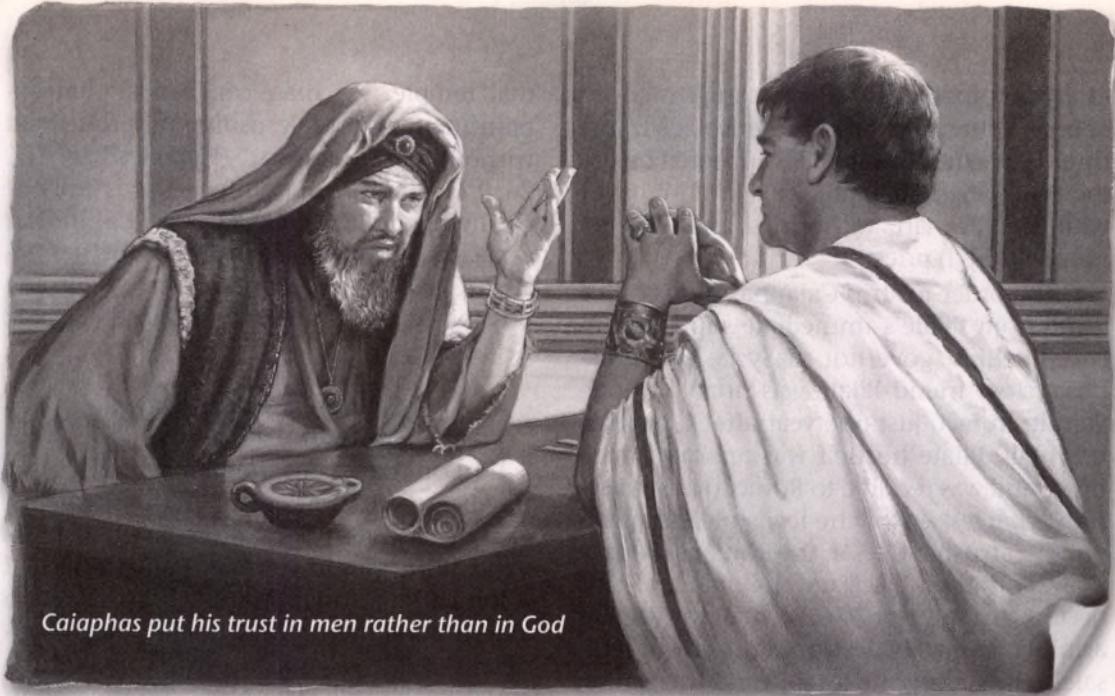
⁷ The apostles' determination to keep preaching angered the chief priests. Certain members of the priesthood, including Caiaphas himself, were Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection. (Acts 4:1, 2; 5:17) Yet, the apostles kept insisting that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. In addition, some of the chief priests had gone to great lengths to curry favor with the Roman authorities. At Jesus' trial, when offered the opportunity to accept Jesus as their king, the chief priests went so far as to cry out: "We have no king but Caesar." (John 19:15)* Not only were the apostles affirming that Jesus had been resurrected but they were teaching that apart from the name of Jesus, "there is not another name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must get saved." (Acts 2:36; 4:12) If the people began to look to the resurrected Jesus as their Leader, the priests feared, the Romans might come and the Jewish leaders might lose 'both their place and their nation.'—John 11:48.

⁸ The future looked grim for the apostles of Jesus Christ. The judges of the Sanhedrin

* The "Caesar" whom the chief priests publicly embraced on that occasion was the despised Roman Emperor Tiberius, a hypocrite and a murderer. Tiberius was also known for his debased sexual practices.—Daniel 11:15, 21.

7. Why did the preaching work anger the chief priests?

8. What wise counsel did Gamaliel give to the Sanhedrin?



Caiaphas put his trust in men rather than in God

were determined to have them put to death. (Acts 5:33) However, events took an unexpected turn. Gamaliel, an expert in the Law, stood up and warned his colleagues not to act hastily. He wisely observed: "If this scheme or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them." Then, significantly, Gamaliel added: "Otherwise, you may perhaps be found fighters actually against God."—Acts 5:34, 38, 39.

⁹ Amazingly, the court accepted Gamaliel's advice. The Sanhedrin "summoned the apostles, flogged them, and ordered them to stop speaking upon the basis of Jesus' name, and let them go." Far from being intimidated, however, the apostles were determined to obey the angelic command to preach. Thus, after their release, "every day in the temple and from house to house [the apostles] continued without letup teaching and declaring

9. What proves that the apostles' work was from God?

the good news about the Christ, Jesus." (Acts 5:40, 42) Jehovah blessed their efforts. To what extent? "The word of God went on growing, and the number of the disciples kept multiplying in Jerusalem very much." In fact, "a great crowd of priests began to be obedient to the faith." (Acts 6:7) How devastating that must have been for the chief priests! The evidence was piling up: The work of the apostles was indeed from God!

Fighters Against God Cannot Succeed

¹⁰ In the first century, the Jewish high priests were appointed by the Roman authorities. Wealthy Joseph Caiaphas was placed in his position by Valerius Gratus, and he held that post longer than many of his predecessors. Caiaphas likely attributed this accomplishment to his skill as a diplomat and his personal friendship with Pilate rather than

10. From a human standpoint, why might Caiaphas have felt secure in his position, but why was his confidence misplaced?

to divine providence. In any case, his confidence in men proved to be misplaced. Just three years after the apostles appeared before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas fell out of favor with the Roman authorities and was removed as high priest.

