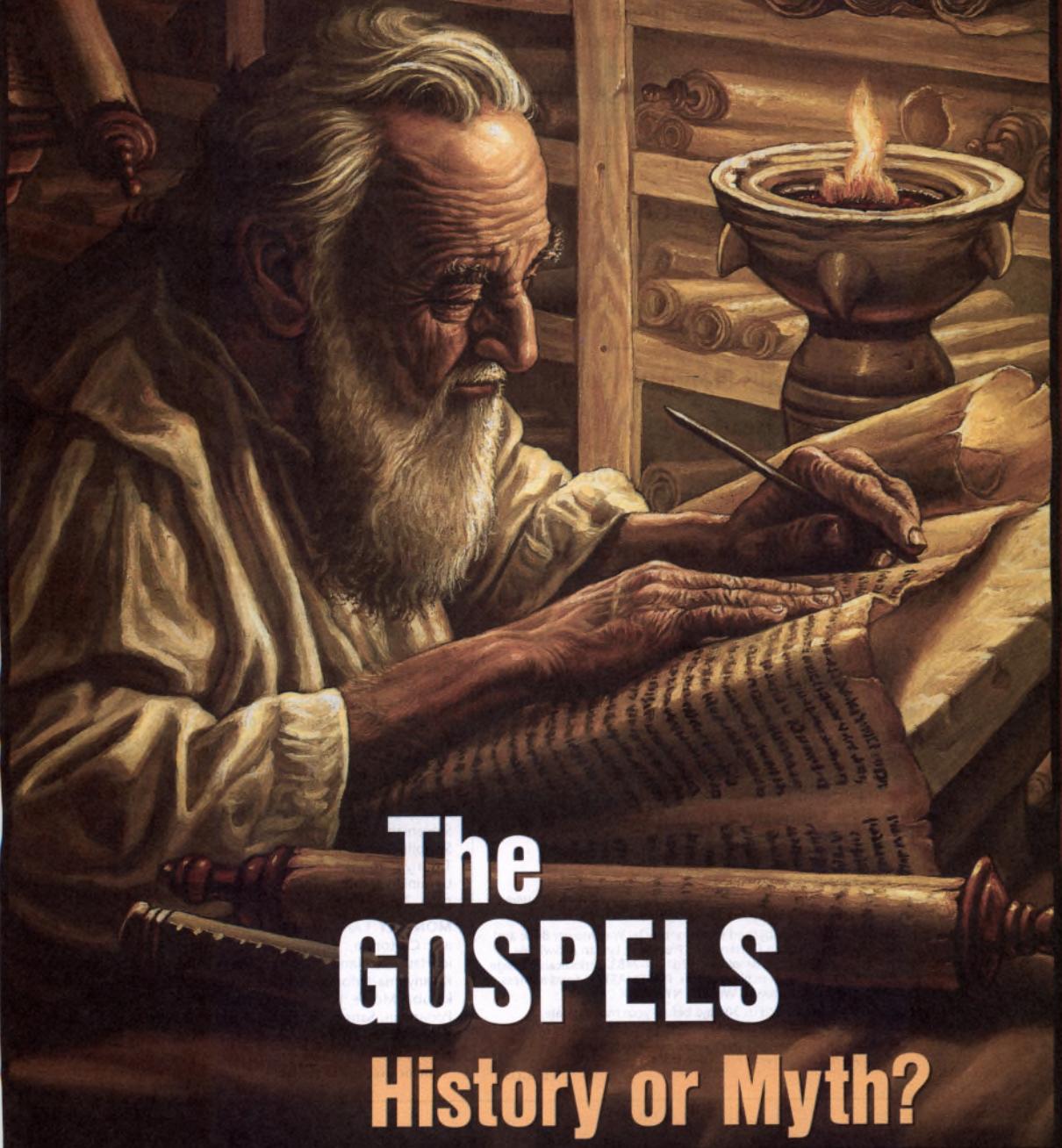




MAY 15, 2000

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



## The GOSPELS History or Myth?

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

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# The Gospels

## ♦ The Debate Goes On

Are the Gospel accounts  
of the birth of Jesus  
Christ true?

♦ Did he give the  
Sermon on the Mount?

♦ Was Jesus really  
resurrected?

♦ Did he actually say:  
"I am the way and the  
truth and the life"?

—JOHN 14:6.

Background, pages 3-5  
and 8; Courtesy of the  
Freer Gallery of Art,  
Smithsonian Institution,  
Washington, D.C.

MATTERS of this kind have been discussed by some 80 scholars at the Jesus Seminar, which has been held twice a year since 1985. This group of scholars has answered such questions in an unusual way. Seminar participants have cast ballots on each saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. A red ballot indicates the opinion that the statement

was indeed made by Jesus. A pink ballot means that a statement resembles something Jesus might have said. A gray ballot shows that the ideas may be close to those of Jesus, but the statement did not originate with him. A black ballot is totally negative, holding that the statement was derived from later tradition.

Following this method, the participants in the Jesus Seminar have dismissed all four points raised in question form at the outset. In fact, they have cast a black ballot for 82 percent of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. According to them, only 16 percent of the events recounted about Jesus in the Gospels and other writings appear to be authentic.

Such criticism of the Gospels is not new. An attack on the Gospels appeared in 1774 when a 1,400-page manuscript by Hermann Reimarus, a professor of Oriental languages in Hamburg, Germany, was published posthumously. Therein Reimarus entertained profound doubts about the historicity of the Gospels. His conclusions were based on linguistic analysis and seeming contradictions found in the four Gospel accounts of Jesus' life. Since then, critics have often expressed doubts about the authenticity of the Gospels, to some extent undermining public confidence in these writings.

The common denominator among such scholars is that they regard the Gospel accounts as religious fiction handed down by various individuals. The usual questions raised by doubting scholars are: Might their beliefs have caused the writers of the four Gospels to embellish actual fact? Did the politics of the early Christian community cause them to edit

Jesus Walking on the Sea/The Dove Bible Illustrations/Dover Publications



### *Do the Gospels contain fables or facts?*

or add to Jesus' story? Which parts of the Gospels are likely to be straight reporting rather than mythmaking?

People raised in an atheistic or secularized society believe that the Bible—the Gospels included—is a book full of legends and myths. Still others are appalled by Christendom's history of bloodshed, oppression, disunity, and ungodly behavior. Such individuals see no reason for paying any attention to writings held sacred in Christendom. They feel that works that have produced a hypocritical religion cannot be anything more than useless fables.

What do you think? Should you allow some scholars who question the historicity of the Gospels to give rise to similar doubts in your mind? When you hear declarations about alleged mythmaking by Gospel writers, should you allow this to shake your confidence in their writings? Should the ungodly record of Christendom make you question the reliability of the Gospels? We invite you to examine some of the facts.

# The Gospels

## History or Myth?

AROUND the world the story of Jesus of Nazareth—a young man who changed the course of human history—is woven into the fabric of society. It is part of people's formal and informal education. Many consider the Gospels to be the fountains of timeless truths and adages, such as, "Let your Yes mean Yes, your No, No." (Matthew 5:37) Indeed, the Gospel accounts may have been the basis for lessons that your parents taught you, whether they were Christians or not.

For millions of sincere followers of Christ, the Gospels have provided the description of the man for whom they have been willing to suffer and die. The Gospels have also provided the basis and inspiration for courage, endurance, faith, and hope. Would you not, then, agree that it should take irrefutable evidence to dismiss these accounts as mere fiction? Considering the immense influence that the Gospel accounts have had on human thought and behavior, would you not demand con-

vincing proof if someone wanted to cast doubt on their authenticity?

We invite you to consider a number of thought-provoking questions regarding the Gospels. See for yourself what certain students of the Gospels think about these issues, even though some of them do not profess to be Christians. Then you can draw your own informed conclusions.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

#### ◆ Could the Gospels be a masterful invention?

Robert Funk, the founder of the Jesus Seminar, says: "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John 'marketed the Messiah' to make him conform to Christian doctrine that evolved after the death of Jesus." While the Gospels were being written, however, many who had heard Jesus' sayings, had observed his deeds, and had seen him after his resurrection were still alive. They did not charge the Gospel writers with any form of fraud.

Consider the death and resurrection of Christ. Not only do the Gospels contain reliable accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection but so does the apostle Paul's first canonical letter to Christians in ancient Corinth. He wrote: "I handed on to you, among the first things, that which I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, yes, that he has been raised up the third day according to the Scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that he appeared to upward of five hundred brothers at one time, the most of whom remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep in death. After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles; but last of all he appeared also to me as if to one born prematurely." (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) Such witnesses were custodians of historical facts regarding the life of Jesus.

The inventiveness alleged by modern critics

is not found in the Christian Greek Scriptures. Rather, it appears in documents of the second century C.E. So certain unscriptural narratives about Christ were produced when an apostasy from true Christianity was developing among communities alienated from the apostolic congregation.—Acts 20:28-30.

◆ Could the Gospels be legends?

Author and critic C. S. Lewis found it difficult to view the Gospels as mere legends. "As a literary historian I am perfectly convinced that whatever the Gospels are, they are not legends," he wrote. "They are not artistic enough to be legends. . . . Most of the life of Jesus is unknown to us, and no people building up a legend would allow that to be so." It is also interesting that although noted historian H. G. Wells did not claim to be a Christian, he acknowledged: "All four [Gospel writers] agree in giving us a picture of a very definite personality; they carry the . . . conviction of reality."

Consider an instance when the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples. A good legend maker would likely have had Jesus stage a spectacular comeback, deliver a momentous speech, or be bathed in light and splendor. Instead, the Gospel writers simply describe him as standing in front of his disciples. Then he asked: "Young children, you do not have anything to eat, do you?" (John 21:5) Scholar Gregg Easterbrook concludes: "These are the sorts of touches that suggest a genuine account, not myth-building."

The accusation that the Gospels are legends also stumbles on the strict rabbinic method of teaching that was in fashion during the time of the writing of the Gospels. That method adhered closely to learning by rote—a memorizing process using routine or repetition. This favors the accurate and careful rendering of Jesus' sayings and works as opposed to the creation of an embellished version.

◆ If the Gospels were legends, could they have been compiled so quickly after the death of Jesus?

According to available evidence, the Gospels were written between the years 41 and 98 C.E. Jesus died in the year 33 C.E. This means that the accounts of his life were put together in a comparatively short time after his ministry ended. This poses a tremendous obstacle to the argument that the Gospel narratives are mere legends. Time is needed for legends to develop. Take, for example, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by the ancient Greek poet Homer. Some hold that the text of those two epic legends developed and became stabilized over hundreds of years. What about the Gospels?

In his book *Caesar and Christ*, historian Will Durant writes: "That a few simple men should . . . have invented so powerful and appealing a personality, so lofty an ethic and so inspiring a vision of human brotherhood, would be a miracle far more incredible than any recorded in the Gospels. After two centuries of Higher Criticism the outlines of the life, character, and teaching of Christ, remain reasonably clear, and constitute the most fascinating feature in the history of Western man."

◆ Were the Gospels later edited to fit the needs of the early Christian community?

Some critics argue that the politics of the early Christian community caused the Gospel writers to edit the story of Jesus or add to it. However, a close study of the Gospels shows that no such doctoring took place. If Gospel accounts concerning Jesus were altered as a result of first-century Christian intrigue, why do negative remarks about both Jews and Gentiles still appear in the text?

A case in point is found at Matthew 6:5-7, where Jesus is quoted as saying: "When you pray, you must not be as the hypocrites; be-



## Evidence of Authentic Reporting

SOME years ago an Australian scriptwriter and former critic of the Bible confessed: "For the first time in my life I did what is normally a reporter's first duty: checked my facts. . . . And I was appalled, because what I was reading [in the Gospel accounts] was not legend and it was not naturalistic fiction. It was reporting. First and second-hand accounts of extraordinary events . . . Reporting has a taste, and that taste is in the Gospels."

Similarly, E. M. Blaiklock, professor of classics at Auckland University, argued: "I claim to be an historian. My approach to the Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history."

cause they like to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the broad ways to be visible to men. Truly I say to you, They are having their reward in full." Clearly, this was a condemnation of Jewish religious leaders. Jesus further said: "When praying, do not say the same things over and over again, just as the people of the nations [the Gentiles] do, for they imagine they will get a hearing for their use of many words." By quoting Jesus in this way, the Gospel writers were not trying to win converts. They were simply recording statements actually made by Jesus Christ.

Consider also the Gospel accounts regarding the women who visited Jesus' tomb and saw that it was empty. (Mark 16: 1-8) According to Gregg Easterbrook, "in the sociology of the ancient Middle East, testimony by women was considered inherently unreliable: for instance, two male witnesses were sufficient to convict a woman of adultery, while no woman's testimony could convict a man." Indeed, Jesus' own disciples did not believe the women! (Luke 24:11) It is thus most unlikely that such a story would have been deliberately invented.

The absence of parables in the epistles and in the book of Acts is a strong argument that those in the Gospels were not inserted by early Christians but were spoken by Jesus himself. Additionally, a careful comparison of the Gospels with the epistles reveals that neither Paul's words nor those of other writers of the Greek Scriptures were artfully reworded and ascribed to Jesus. If the early Christian community had done such a thing, we should expect to find at least some of the material from the epistles in the Gospel accounts. Since we do not, we can surely conclude that the Gospel material is original and authentic.

### ◆ What about seeming contradictions in the Gospels?

Critics have long claimed that the Gospels are full of contradictions. Historian Durant sought to examine the Gospel accounts from a purely objective standpoint—as historical documents. Though he says that there are seeming contradictions in them, he concludes: "The contradictions are of minutiae [trivial details], not substance; in essentials the synoptic gospels agree remarkably well, and form a consistent portrait of Christ."

Seeming contradictions in Gospel accounts are often easily resolved. To illustrate: Matthew 8:5 says that "an army officer came to [Jesus], entreating him" to cure a manservant. At Luke 7:3, we read that the officer "sent forth older men of the Jews to [Jesus] to ask him to come and bring [the] slave safely through." The officer sent the elders as his representatives.