¹¹ The order to strip Caiaphas of his office came from Pilate's immediate superior, Lucius Vitellius, governor of Syria, and Caiaphas' close friend Pilate was unable to prevent it. In fact, just one year after Caiaphas' downfall, Pilate himself was removed from office and was recalled to Rome to answer serious charges. As for the Jewish leaders who put their trust in Caesar, the Romans did take away 'both their place and their nation.' This occurred in the year 70 C.E. when the Roman armies completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including the temple and the Sanhedrin hall. How true the words of the psalmist proved to be in this case: "Do not put your trust in nobles, nor in the son of earthling man, to whom no salvation belongs!"—John 11:48; Psalm 146:3.

¹² In contrast, God appointed the resurrected Jesus Christ as High Priest of a great spirit-

11. What end came to Pontius Pilate and the Jewish system of things, and what conclusion do you draw from this?
12. How does the case of Jesus prove that obedience to God is the course of wisdom?

Can You Answer?

- What encouraging example did the apostles set for us by the way they faced opposition?
- Why should we always obey God as ruler rather than men?
- Our opposers are really fighting against whom?
- What outcome can we expect for those who endure persecution?

tual temple. No man can cancel that appointment. Indeed, Jesus "has his priesthood without any successors." (Hebrews 2:9; 7:17, 24; 9:11) God also appointed Jesus as Judge of the living and the dead. (1 Peter 4:5) In that capacity, Jesus will determine whether Joseph Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate have any possibility of future life.—Matthew 23:33; Acts 24:15.

Fearless Modern-Day Kingdom Preachers

¹³ In our day, as in the first century, there has been no shortage of 'fighters against God.' (Acts 5:39) For example, when Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany refused to heil Adolf Hitler as their Führer, Hitler vowed to exterminate them. (Matthew 23:10) His efficient death machine seemed more than equal to the task. The Nazis did succeed in rounding up thousands of Witnesses and sending them off to concentration camps. They even managed to kill some Witnesses. But the Nazis failed to break the Witnesses' resolve to worship God alone, and they failed to eliminate God's servants as a group. The work of these Christians was from God, not man, and the work of God cannot be overthrown. Sixty years later, faithful survivors of Hitler's concentration camps are still serving Jehovah 'with their whole heart and soul and mind,' whereas Hitler and his Nazi party live only in infamy.—Matthew 22:37.

¹⁴ In the years since the Nazis' efforts, others have joined the losing battle against Jehovah and his people. In a number of countries in Europe, crafty religious and political elements have endeavored to brand Jeho-

13. In modern times, what work proved to be from men, and what work proved to be from God? How do you know?

14. (a) What efforts have opposers made to slander God's servants, and with what results? (b) Will such efforts bring any lasting harm to God's people? (Hebrews 13:5, 6)

vah's Witnesses a 'dangerous sect,' the same charge that was leveled against first-century Christians. (Acts 28:22) The fact is, the European Court of Human Rights has recognized Jehovah's Witnesses as a religion, not a sect. Opposers must know that. Still, they persist in slandering the Witnesses. As a direct result of this mischaracterization, some of these Christians have been discharged from their employment. Witness children have been harassed in schools. Fearful landlords have canceled contracts for buildings that the Witnesses have long used as meeting places. In a few cases, government agencies have even denied citizenship to individuals solely on the grounds that they are Jehovah's Witnesses! Still, the Witnesses are undeterred.

¹⁵ In France, for example, people are generally reasonable and fair-minded. However, a few opposers have promoted laws aimed at crippling the Kingdom work. How have Jehovah's Witnesses there reacted? They have intensified their activity in the field as never before and with thrilling results. (James 4:7) Why, in just one six-month period, the number of home Bible studies increased by an amazing 33 percent in that country! It must infuriate the Devil to see honest-hearted ones in France respond to the good news. (Revelation 12:17) Our fellow Christians in France are confident that the words of the prophet Isaiah will prove true in their case: "Any weapon whatever that will be formed against you will have no success, and any tongue at all that will rise up against you in the judgment you will condemn."—Isaiah 54:17.

¹⁶ Jehovah's Witnesses do not enjoy being persecuted. However, in obedience to God's command to all Christians, they cannot and

15, 16. How have Jehovah's Witnesses in France reacted to opposition to their Christian work, and why do they keep on preaching?

The yeartext
for 2006 will be:
**"We must obey
God as ruler
rather than men."**
—Acts 5:29

will not stop speaking about the things they have heard. They endeavor to be good citizens. Where there is a conflict between God's law and man's law, however, they must obey God as ruler.

Fear Them Not

¹⁷ Our enemies are in a very precarious position. They are fighting against God. Thus, in harmony with Jesus' command, rather than fear them, we pray for those persecuting us. (Matthew 5:44) We pray that if any are opposing God out of ignorance, as Saul of Tarsus was, Jehovah will graciously open their eyes to the truth. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Saul became the Christian apostle Paul and suffered greatly at the hands of the authorities of his day. Still, he kept reminding fellow believers "to be in subjection and be obedient to governments and authorities as rulers, to be ready for every good work, to speak injuriously of no one [no, not even of their most ardent persecutors], not to be belligerent, to be reasonable, exhibiting all mildness toward all men." (Titus 3:1, 2) Jehovah's Witnesses in France and elsewhere endeavor to take this counsel to heart.

¹⁸ God told the prophet Jeremiah: "I am
17. (a) Why are our enemies not to be feared?
(b) What should be our attitude toward persecutors?
18. (a) In what ways might Jehovah deliver his people? (b) What will be the final outcome?

with you to deliver you." (Jeremiah 1:8) How might Jehovah deliver us from persecution today? He might raise up a fair-minded judge like Gamaliel. Or he may see to it that a corrupt or antagonistic official is unexpectedly replaced by a more reasonable one. At times, though, Jehovah may permit the persecution of his people to run its course. (2 Timothy 3:12) If God allows us to be persecuted, he will always give us the strength to endure persecution. (1 Corinthians 10:13) And no matter what God permits, we have no doubt as to the final outcome: Those who fight against God's people are fighting

against God, and fighters against God will not prevail.