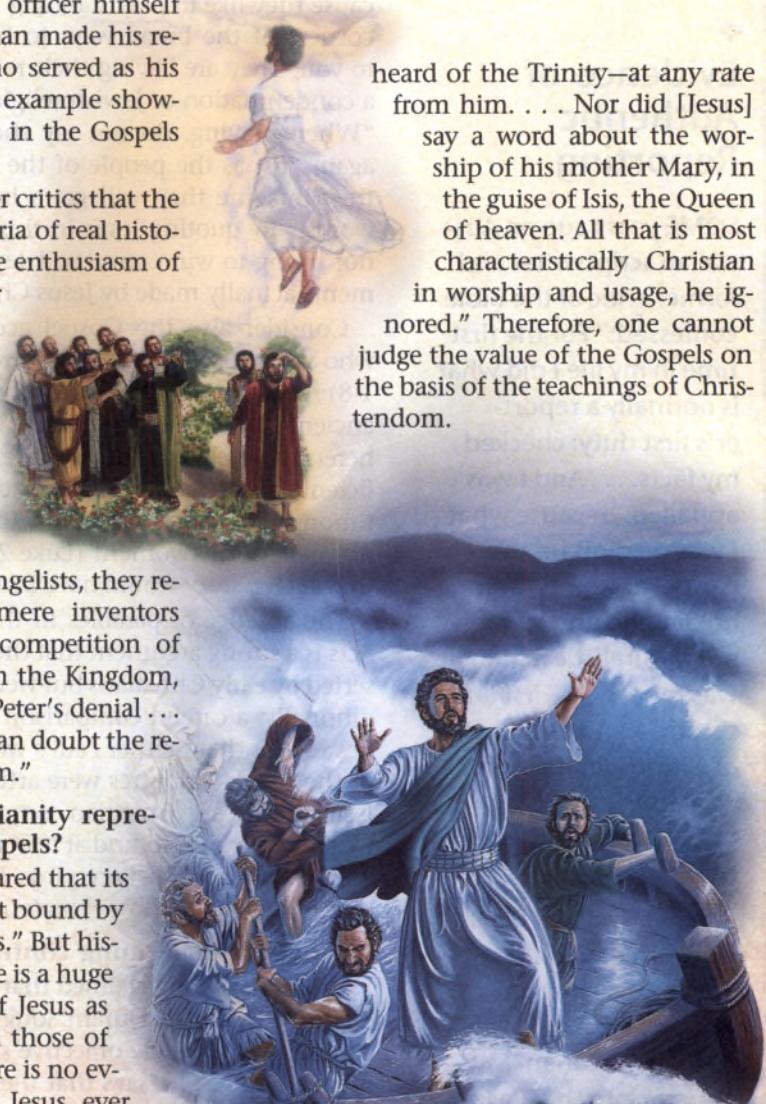
Matthew says that the army officer himself entreated Jesus because the man made his request through the elders, who served as his mouthpiece. This is just one example showing that alleged discrepancies in the Gospels can be resolved.

What of the claims of higher critics that the Gospels do not meet the criteria of real history? Continues Durant: "In the enthusiasm of its discoveries the Higher Criticism has applied to the New Testament tests of authenticity so severe that by them a hundred ancient worthies—e.g., Hammurabi, David, Socrates—would fade into legend. Despite the prejudices and theological preconceptions of the evangelists, they record many incidents that mere inventors would have concealed—the competition of the apostles for high places in the Kingdom, their flight after Jesus' arrest, Peter's denial . . . No one reading these scenes can doubt the reality of the figure behind them."

◆ Does modern-day Christianity represent the Jesus of the Gospels?

The Jesus Seminar has declared that its research on the Gospels is "not bound by the dictates of church councils." But historian Wells realized that there is a huge gap between the teachings of Jesus as presented in the Gospels and those of Christendom. He wrote: "There is no evidence that the apostles of Jesus ever

heard of the Trinity—at any rate from him. . . . Nor did [Jesus] say a word about the worship of his mother Mary, in the guise of Isis, the Queen of heaven. All that is most characteristically Christian in worship and usage, he ignored." Therefore, one cannot judge the value of the Gospels on the basis of the teachings of Christendom.



"The evidence for the life, the  
is better authenticated than mos

## WHAT IS YOUR CONCLUSION?

After considering the foregoing points, what do *you* think? Is there real, convincing proof that the Gospels are mere myth? Many find the questions and doubts raised about the authenticity of the Gospels to be shaky and unconvincing. To form a personal opinion, you need to read the Gospels with an open mind. (Acts 17:11) When you consider the consistency, honesty, and accuracy with which the Gospels present the personality of Jesus, you will realize that these accounts are definitely not a collection of fables.\*

If you carefully examine the Bible and apply its counsel, you will see how it can change your life for the better. (John 6:68) This is especially true of Jesus' sayings recorded in the Gospels. What is more, therein you can learn about the wonderful future in store for obedient mankind.—John 3:16; 17:3, 17.

\* See chapters 5 to 7 of the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* and the brochure *A Book for All People*. Both are published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

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leath, and the resurrection of Christ  
of the facts of ancient history."

JUDEA

• PROFESSOR E. M. BLAIKLOCK

# PAY ATTENTION TO GOD'S PROPHETIC WORD FOR OUR DAY

*"Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."*—DANIEL 8:17.

**J**EHOVAH does not keep knowledge of future events to himself. Rather, he is the Revealer of secrets. In fact, he wants all of us to know that we are deep in "the time of the end." What vital news that is for the six billion people now living on earth!

<sup>2</sup> Is it any wonder that this world is near its end? Man can walk on the moon, but in many places he cannot without fear stroll on the streets of this planet. He can fill a home with modern appliances, but he cannot stem the tide of broken families. And he can bring about the information age, but he cannot teach people to live together peacefully. These failures support the abundant Scriptur-

1. What does Jehovah want all mankind to know about our day?
2. Why are people concerned about mankind's future?

al evidence that we are living in the time of the end.

<sup>3</sup> Those striking words—"the time of the end"—were first used on the earth some 2,600 years ago by the angel Gabriel. A terrified prophet of God heard Gabriel say: "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."—Daniel 8:17.

## This Is "the Time of the End"!

<sup>4</sup> The expressions "the time of the end" and "the appointed time of the end" appear six times in the book of Daniel. (Daniel 8:17, 19; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9) They pertain to "the last days" foretold by the apostle Paul. (2 Timo-

3. When were the words "the time of the end" first used on earth?
4. In what other ways does the Bible refer to the time of the end?



thy 3:1-5) Jesus Christ referred to this period as his "presence" as enthroned King in heaven.—Matthew 24:37-39.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel 12:4 states: "As for you, O Daniel, make secret the words and seal up the book, until the time of the end. Many will rove about, and the true knowledge will become abundant." Much of what Daniel wrote was made secret and sealed up to human understanding for centuries. But what about today?