¹⁹ Jesus told his disciples to expect tribulation. (John 16:33) In view of this, the words recorded at Acts 5:29 have never been more timely: "*We must obey God as ruler rather than men.*" For that reason, these thrilling words have been selected as the yeartext of Jehovah's Witnesses for 2006. May it be our resolve during the coming year and throughout eternity to obey God as Ruler at all costs!

19. What is the yeartext for 2006, and why is it appropriate?

NOW IS THE TIME FOR DECISIVE ACTION

"How long will you be limping upon two different opinions?"—1 KINGS 18:21.

DO YOU believe that Jehovah is the only true God? Do you also believe that Bible prophecies point to our time as "the last days" of Satan's wicked system? (2 Timothy 3:1) If so, you will surely agree that now, of all times, there is a need for decisive action. Never before in human history have so many lives been at stake.

² In the tenth century B.C.E., the nation of Israel needed to make a very serious decision. Whom would they serve? King Ahab, under the influence of his pagan wife, Jezebel, promoted Baal worship in the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. Baal was a fertility god who was supposed to provide rain and fruitful crops.

1. What makes our time so different from the past?
2. What happened in the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab?

Many Baal worshippers may have blown a kiss or bowed down to an idol of their god. To induce Baal to bless their crops and livestock, his worshippers took part in sex orgies with temple prostitutes. They also had the custom of cutting themselves to make blood flow. —1 Kings 18:28.

³ A remnant of some 7,000 Israelites refused to take part in this idolatrous, immoral, violent form of worship. (1 Kings 19:18) They loyally stuck to their covenant relationship with Jehovah God, and for this they were persecuted. For example, Queen Jezebel murdered many prophets of Jehovah. (1 Kings 18:4, 13) Because of these trying conditions, the majority of the Israel-

3. What effect did Baal worship have on God's people?

ites practiced interfaith, trying to please both Jehovah and Baal. But it was apostasy for an Israelite to turn away from Jehovah and worship a false god. Jehovah promised to bless the Israelites if they loved him and obeyed his commandments. However, he warned them that if they failed to give him "exclusive devotion," they would be annihilated.
—Deuteronomy 5:6-10; 28:15, 63.

⁴ A similar situation exists in Christendom today. Church members claim to be Christians, but their holidays, behavior, and beliefs conflict with Bible teachings. Like Jezebel, Christendom's clergy spearhead the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses. Christendom's clergy also have a long record of supporting wars and are thus responsible for the deaths of countless millions of church members. Such religious support of worldly

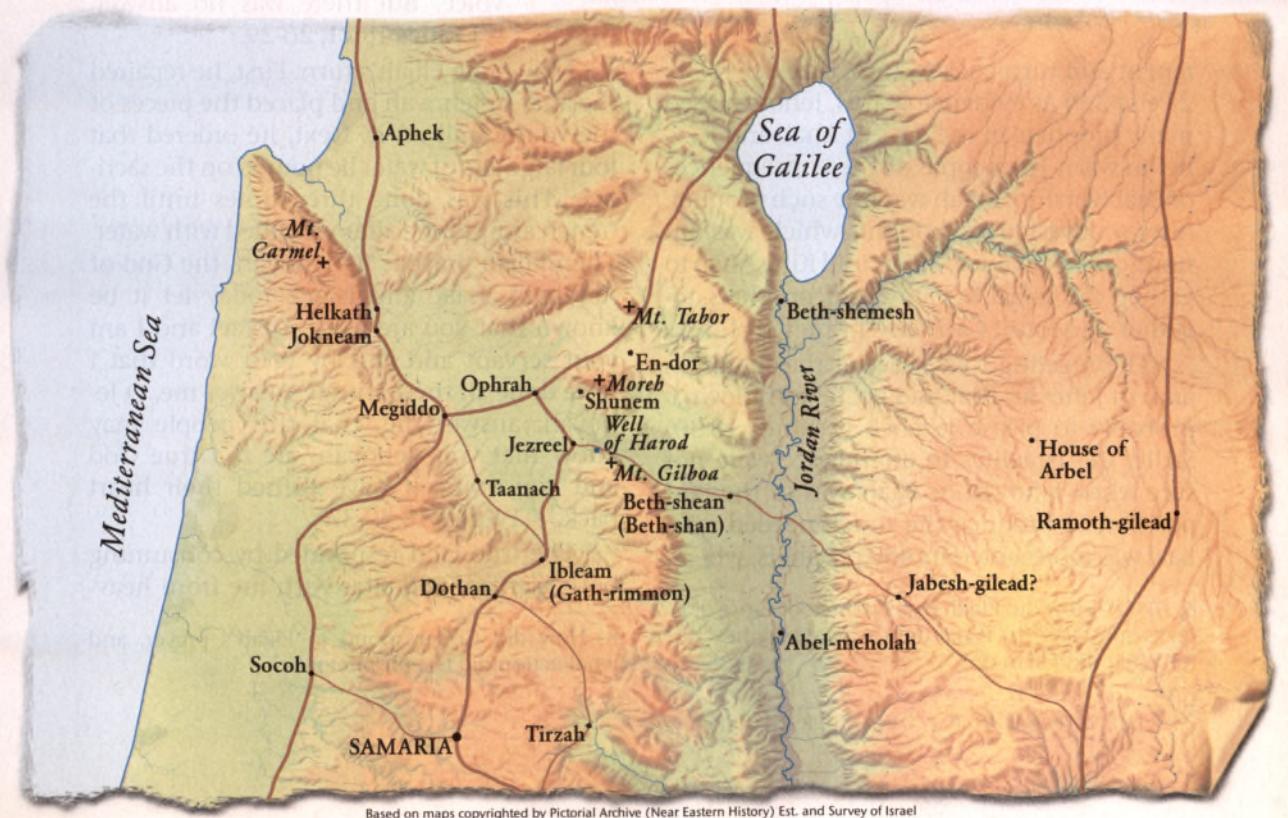
4. What did Jesus and his apostles foretell would happen among Christians, and how has it been fulfilled?

governments is identified in the Bible as spiritual fornication. (Revelation 18:2, 3) In addition, Christendom has become increasingly tolerant of literal fornication, even among its clergy. Jesus Christ and his apostles foretold this great apostasy. (Matthew 13:36-43; Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Peter 2:1, 2) What will be the final outcome for the more than one billion adherents of Christendom? And what responsibility do true worshippers of Jehovah have toward these and all others who have been misled by false religion? We get a clear answer to such questions by examining the dramatic events that led to the 'annihilation of Baal out of Israel.'—2 Kings 10:28.

God's Love for His Wayward People

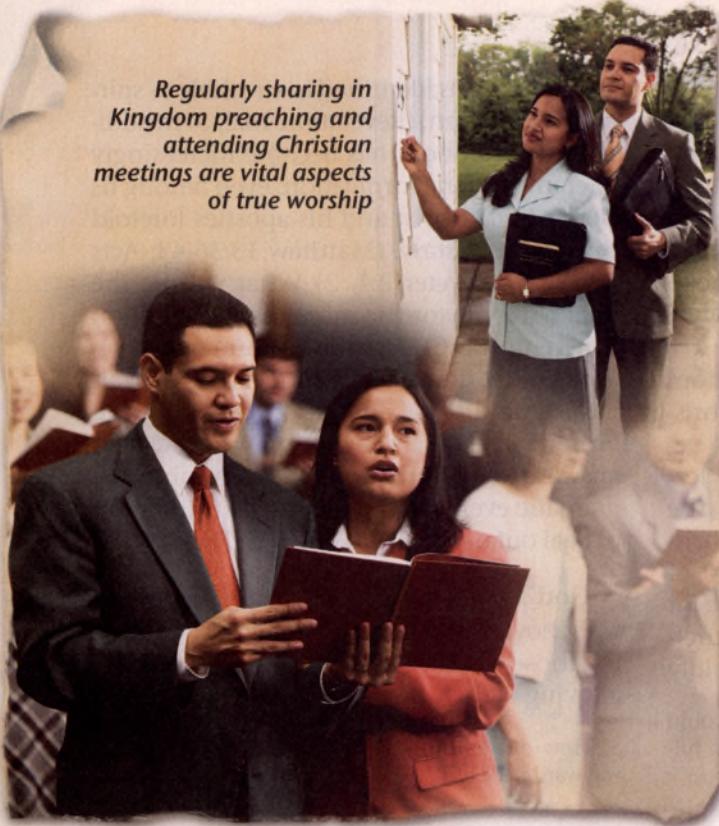
⁵ Jehovah God takes no delight in punishing those who become unfaithful to him. As a loving Father, he desires that wicked ones

5. How did Jehovah show loving concern for his wayward people?



Based on maps copyrighted by Pictorial Archive (Near Eastern History) Est. and Survey of Israel

Regularly sharing in Kingdom preaching and attending Christian meetings are vital aspects of true worship



repent and turn back to him. (Ezekiel 18:32; 2 Peter 3:9) As evidence of this, Jehovah used many prophets in the days of Ahab and Jezebel to warn His people of the consequences of Baal worship. Elijah was one such prophet. After a devastating drought, which was announced in advance, Elijah told King Ahab to gather the Israelites and Baal prophets together on Mount Carmel.—1 Kings 18:1, 19.

⁶ The meeting took place at the site of an altar of Jehovah that had been “torn down,” probably to please Jezebel. (1 Kings 18:30) Sadly, the Israelites in attendance were not sure who—Jehovah or Baal—was in the best position to produce the much-needed rain. Baal was represented by 450 prophets, where-

6, 7. (a) How did Elijah expose the root cause of Israel's apostasy? (b) What did the Baal prophets do? (c) What did Elijah do?

as Elijah was the only prophet representing Jehovah. Getting to the root of their problem, Elijah asked the people: “How long will you be limping upon two different opinions?” Then, in even plainer words, he placed the issue before them: “If Jehovah is the true God, go following him; but if Baal is, go following him.” To move the indecisive Israelites to render exclusive devotion to Jehovah, Elijah proposed a test of Godship. Two bulls were to be slaughtered as a sacrifice, one for Jehovah and the other for Baal. The true God would consume his sacrifice with fire. The Baal prophets got their sacrifice ready, and then for hours they kept calling: “O Baal, answer us!” When Elijah began to mock them, they cut themselves until blood flowed, and they shouted at the top of their voice. But there was no answer.

—1 Kings 18:21, 26-29.

⁷ Now came Elijah's turn. First, he repaired the altar of Jehovah and placed the pieces of the young bull on it. Next, he ordered that four large jars of water be poured on the sacrifice. This was done three times until the trench around the altar was filled with water. Then Elijah prayed: “O Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that you are God in Israel and I am your servant and it is by your word that I have done all these things. Answer me, O Jehovah, answer me, that this people may know that you, Jehovah, are the true God and you yourself have turned their heart back.”—1 Kings 18:30-37.