<sup>6</sup> In this time of the end, many faithful Christians have 'roved about' in the pages of God's Word, the Bible. The result? With Jehovah's blessing on their efforts, true knowledge has become abundant. For instance, anointed Witnesses of Jehovah have been blessed with insight, enabling them to understand that Jesus Christ became heavenly King in the year 1914. In keeping with the apostle's words recorded at 2 Peter 1:19-21, such anointed ones and their loyal companions are 'paying attention to the prophetic word' and are absolutely certain that this is the time of the end.

<sup>7</sup> The book of Daniel is unique in a number of ways. In its pages, a king threatens to execute his wise men because they cannot reveal and interpret his puzzling dream, but God's prophet solves the puzzle. Three young men who refuse to worship a towering image are thrown into a superheated furnace, yet they survive unsinged. During a festive celebration, hundreds behold a hand that writes mysterious words on a palace wall. Evil conspirators have an elderly man thrown into a pit of lions, but he emerges without a scratch. Four beasts are seen in a vision, and they are given prophetic significance that stretches right into the time of the end.

<sup>8</sup> Clearly, the book of Daniel contains two

5, 6. Who have 'roved about' during the time of the end, and with what result?

7. What are some of the accounts that make the book of Daniel unique?

8, 9. How can the book of Daniel benefit us, especially now, in the time of the end?

very different threads. One is narrative, the other prophetic. Both can build our faith. The narratives show us that Jehovah God blesses those who maintain integrity to him. And the prophetic portions build faith by showing that Jehovah knows the course of history centuries—even millennia—in advance.

<sup>9</sup> Various prophecies recorded by Daniel direct attention to God's Kingdom. As we observe the fulfillment of such prophecies, our faith is strengthened and so is our conviction that we are living in the time of the end. But some critics attack Daniel, saying that the prophecies in the book bearing his name were really written after the events that seemed to fulfill them. If such claims are true, that would raise serious questions about what the book of Daniel foretold regarding the time of the end. Skeptics also question the book's narratives. So let us investigate.

### On Trial!

<sup>10</sup> Imagine yourself in a court of law, attending a trial. The prosecuting attorney insists that the defendant is guilty of fraud. Well, the book of Daniel presents itself as an authentic work written by a Hebrew prophet who lived during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. However, critics assert that the book is a fraud. So let us first see if the narrative portion of the book harmonizes with historical fact.

<sup>11</sup> Suppose we consider what might be called the case of the missing monarch. Daniel chapter 5 shows that Belshazzar was ruling as king in Babylon when that city was overthrown in 539 B.C.E. Critics have challenged this point because Belshazzar's name was found nowhere outside the Bible. Instead, ancient historians identified Nabonidus as the last Babylonian king.

<sup>12</sup> In the year 1854, however, some small

10. In what sense does the book of Daniel stand accused?

11, 12. What happened to the charge that Belshazzar was merely a fictitious character?

clay cylinders were unearthed in the ruins of the ancient Babylonian city of Ur in present-day Iraq. These cuneiform documents included a prayer in which King Nabonidus referred to "Bel-sar-usur, my eldest son." Even critics had to agree: This was the Belshazzar of the book of Daniel. So the missing monarch was not missing after all, just not yet known in secular sources. This is only one of many proofs that the writings of Daniel are truly authentic. Such evidence shows that the book of Daniel surely is part of God's Word that merits our careful attention right now, in the time of the end.

<sup>13</sup> Woven into the fabric of the book of Daniel are prophecies involving the march of world powers and the acts of some of their rulers. One of the rulers might be called a warrior who built an empire. As Babylon's crown prince, he and his army shattered the forces of Egyptian Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish. But a message compelled the victorious Babylonian prince to leave mopping-up operations to his generals. Learning that his father, Nabopolassar, had died, this young man named Nebuchadnezzar took the throne in 624 B.C.E. During his 43-year reign, he built an empire that embraced territories once occupied by Assyria, and he extended his domain into Syria and Palestine down to the border of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar's religious devotion went particularly to Marduk, the chief god of Babylon. The king credited Marduk with all his conquests. In Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar built and beautified the temples of Marduk and of numerous other Babylonian deities. The image of gold that this Babylonian



king set up on the plain of Dura may have been dedicated to Marduk. (Daniel 3:1, 2) And Nebuchadnezzar appears to have relied heavily on divination in planning his military moves.

<sup>15</sup> By completing Babylon's massive double walls that his father had started to build, Nebuchadnezzar made the capital city seemingly impregnable. To satisfy his Median queen, who longed for the hills and forests of her homeland, Nebuchadnezzar reportedly built the hanging gardens—one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. He made Babylon the greatest walled city of the time. And how proud he was of that seat of false worship!

<sup>16</sup> "Is not this Babylon the Great, that I myself have built?" boasted Nebuchadnezzar one day. According to Daniel 4:30-36, however, "while the word was yet in the king's mouth," insanity struck him. Unfit to rule for seven years, he ate vegetation, just as Daniel had foretold. Then his kingdom was restored. Do you know the prophetic significance of all of this? Can you explain how its major fulfillment brings us right down to the time of the end?

### Picking Up Prophetic Strands

<sup>17</sup> Let us now pick up some prophetic strands in the book of Daniel. During the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign as world ruler of Bible prophecy (606/605 B.C.E.), God sent him a terrifying dream. According to Daniel chapter 2, the dream involved an im-

15, 16. What did Nebuchadnezzar do for Babylon, and what happened when he boasted about its greatness?

17. How would you describe the prophetic dream that God sent Nebuchadnezzar in the second year of his reign as world ruler?

13, 14. Who was Nebuchadnezzar, and to what false god was he especially devoted?

mense image with a head of gold, breasts and arms of silver, belly and thighs of copper, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. What did the various parts of the image represent?

<sup>18</sup> God's prophet told Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, . . . you yourself are the head of gold." (Daniel 2:37, 38) Nebuchadnezzar headed a dynasty that ruled over the Babylonian Empire. It was overthrown by Medo-Persia, represented by the image's breasts and arms of silver. Next came the Grecian Empire, signified by the belly and thighs of copper. How did that world power get its start?

<sup>19</sup> In the fourth century B.C.E., a young man played a significant role in the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. He was born in 356 B.C.E., and the world has come to call him Alexander the Great. Upon the assassination of his father, Philip, in 336 B.C.E., 20-year-old Alexander inherited the throne of Macedonia.

<sup>20</sup> In early May of 334 B.C.E., Alexander embarked upon a campaign of conquest. He had a small but efficient army of 30,000 foot soldiers and 5,000 cavalrymen. At the Granicus River in northwestern Asia Minor (now Turkey), Alexander won his first battle against the Persians in 334 B.C.E. By 326 B.C.E., this relentless conqueror had subdued them and had gone as far to the east as the Indus River, located in modern-day Pakistan. But Alexander lost his final battle while in Babylon. On June 13, 323 B.C.E., after living a mere 32 years and 8 months, he surrendered to the most formidable enemy, death. (1 Corinthians 15:55) Through his conquests, however, Greece had become a world power, as foretold in Daniel's prophecy.

<sup>21</sup> What is represented by the iron legs of the

18. What did the dream image's head of gold, breasts and arms of silver, and belly and thighs of copper represent?

19, 20. Who was Alexander the Great, and what role did he play in making Greece a world power?