⁸ The true God responded by consuming both sacrifice and altar with fire from heav-

8. How did God respond to Elijah's prayer, and what action did the prophet take?

en. That fire consumed even the water in the trench around the altar! Imagine the effect on the Israelites. "They immediately fell upon their faces and said: 'Jehovah is the true God! Jehovah is the true God!'" Elijah now took further decisive action, ordering the Israelites: "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let a single one of them escape!" All 450 Baal prophets were then executed at the foot of Mount Carmel.—1 Kings 18:38-40.

⁹ On that same unforgettable day, Jehovah caused rain to fall upon the land for the first time in three and a half years! (James 5:17, 18) You can imagine all the talk among the Israelites as they returned home; Jehovah had vindicated his Godship. The Baal worshippers, however, did not give up. Jezebel continued her campaign of persecuting Jehovah's servants. (1 Kings 19:1, 2; 21:11-16) Thus the integrity of God's people was again tested. Would they be giving exclusive devotion to Jehovah when his day of judgment against Baal worshippers came?

Act Decisively Now

¹⁰ In modern times, anointed Christians have done a work like that of Elijah. By word of mouth and by the printed page, they have warned people of all nations inside and outside of Christendom about the danger of false religion. As a result, millions have taken decisive action to end their membership in false religion. They have dedicated their lives to Jehovah and have become baptized disciples of Jesus Christ. Yes, they have heeded God's urgent appeal respecting false religion: "Get out of her, my people, if you do not want to share with her in her sins, and if you do not want to receive part of her plagues."—Revelation 18:4.

9. How were true worshippers still tested?
10. (a) In modern times, what have anointed Christians been doing? (b) What does it mean to obey the command found at Revelation 18:4?

¹¹ Other millions, while attracted to the Bible-based message spread by Jehovah's Witnesses, are still unsure about what they should do. Some of these occasionally come to Christian meetings, such as the observance of the Lord's Evening Meal or sessions of a district convention. We urge all such ones to consider carefully Elijah's words: "How long will you sit on the fence?" (1 Kings 18:21, *New English Bible*) Instead of delaying, they need to take decisive action now and zealously work toward the goal of becoming dedicated, baptized worshippers of Jehovah. Their prospects for everlasting life are at stake!—2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

¹² Sadly, some baptized Christians have become irregular or inactive in their worship. (Hebrews 10:23-25; 13:15, 16) Some have lost their zeal because of fear of persecution, the anxieties of making a living, efforts to get rich, or the pursuit of selfish pleasures. Jesus warned that these very things would stumble, choke, and ensnare some of his followers. (Matthew 10:28-33; 13:20-22; Luke 12:22-31; 21:34-36) Instead of 'limping on two opinions,' as it were, such ones should "be zealous and repent" by taking decisive action to carry out their dedication to God.—Revelation 3:15-19.

False Religion's Sudden End

¹³ The reason why it is urgent for humans to take decisive action now is seen in what happened in Israel about 18 years after the issue of Godship was settled on Mount Carmel. Jehovah's day of judgment against Baal worship came suddenly and unexpectedly during the ministry of Elijah's successor, Elisha. King Ahab's son Jehoram was ruling

11. What is needed to have Jehovah's approval?
12. Into what dangerous condition have some baptized Christians slipped, and what should they do?
13. Describe the situation in Israel when Jehu was anointed as king.



Like Jehu, all who want to survive Jehovah's day must take decisive action

Ahab your lord, and I must avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the servants of Jehovah at the hand of Jezebel. And the whole house of Ahab must perish; . . . Jezebel the dogs will eat up in the tract of land at Jezreel, and there will be no one burying her."—2 Kings 9:7-10.

¹⁵ Jehu was a decisive

Israel, and Jezebel was still alive as queen mother. Quietly, Elisha sent his attendant to anoint Israel's army chief, Jehu, as the new king. At the time, Jehu was on the east side of the Jordan at Ramoth-gilead, directing a war against Israel's enemies. King Jehoram was at Jezreel in the valley plain near Megiddo, recovering from a battle wound.—2 Kings 8:29-9:4.

¹⁴ This is what Jehovah commanded Jehu to do: "You must strike down the house of

14, 15. What commission did Jehu receive, and how did he respond?

Questions for Meditation

- How did ancient Israel become guilty of Baal worship?
- What great apostasy did the Bible foretell, and how has that prophecy been fulfilled?
- How did Jehu eradicate Baal worship?
- What must we do to survive God's day of judgment?

man. Without delay, he got into his chariot and sped toward Jezreel. A watchman at Jezreel recognized the driving of Jehu and reported to King Jehoram, whereupon Jehoram got into his chariot and went out to meet his army chief. When they met, Jehoram asked: "Is there peace, Jehu?" Jehu replied: "What peace could there be as long as there are the fornications of Jezebel your mother and her many sorceries?" Then, before King Jehoram could flee, Jehu drew his bow and killed Jehoram with an arrow that pierced his heart.—2 Kings 9:20-24.

¹⁶ Wasting no time, Jehu raced to the city in his chariot. Looking down from a window, the heavily made-up Jezebel greeted Jehu with a challenging threat. Ignoring her, Jehu called for support: "Who is with me? Who?" Jezebel's attendants now had to act decisively. Two or three court officials stuck their heads out of the window. Immediately, their loyalty was put to the test. "Let her drop!" ordered Jehu. The officials let Jezebel

16. (a) What situation did Jezebel's court officials suddenly face? (b) How was Jehovah's word about Jezebel fulfilled?

drop to the street below, where she was trampled by Jehu's horses and chariot. Thus the instigator of Baal worship in Israel came to her deserved end. Before there was time to bury her, dogs had eaten up her fleshy parts, just as foretold.—2 Kings 9:30-37.

¹⁷ A similar shocking end will come to the symbolic harlot who has the name "Babylon the Great." The harlot represents the false religions of Satan's world, which have their origin in the ancient city of Babylon. After false religion's end, Jehovah God will turn his attention to all humans who make up the secular parts of Satan's world. These will also be destroyed, preparing the way for a righteous new world.—Revelation 17:3-6; 19:19-21; 21:1-4.

¹⁸ After Jezebel's death, King Jehu wasted no time in executing all Ahab's descendants and key supporters. (2 Kings 10:11) But many Baal-worshipping Israelites remained in the land. Concerning these, Jehu took decisive action to show his "toleration of no rivalry toward Jehovah." (2 Kings 10:16) Pretending to be a Baal worshipper himself, Jehu organized a great festival at the temple of Baal that Ahab had built in Samaria. All Baal worshippers in Israel came to the festival. Trapped inside the temple, they were all

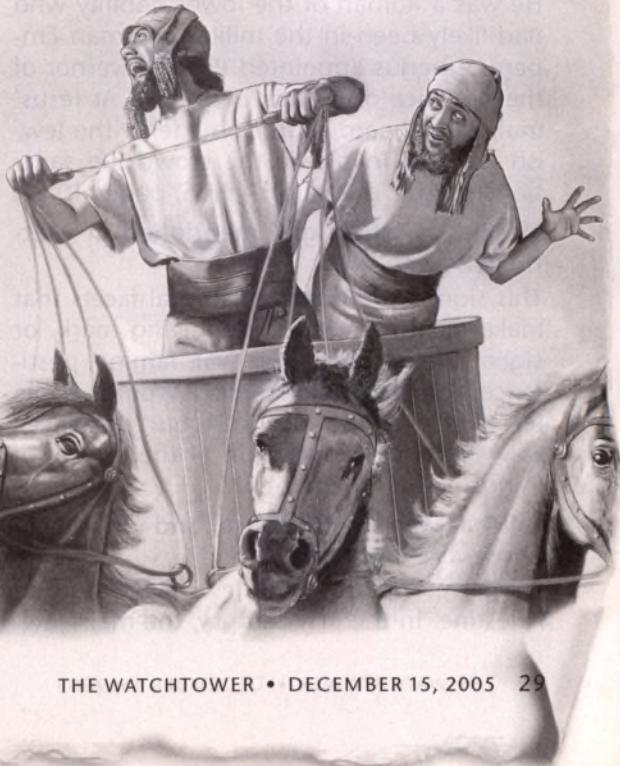
17. God's judgment upon Jezebel should strengthen our faith in what future event?

18. After Jezebel's death, what happened to Baal worshippers in Israel?

slaughtered by Jehu's men. The Bible concludes the account with the words: "Thus Jehu annihilated Baal out of Israel."—2 Kings 10:18-28.

¹⁹ Baal worship was eradicated from Israel. Just as surely, this world's false religions will come to a sudden, shocking end. On whose side will you be during that great day of judgment? Act decisively now, and you may be privileged to be included among the "great crowd" of human survivors of "the great tribulation." Then you will be able to look back with joy, and you will praise God for executing judgment on "the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication." United with other true worshippers, you will be in agreement with the thrilling words that heavenly voices sing: "Praise Jah, you people, because Jehovah our God, the Almighty, has begun to rule as king."—Revelation 7:9, 10, 14; 19:1, 2, 6.

19. What grand prospect awaits the "great crowd" of Jehovah's loyal worshippers?



Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*? See if you can answer the following questions:

- **Why can the first sin—Adam's disobedience—be likened to a hereditary disease?**

It is like a disease because Adam transmitted sin to his offspring. We have thus inherited the defect of sin, just as some children inherit a disease from their parents.—8/15, page 5.

- **What are basic causes of the increased violence today?**

Satan is trying to estrange people from Jehovah by sowing a spirit of violence in hearts, such as through movies, music, and computer games that incite players to simulate brutality and slaughter. Media violence has contributed to many acts of violence.—9/1, page 29.

- **Who was Pontius Pilate?**

He was a Roman of the lower nobility who had likely been in the military. Roman Emperor Tiberius appointed Pilate governor of the province of Judaea in 26 C.E. At Jesus' trial, Pilate heard charges made by the Jewish leaders. To please the crowd, he sanctioned Jesus' execution.—9/15, pages 10-12.

- **What is "the sign" mentioned at Matthew 24:3?**

This sign is composed of several facets that make up a composite identifying mark, or signal. The sign includes war, famine, pestilence, and earthquakes, and it would enable Jesus' followers to recognize his "presence" as well as "the conclusion of the system of things."—10/1, pages 4-5.

- **What was the Diaspora, and what locations were involved?**

The term applies to the Jews living outside Palestine. In the first century, the main Jew-

ish centers were in Syria, Asia Minor, Babylonia, and Egypt, and there were smaller communities in the European part of the Roman Empire.—10/15, page 12.

- **Can a Christian maintain a good conscience if he accepts armed employment?**

Engaging in secular work that requires carrying a firearm or another weapon is a personal decision. But armed employment exposes one to possible bloodguilt if one uses the weapon and to the danger of injury or death from an attack or reprisal. A Christian carrying such a weapon would not qualify for special privileges in the congregation. (1 Timothy 3:3, 10)—11/1, page 31.

- **Since the word "Armageddon" is drawn from the expression "Mountain of Megiddo," will the battle of Armageddon be fought at a mountain in the Middle East?**

No. There is no Mountain of Megiddo, only a mound, or tell, rising above the adjacent valley plain in Israel. That area could not hold all "the kings of the earth and their armies." God's great war will be fought earth wide, and it will end all wars. (Revelation 16:14, 16; 19:19; Psalm 46:8, 9)—12/1, pages 4-7.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

How Good Will Conquer Evil

How Firm Is Your Trust in God?