21. In addition to the Roman Empire, what other world power was pictured by the iron legs of the dream image?

immense image? Well, it was ironlike Rome that crushed and shattered the Grecian Empire. Showing no respect for God's Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus Christ, the Romans put him to death on a torture stake in 33 C.E. In an effort to shatter true Christianity, Rome persecuted Jesus' disciples. However, the iron legs of Nebuchadnezzar's dream image pictured not only the Roman Empire but also its political outgrowth—the Anglo-American World Power.

<sup>22</sup> Careful study proves that we are deep in the time of the end, for we have reached the dream image's feet of iron and clay. Some present-day governments are ironlike or authoritarian, whereas others are claylike. Despite the fragile nature of clay, of which "the offspring of mankind" are made, ironlike rulerships have been obliged to let the common people have some say in the governments ruling over them. (Daniel 2:43; Job 10:9) Of course, authoritarian rule and the common people stick together no better than do iron and clay. But God's Kingdom will soon bring an end to this politically fragmented world.

—Daniel 2:44.

<sup>23</sup> The 7th chapter of Daniel's gripping prophecy also brings us into the time of the end. It relates an event in the first year of Babylonian King Belshazzar. Then in his 70's, Daniel has "a dream and visions of his head upon his bed." How those visions frighten him! "See there!" he exclaims. "The four winds of the heavens were stirring up the vast sea. And four huge beasts were coming up out of the sea, each one being different from the others." (Daniel 7:1-8, 15) What remarkable beasts! The first is a winged lion, and the second is like a bear. Then comes a leopard with four wings and four heads! The

22. How does the dream image help us to see that we are deep in the time of the end?

23. How would you describe the dream and visions that Daniel had in the first year of Belshazzar's reign?

unusually strong fourth beast has large iron teeth and ten horns. In among its ten horns rises “a small” horn having “eyes like the eyes of a man” and “a mouth speaking grandiose things.” What grotesque creatures!

<sup>24</sup> Daniel’s visions next turn heavenward. (Daniel 7:9-14) “The Ancient of Days,” Jehovah God, is seen sitting gloriously enthroned as Judge. ‘A thousand thousands minister to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand keep standing before him.’ Judging the beasts adversely, God takes rulership away from them and destroys the fourth beast. Lasting rulership over “the peoples, national groups and languages” is vested in “someone like a son of man.” This points to the time of the end and to the enthronement of the Son of man, Jesus Christ, in the year 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Readers of the book of Daniel are sure to have questions. For instance, what do the four beasts of Daniel chapter 7 represent? What is the explanation of the prophetic “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9:24-27? How about Daniel chapter 11 and the prophetic conflict of “the king of the north” and “the king of the south”? What can we expect of these kings in the time of the end?

<sup>26</sup> Jehovah has granted insight into such matters to his anointed servants on earth, to “the holy ones of the Supreme One,” as they are called at Daniel 7:18. Moreover, “the faithful and discreet slave” has made provision for us to gain further insight into the inspired writings of the prophet Daniel. (Matthew 24:45) This is now available through the recent release of the book *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!* This beautifully illustrated 320-page publication covers every part of the book of Daniel. It deals with each faith-building

24. According to Daniel 7:9-14, what does Daniel behold in heaven, and to what does this vision point?

25, 26. What questions may arise when we read the book of Daniel, and what publication can help to answer them?

prophecy and every narrative recorded by the beloved prophet Daniel.

### Real Meaning for Our Day

<sup>27</sup> Consider this significant point: All the prophecies in the book of Daniel have been fulfilled except for a few details. For example, we now see the world situation portrayed by the feet of the dream image of Daniel chapter 2. The tree stump of Daniel chapter 4 was unbanded by the enthronement of the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, in the year 1914. Yes, as foretold in Daniel chapter 7, the Ancient of Days then gave rulership to the Son of man. —Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 16:27-17:9.

<sup>28</sup> The 2,300 days of Daniel chapter 8 as well as the 1,290 and the 1,335 days of chapter 12 are all past—behind us in the stream of time. A study of Daniel chapter 11 shows that the conflict between “the king of the north” and “the king of the south” has reached its final stages. All of this adds to the Scriptural evidence that we are now deep in the time of the end. Considering our unique place in the stream of time, what should we be determined to do? Without question, we should pay attention to Jehovah God’s prophetic word.

27, 28. (a) What is true about the fulfillment of prophecies in the book of Daniel? (b) In what period are we living, and what should we do?

### How Would You Answer?

- What does God want all mankind to know about our day?
- How can the book of Daniel build our faith?
- Nebuchadnezzar’s dream image had what features, and what did these symbolize?
- What is noteworthy about the fulfillment of prophecies found in the book of Daniel?

# HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S PROPHETIC WORD!

*"We have the prophetic word made more sure."*—2 PETER 1:19.

**J**EHOVAH was the Source of the first prophecy ever recorded. After Adam and Eve sinned, God told the serpent: "I shall put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise you in the head and you will bruise him in the heel." (Genesis 3:1-7, 14, 15) Centuries would pass before those prophetic words were fully understood.

<sup>2</sup> That first prophecy held out real hope for sinful mankind. The Scriptures later identified Satan the Devil as "the original serpent." (Revelation 12:9) But who would be God's promised Seed?

## Searching for the Seed

<sup>3</sup> Unlike his father, godly Abel exercised faith in the first prophecy. Abel evidently realized that the shedding of blood would be needed to cover sin. Faith therefore moved him to offer an animal sacrifice that proved acceptable to God. (Genesis 4:2-4) Yet, the identity of the promised Seed remained a mystery.

<sup>4</sup> Some 2,000 years after Abel's day, Jehovah gave the patriarch Abraham this prophet-



- 1, 2. What was the first prophecy ever recorded, and what was one of the questions it raised?
3. How did Abel exercise faith in the first prophecy?
4. God gave Abraham what promise, and what did it indicate regarding the promised Seed?

ic promise: "I shall surely bless you and I shall surely multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens . . . And by means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves." (Genesis 22:17, 18) Those words linked Abraham with the fulfillment of the first prophecy. They indicated that the Seed through whom Satan's works would be brought to nothing would appear in Abraham's lineage. (1 John 3:8) "Because of the promise of God [Abraham] did not waver in a lack of faith" and neither did other pre-Christian witnesses of Jehovah who "did not get the fulfillment of the promise." (Romans 4:20, 21; Hebrews 11:39) Instead, they maintained faith in God's prophetic word.

<sup>5</sup> The apostle Paul identified God's promised Seed when he wrote: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. It says, not: 'And to seeds,' as in the case of many such, but as in the case of one: 'And to your seed,' who is Christ." (Galatians 3:16) The Seed through whom the nations were to bless themselves did not include all of Abraham's offspring. Descendants of his son Ishmael and of his sons by Keturah were not used to bless

5. In whom was God's promise of the Seed fulfilled, and why do you so answer?

mankind. The Seed of blessing came through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. (Genesis 21:12; 25:23, 31-34; 27:18-29, 37; 28:14) Jacob showed that "peoples" would be obedient to Shiloh of the tribe of Judah, but the Seed was later restricted to David's lineage. (Genesis 49:10; 2 Samuel 7:12-16) First-century Jews expected one person to come as the Messiah, or Christ. (John 7:41, 42) And God's prophecy of the Seed was fulfilled in his Son, Jesus Christ.

### The Messiah Appears!

<sup>6</sup> The prophet Daniel recorded a vital Messianic prophecy. In the first year of Darius the Mede, he realized that Jerusalem's 70-year desolation was near its end. (Jeremiah 29:10; Daniel 9:1-4) While Daniel was praying, the angel Gabriel came and revealed that 'seventy weeks had been determined to finish off sin.' The Messiah would be cut off in the middle of the 70th week. "Seventy weeks of years" began in 455 B.C.E. when Persian King Artaxerxes I 'sent forth the word to rebuild Jerusalem.' (Daniel 9:20-27; Moffatt; Nehemiah 2:1-8) The Messiah would come after 7 weeks plus 62 weeks. These 483 years ran from 455 B.C.E. to 29 C.E., when Jesus was baptized and God anointed him as the Messiah, or Christ. (Luke 3:21, 22) Jesus 'finished off sin' by giving his life as a ransom in 33 C.E. (Mark 10:45) What sound reasons for having faith in God's prophetic word!\*

<sup>7</sup> Faith in God's prophetic word makes it possible for us to identify the Messiah. Of the many Messianic prophecies recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, a number were direct-

\* See chapter 11 of *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy*, and "Seventy Weeks" in *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

6. (a) How are we to understand the prophecy of the 70 weeks? (b) When and how did Jesus "finish off sin"?

7. Using the Scriptures, point out how Jesus fulfilled Messianic prophecy.

ly applied to Jesus by writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures. To illustrate: Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 2:4-11) He was called out of Egypt, and babes were killed after his birth. (Jeremiah 31:15; Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13-18) Jesus carried our sicknesses. (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:16, 17) As foretold, he entered Jerusalem on the colt of an ass. (Zechariah 9:9; John 12:12-15) The psalmist's words were fulfilled after Jesus' impalement when soldiers apportioned his clothing among themselves and cast lots for his inner garment. (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23, 24) The fact that Jesus' bones were not broken and that he was pierced also fulfilled prophecy. (Psalm 34:20; Zechariah 12:10; John 19:33-37) These are but a few examples of Messianic prophecies applied to Jesus by divinely inspired Bible writers.\*

### Hail the Messianic King!

<sup>8</sup> In the first year of Babylonian King Belshazzar, Jehovah granted his prophet Daniel a dream and remarkable visions. The prophet first saw four huge beasts. God's angel identified them as "four kings," thus indicating that they symbolized successive world powers. (Daniel 7:1-8, 17) Daniel next beheld Jehovah, "the Ancient of Days," sitting gloriously enthroned. Judging the beasts adversely, he took rulership away from them and destroyed the fourth beast. Lasting rulership over "the peoples, national groups and languages" was then vested in "someone like a son of man." (Daniel 7:9-14) What a wonderful prophecy relating to the enthronement of "the Son of man," Jesus Christ, in the heavens in the year 1914!—Matthew 16:13.

\* See "All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial," pages 343-4, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

8. Who is the Ancient of Days, and how was the prophecy recorded at Daniel 7:9-14 fulfilled?

<sup>9</sup> Daniel knew that God is “removing kings and setting up kings.” (Daniel 2:21) With faith in Jehovah, the “Revealer of secrets,” the prophet disclosed the meaning of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of an immense image. Its various parts pointed to the rise and fall of such world powers as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. God also used Daniel to outline world events down to our time and beyond.—Daniel 2:24-30.

<sup>10</sup> “In the days of those kings,” said the prophecy, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite.” (Daniel 2:44) When “the appointed times of the nations” ended in 1914, God established the heavenly Kingdom under Christ. (Luke 21:24; Revelation 12:1-5) By divine power the Messianic Kingdom “stone” was then cut out of the “mountain” of God’s universal sovereignty. At Armageddon that stone will strike the image and grind it to powder. As a governmental mountain affecting “the whole earth,” the Messianic Kingdom will stand forever.—Daniel 2:35, 45; Revelation 16:14, 16.\*

<sup>11</sup> With his Kingdom rule in mind, Jesus told his disciples: “There are some of those standing here that will not taste death at all until first they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16:28) Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into a lofty mountain where he was transfigured before them. As a bright cloud covered the apostles, God declared: “This is my Son, the beloved,

\* See chapters 4 and 9 of the book *Pay Attention to Daniel’s Prophecy!*

9, 10. (a) The various parts of the dream image pointed to what? (b) How would you explain the fulfillment of Daniel 2:44?

11. Jesus’ transfiguration was a preview of what, and what impact did that vision have on Peter?

whom I have approved; listen to him.” (Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:1-9) What a preview of Christ’s Kingdom glory! No wonder Peter referred to that dazzling vision and said: “Consequently we have the prophetic word made more sure.”—2 Peter 1:16-19.\*

<sup>12</sup> “The prophetic word” apparently includes not only Hebrew Scripture prophecies about the Messiah but also Jesus’ statement that he would come “with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:30) The transfiguration verified the prophetic word about Christ’s glorious coming in Kingdom power. Very soon, his revelation in glory will mean destruction for the faithless and blessings for those exercising faith. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10) The fulfillment of Bible prophecy proves that these are “the last days.” (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 16, 17; Matthew 24:3-14) As Jehovah’s Chief Executioner, Michael, who is Jesus Christ, stands ready to bring an end to this wicked system of things during the “great tribulation.” (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1) This, then, certainly is the time to demonstrate that we have faith in God’s prophetic word.

### Maintain Faith in God’s Prophetic Word

<sup>13</sup> Surely we were thrilled when we first learned about fulfillments of God’s prophetic word. But since then has our faith diminished and our love cooled off? May we never become like the Christians in Ephesus who ‘left the love they had at first.’ (Revelation 2:1-4) Regardless of how long we have served Jehovah, we can suffer such loss unless we ‘keep on seeking first God’s kingdom and his righteousness’ so as to store up treasures in heaven.

\* See the article entitled “Pay Attention to God’s Prophetic Word,” appearing in *The Watchtower* of April 1, 2000.

12. Why is this especially the time to demonstrate our faith in God’s prophetic word?

13. What can help us to maintain our love for God and keep alive our faith in his word?

(Matthew 6:19-21, 31-33) Diligent Bible study, regular participation in Christian meetings, and zealous Kingdom-preaching activity will help us to maintain our love for Jehovah, for his Son, and for the Scriptures. (Psalm 119: 105; Mark 13:10; Hebrews 10:24, 25) In turn, this will keep alive our faith in God's word.

—Psalm 106:12.