Seeking Righteousness Will Protect Us

SUBJECT INDEX FOR THE WATCHTOWER 2005

Indicating date of issue in which article appears

BIBLE

- Berleburg Bible, 2/15
- Can Help You Find Joy, 8/1
- "Clear Light" From Russia's Oldest Library, 7/15
- Early German, Uses God's Name, 9/1
- Highlights From Judges, 1/15
- Highlights From Ruth, 3/1
- Highlights From 1 Samuel, 3/15
- Highlights From 2 Samuel, 5/15
- Highlights From 1 Kings, 7/1
- Highlights From 2 Kings, 8/1
- Highlights From 1 Chronicles, 10/1
- Highlights From 2 Chronicles, 12/1
- History—How Accurate? 4/15
- Italian—Troubled History, 12/15
- "It Is Finished" (New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures in Lingala), 7/1
- "Pim" Testifies to Historicity, 3/15
- Royal Bible, 8/15
- Science and, Contradict? 4/1
- Sea of Galilee (ancient boat), 8/15
- Translation Aid, 4/15
- True Teachings, 7/15

CALENDAR

- Families Fortified, 5/15
- Multitudes Embrace Jehovah's Worship, 9/15
- Old Age "a Crown of Beauty," 1/15
- Self-Sacrifice, 11/15
- Single and Contented, 7/15
- Youth Praise Jehovah, 3/15

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND QUALITIES

- Basis for Taking Offense? 8/1
- "Be Hospitable," 1/15
- Can Cope With Any Trial! 6/15
- Common Sense, 5/15
- Conscience Well Trained? 10/1
- Converse With Those You Love, 6/1
- Courage in Face of Opposition, 5/1
- Customs That Displease God, 1/1
- Faith Move You to Action? 4/15
- 'Fear of Jehovah Is Wisdom' (Pr 14), 9/15
- Listening With Love, 11/15
- Loyalty, 9/1
- Make Each Day Count, 5/1
- Making Jehovah Your God, 4/1
- Making Peace, 3/1
- Marital Disagreements, 6/1
- Mealtimes, 1/1
- Measure Yourself Against Others? 2/15
- Not Give Up in What Is Fine, 6/1
- On What Foundation Building? 5/15
- Protect Children by Godly Wisdom, 1/1
- Resist Wrong Thinking! 9/15
- "Rich Toward God"? 10/1
- 'Shrewd One Considers Steps' (Pr 14), 7/15
- Truth Bearing Fruit in Those You Teach? 2/1
- What Others Think of Us, 9/15

JEHOVAH

- Always Does What Is Right, 2/1
- Jehovah's "Saying" Safeguard You, 9/1
- Jehovah Will Not Leave You, 10/15

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- Assembly in Refugee Camp (Kenya), 4/15
- Australia's Outback, 4/1
- Contributions, 11/1
- 'Could Have Been Freed,' 8/15
- "Did Not Compromise," 7/15
- "Faithful Under Trials" (video), 3/1
- Gilead Graduation, 7/1
- "Godly Obedience" Conventions, 3/1
- Good Conduct Bears Fruit (Japan), 11/1
- "Good News for People of All Nations" (booklet), 12/1

Helping Chinese in Mexico, 12/15

- Honest People, 6/1
- "Land of the Eagle" (Albania), 10/15
- 'Love of All Is Increasing' (Japan), 11/15
- Macedonia, 4/15
- Mennonites Search for Truth (Bolivia), 9/1
- 'One of Best Days of My Life' (Australia), 11/1
- "Persecuted for His Faith" (N. Riet), 6/15
- Power of God's Word, 2/15
- Praising Jehovah at School, 6/15
- 'Preach Release to Captives' (prison work), 12/15
- Saba, 2/15
- Share Good News With Deaf (Spain), 11/1
- Testimony to Love, Faith, Obedience (Watchtower Farms printery), 12/1
- Where Early Christianity Flourished (Italy), 6/15

JESUS CHRIST

- What Influence on You? 3/15
- Who Is Jesus Christ? 9/15

LIFE STORIES

- Determined to Continue Serving (C. Benanti), 12/1
- Enduring as Soldier of Christ (Y. Kaptola), 9/1
- Happy for Share in Bible Education (A. Matheakis), 7/1
- I Received 'Requests of My Heart' (D. Morgou), 11/1
- Jehovah Richly Rewards (R. Stawski), 8/1
- Learned to Trust Completely in Jehovah (N. Holtorf), 1/1
- Orphan Finds a Loving Father (D. Sidiropoulos), 4/1
- Parents' Example Strengthened Me (J. Rekeli), 10/1
- "The Life Now"—Enjoying It Fully! (T. Buckingham), 6/1
- Though Weak, I Am Powerful (L. Engleitner), 5/1
- Triumphant in Special Way (E. Ludolph), 5/1
- Used Circumstances to Witness Far and Wide (R. Malicsi), 3/1