<sup>14</sup> Just as God's prophetic word was fulfilled in the past, so we can have faith in what it foretells for the future. For instance, Christ's presence in Kingdom glory is now a reality, and anointed Christians who were faithful to death have experienced the fulfillment of the prophetic promise: "To him that conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Revelation 2:7, 10; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17) Jesus grants these victorious ones the privilege "to eat of the tree of life" in the heavenly "paradise of God." In their resurrection and by means of Jesus Christ, they partake of immortality and incorruption granted by Jehovah, "the King of eternity, incorruptible, invisible, the only God."

14. How are anointed Christians rewarded for their faith in Jehovah's prophetic word?

(1 Timothy 1:17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54; 2 Timothy 1:10) What a grand reward for their undying love of God and unwavering faith in his prophetic word!

<sup>15</sup> Shortly after faithful dead anointed ones were resurrected into the heavenly "paradise of God," the remnant of spiritual Israel on earth was liberated from "Babylon the Great," the world empire of false religion. (Revelation 14:8; Galatians 6:16) In them the foundation of the "new earth" was laid. (Revelation 21:1) "A land" was thus brought forth, and it was built up into a spiritual paradise that flourishes earth wide today. (Isaiah 66:8) Into it the multitudes of sheeplike associates of spiritual Israel are streaming right now, "in the final part of the days."—Isaiah 2:2-4; Zechariah 8: 23; John 10:16; Revelation 7:9.

### Mankind's Future Foretold in God's Prophetic Word

<sup>16</sup> What are the prospects of loyal supporters of the anointed? They too have faith in

15. In whom was the foundation of the "new earth" laid, and who are their associates?
16. What are the prospects of loyal supporters of the anointed ones?

*Do you hope to live in the earthly Paradise?*



God's prophetic word, and their hope rests on entering the earthly Paradise. (Luke 23:39-43) There they will drink from a life-sustaining "river of water of life" and will find healing from "the leaves of the trees" planted alongside it. (Revelation 22:1, 2) If you have such a wonderful hope, may you continue to demonstrate deep love for Jehovah and faith in his prophetic word. May you be among those who experience the unbounded joy of everlasting life in the Paradise earth.

<sup>17</sup> Imperfect humans are at a loss to describe life in the coming earthly Paradise, but God's prophetic word gives us insight into the blessings then in store for obedient mankind. When God's Kingdom rules unopposed and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven, no vicious humans—no, not even animals—will "do any harm or cause any ruin." (Isaiah 11:9; Matthew 6:9, 10) The meek will inhabit the earth, and "they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace." (Psalm 37:11) Starving masses will not exist, for "there will come to be plenty of grain on the earth; on the top of the mountains there will be an overflow." (Psalm 72:16) No longer will tears of sorrow be shed. Sickness will be gone, and even death will be no more. (Isaiah 33:24; Revelation 21:4) Can you imagine—no doctors, no medicines, no hospitals or mental institutions, no funerals. What splendid prospects!

<sup>18</sup> Even the common grave of mankind will be emptied as deaths give way to resurrections. The righteous man Job had such a hope. (Job 14:14, 15) So did the prophet Daniel, for Jehovah's angel gave him the comforting assurance: "As for you yourself, go toward the end; and you will rest, but you will stand

17. Life in the earthly Paradise will include what blessings?

18. (a) Of what was Daniel given assurance?  
(b) What will be Daniel's "lot"?

up for your lot at the end of the days." (Daniel 12:13) Daniel served God faithfully until the end of his life. Now he is resting in death, but he will "stand up" in "the resurrection of the righteous ones" during Christ's Millennial Reign. (Luke 14:14) What will be Daniel's "lot"? Well, in its Paradise fulfillment, Ezekiel's prophecy suggests that all of Jehovah's people will have a place, even the land being apportioned in a just and orderly way. (Ezekiel 47:13-48:35) So Daniel will have a place in Paradise, but his lot there will involve more than land. It will include his place in Jehovah's purpose.

<sup>19</sup> What about you and your lot? If you have faith in God's Word, the Bible, very likely you yearn for life in the earthly Paradise. You may even imagine yourself there, enjoying its many blessings, caring for the earth, and joyfully welcoming back the dead. After all, Paradise is where mankind belongs. God created the first human pair to live in such a place. (Genesis 2:7-9) And he wants obedient humans to live forever in Paradise. Will you act in accord with the Scriptures so that you can be among the billions who will eventually live on the Paradise earth? You can be there if you have true love for our heavenly Father, Jehovah, and enduring faith in God's prophetic word.

19. What is required for life in the earthly Paradise?

### How Would You Answer?

- What was the first prophecy, and who was the promised Seed?
- What were some Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus?
- How will Daniel 2:44, 45 be fulfilled?
- God's prophetic word points to what future for obedient mankind?

# "SAFEGUARD YOUR HEART"

JEHOVAH told the prophet Samuel: "Not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is." (1 Samuel 16:7) Also focusing attention on the figurative heart, the psalmist David sang: "You [Jehovah] have examined my heart, you have made inspection by night, you have refined me; you will discover that I have not schemed."—Psalm 17:3.

Yes, Jehovah looks into the heart to determine what we truly are. (Proverbs 17:3) For good reason, then, King Solomon of ancient Israel counsels: "More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart, for out of it are the sources of life." (Proverbs 4:23) How may we safeguard our figurative heart? Proverbs chapter 4 gives us the answer to that question.

## Listen to the Discipline of a Father

The 4th chapter of Proverbs begins with the words: "*Listen, O sons, to the discipline of a father and pay attention, so as to know understanding. For good instruction is what I certainly shall give to you. My law do not leave.*"—Proverbs 4:1, 2.

The counsel to youths is that they listen to the sound instruction of their godly parents, particularly to that of a father. He has the Scriptural responsibility to provide for the physical and spiritual needs of his family. (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; 1 Timothy 5:8) Without such guidance, how much more difficult it is for a young person to reach maturity! Should not a child, therefore, respectfully accept the discipline of his father?

What, though, of a youth who has no father to instruct him? Eleven-year-old Jason, for example, became fatherless at the age of four.\* When a Christian elder asked him what was the most troubling aspect of his life, Jason quickly replied: "I miss having a father. Sometimes it really gets me down." Yet, comforting advice is available for youths lacking parental direction. Jason and others like him can seek and receive fatherly advice from the elders and other mature ones in the Christian congregation.—James 1:27.

Reminiscing about his own education, Solomon continues: "*I proved to be a real son to my father, tender and the only one before my mother.*" (Proverbs 4:3) The king evidently remembered his upbringing with fondness. Being "a real son" who took fatherly advice to heart, young Solomon must have had a warm and close relationship with his father, David. Moreover, Solomon was "the only one," or dearly beloved. How important it is for a child to grow up in a home where the atmosphere is warm and lines of communication with the parents are open!

## Acquire Wisdom and Understanding

Remembering his father's loving advice, Solomon relates: "*He would instruct me and say to me: 'May your heart keep fast hold of my words. Keep my commandments and continue living. Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding. Do not forget, and do not turn aside from the sayings of my mouth. Do not leave it [wisdom], and it will keep you. Love it, and it will*

\* Not his real name.



*Benefit from the advice of experienced ones*

safeguard you. Wisdom is the prime thing. Acquire wisdom; and with all that you acquire, acquire understanding.'”—Proverbs 4:4-7.