MISCELLANEOUS

- Armageddon, 12/1
 - Best Education, 10/15
 - Change the World? 11/1
 - Christianity Among First-Century Jews, 10/15
 - Christmastime, 12/15
 - Control Your Future? 1/15
 - Death, 8/15
 - Devil Real? 11/15
 - Holiday Season, 12/15
 - 'Impressed Into Service' (Mt 5:41), 2/15
 - "Jehovah's Sword and Gideon's!" 7/15
 - Mari—Queen of Desert, 5/15
 - Miracles, 2/15
 - Philo of Alexandria, 6/15
 - Pontius Pilate, 9/15
 - Poverty, 5/15
 - 'Precious Red-Colored Stone' (Re 4:3), 3/15
 - Ransom Magnifies God's Righteousness, 11/1
 - Religion Unites Mankind? 1/1
 - Resurrection, 5/1
 - Samson Triumphs, 3/15
 - Saul's Preaching Excites Hostility, 1/15
 - Search for Inner Peace, 7/1
 - Sign of Jesus' Presence, 10/1
 - Taking in Knowledge—Now and Forever, 4/15
 - 'They That Go Down to Sea in Ships,' 10/15
 - True Teachings, 7/15
 - What Is Life Worth? 2/1
 - Wonders of Creation Exalt Jehovah, 11/15
 - Work—Blessing or Curse? 6/15
 - World Unity, 6/1
- ## QUESTIONS FROM READERS
- Armed employment, 11/1
 - Contradiction about eating dead bodies? (Le 11:40; De 14:21), 7/1
- David and men eat showbread, 3/15
 - David treat captives savagely? 2/15
 - "One alone having immortality" and "not one of men has seen" apply to Jesus? (1Ti 6:15, 16), 9/1
 - Paul: "I am a Pharisee" (Ac 23:6), 4/15
 - Peter's "Angel" (Ac 12:15), 6/1
 - "Probably" (Zep 2:3), 8/1
 - Samson rips lion apart as if kid? 1/15
 - Samson touch corpses as Nazirite? 1/15
 - Shechinah's significance, 8/15
 - Solomon to be resurrected? 7/15
 - Stephen pray to Jesus? 1/1
 - Tip government employee? 4/1
 - Violent computer games, 9/15
 - Why David and Bath-sheba not executed? 5/15
 - Women "kept safe through childbearing" (1Ti 2:15), 5/1

STUDY ARTICLES

- Are You Faithful in All Things? 7/15
- Becoming Progressive and Adaptable Ministers, 12/1
- Beware of Developing Haughty Heart, 10/15
- "Bringing Good News of Something Better," 7/1
- Christ—Focus of Prophecy, 1/15
- Christians—Be Proud of Who You Are! 2/15
- Christians Reflect Glory of Jehovah, 8/15
- Coming to Know Jehovah's Ways, 5/15
- Cultivate Genuine Humility, 10/15
- "Finding One Pearl of High Value," 2/1
- Foregleams of God's Kingdom Become Reality, 1/15
- Good News for People of All Nations, 7/1
- Go On Walking as Jesus Christ Walked, 9/15
- Hold to Pattern Jesus Set, 1/1
- Hosea's Prophecy Helps Us Walk With God, 11/15
- Jehovah Has Numbered "Very Hairs of Your Head," 8/1
- Jehovah Is Our Shepherd, 11/1
- Jehovah Is "Rewarde of Those Earnestly Seeking Him," 8/1
- Jehovah Safeguards Those Who Hope in Him, 6/1
- "Keep on the Watch"—Hour of Judgment Has Arrived! 10/1
- "Keep Proving What You Yourselves Are," 7/15
- "Keep Yourself Restrained Under Evil," 5/15
- Law of Love in Hearts, 8/15
- Let God's Word Light Your Roadway, 4/15
- Living No Longer for Ourselves, 3/15
- Marriage Can Succeed in Today's World, 3/1
- Now Is Time for Decisive Action, 12/15
- Our Children—Precious Inheritance, 4/1
- Parents, Protect Your Precious Inheritance, 4/1
- Parents, Provide for Needs of Your Family, 6/15
- Parents—What Future Do You Want for Your Children? 10/1
- People 'of All Languages' Hear Good News, 12/1
- Pursuing "Pearl of High Value" Today, 2/1
- Resurrection Hope—What Does It Mean for You? 5/1
- Resurrection—Teaching That Affects You, 5/1
- Safeguarding Our Christian Identity, 2/15
- Saved, Not by Works Alone, But by Undeserved Kindness, 6/1
- Trained to Give Thorough Witness, 1/1
- Trust in Jehovah's Word, 4/15
- Walk by Faith, Not by Sight! 9/15
- Walk With God in These Turbulent Times, 9/1
- Walk With God, Reap What Is Good, 11/15
- "Ways of Jehovah Are Upright," 11/15
- We Shall Walk in Name of Jehovah Our God, 9/1
- Whom Do You Obey—God or Men? 12/15
- Who Will Be Resurrected? 5/1
- Will You Reflect God's Glory? 8/15
- Will You Walk With God? 11/1
- Wise Guidance for Married Couples, 3/1
- Young People, Praise Jehovah! 6/15
- "You Were Bought With a Price," 3/15

NEW YEAR'S TREE

Is It Russian? Is It Christian?

Photograph: Nikolai Rakhmanov

AT THE beginning of the 1830's, the evergreen tree was still being referred to as a 'fetching German notion.' At the end of that decade, it had 'become a custom' in homes of the St. Petersburg elite. . . . Only in the homes of the clergy and in peasant huts did the evergreen tree fail to take root in the 19th century. . . .

"Before, the tree . . . was not especially favored. Its association as a death-symbol and its link with 'the underworld' according to Russian tradition, as well as the tradition of setting the tree on the roofs of taverns, contrasted with the changes in attitudes that occurred in the middle of the 19th century. . . . It is fully

understandable that in the process of acceptance, the foreign tradition would take on the same meaning that was attributed to the Christmas tree in the West, its link to the Christmas theme. . . .

"The process of the tree's Christianization was not very smooth in Russia. It met opposition from the Orthodox Church. The clergy saw in the new celebration 'demonic action,' a pagan tradition, which had nothing to do with the birth of the Savior, and furthermore, it was a tradition from the West."—Professor Yelena V. Dushechkina, doctor of philosophical sciences at the St. Petersburg State University.