Why is wisdom “the prime thing”? Wisdom means putting knowledge and understanding to work in a way that brings forth good results. Knowledge—acquaintance or familiarity with facts gained by observation and experience or by reading and study—is fundamental to wisdom. But if we do not have the ability to put it to good use, our knowledge would be of little value. We must not only regularly read the Bible and the Bible-based publications provided by “the faithful and discreet slave” but also endeavor to apply what we learn from them.—Matthew 24:45.

Acquiring understanding is also essential. Without it, could we really see how facts re-

late to one another and get the complete picture of a matter under consideration? If we lacked understanding, how could we perceive the whys and wherefores of things and gain insight and discernment? Yes, to be able to put two and two together and come up with the right conclusion, we need understanding.—Daniel 9:22, 23.

Solomon continues to relate his father’s words, saying: “Highly esteem it [wisdom], and it will exalt you. It will glorify you because you embrace it. To your head it will give a wreath of charm; a crown of beauty it will bestow upon you.” (Proverbs 4:8, 9) Godly wisdom protects the one who embraces it. Moreover, it brings him honor and beautifies him. By all means, then, let us acquire wisdom.

#### **“Take Hold on Discipline”**

Echoing the instruction of his father, the king of Israel next says: “Hear, my son, and accept my sayings. Then for you the years of life will become many. I will instruct you even in the way of wisdom; I will cause you to tread in the tracks of uprightness. When you walk, your pace will not be cramped; and if you run, you will not stumble. Take hold on discipline; do not let go. Safeguard it, for it itself is your life.”—Proverbs 4:10-13.

As a real son to his father, Solomon must have appreciated the value of loving discipline that instructs and corrects. Without balanced discipline, how could we expect to progress to spiritual maturity or hope to improve the quality of our life? If we do not

learn from our mistakes or if we fail to correct wrong ideas, our spiritual advancement will indeed be negligible. Reasonable discipline leads to godly conduct and thus helps us to "tread in the tracks of uprightness."

Another type of discipline also results in making 'the years of our life become many.' How? Well, Jesus Christ said: "The person faithful in what is least is faithful also in much, and the person unrighteous in what is least is unrighteous also in much." (Luke 16:10) Would not disciplining ourselves in little things make it easier for us to do the same in big things, upon which our very lives may depend? For example, training the eye not to 'keep on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her' would make it unlikely that we would succumb to immorality. (Matthew 5:28) Naturally, this principle applies to both men and women. If we discipline our minds to 'bring every thought into captivity,' there is little danger that we will grossly transgress in word or action.—2 Corinthians 10:5.

True, discipline is usually difficult to accept and may seem restrictive. (Hebrews 12:11) Yet, the wise king assures us that if we take hold on discipline, our path will be conducive to our making progress. Just as prop-

er training permits a runner to move ahead at optimum speed without falling or injuring himself, taking hold of discipline allows us to continue on the road to life at a steady pace without stumbling. Of course, we must be careful about the path we choose.

**Do  
you avoid  
entertainment  
featuring  
violence?**

**Shun "the Path of the Wicked Ones"**

With a sense of urgency, Solomon warns: "*Into the path of the wicked ones do not enter, and do not walk straight on into the way of the bad ones. Shun it, do not pass along by it; turn aside from it, and pass along. For they do not sleep unless they do badness, and their sleep has been snatched away unless they cause someone to stumble. For they have fed themselves with the bread of wickedness, and the wine of acts of violence is what they drink.*"—Proverbs 4:14-17.

The wicked ones, whose ways Solomon wants us to shun, sustain themselves on their vile deeds. Doing what is bad is like food and drink to them. They are unable to sleep unless they engage in acts of violence. Their very personality is corrupt! Can we really safeguard our hearts while keeping company with them? How foolish to "walk straight on into the way of the bad ones" by exposing ourselves to the violence featured in much of the entertainment in today's world! Striving to be tenderly compassionate simply is not compatible with taking in desensitizing doses of scenes of badness on the television screen or in motion pictures.

**IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

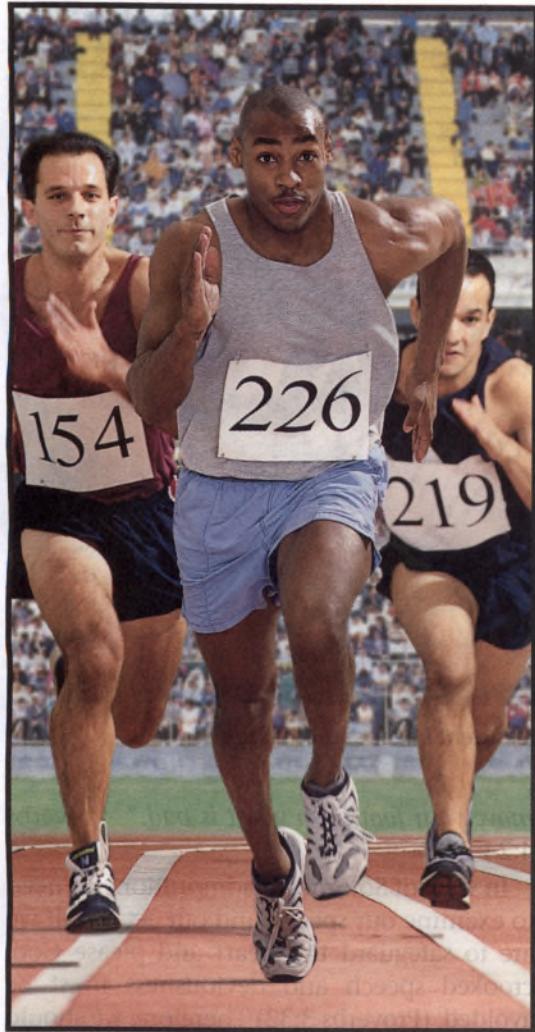
**Keep Your "Hope of Salvation" Bright!**

**Helped to Overcome My Shyness**

**Where Can You Turn for Good Advice?**

**Stay in the Light**

Still using the analogy of a path, Solomon declares: "*But the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established.*"



**Discipline does not slow your pace**

(Proverbs 4:18) Undertaking a study of the Bible and trying to apply what it says in life can be likened to starting out on a journey in the early morning darkness. As the blackness of the night sky lightens to dark blue, we can hardly see anything. But as the dawn gradually breaks, we slowly distinguish more and more of our surroundings. Finally, the sun shines brightly, and we see everything in

clear detail. Yes, the truth gradually becomes clearer to us as we persist in studying the Scriptures patiently and diligently. Supplying the heart with spiritual nourishment is essential if we are to safeguard it against false reasoning.

The meaning or significance of Bible prophecies also unfolds progressively. Prophecies become clear to us as Jehovah's holy spirit sheds light upon them and as they are fulfilled by world events or in the experiences of God's people. Rather than impatiently resorting to speculations about their fulfillment, we need to wait for 'the light to become lighter and lighter.'

What about those who reject God's guidance by refusing to walk in the light? "*The way of the wicked ones is like the gloom,*" says Solomon. "*They have not known at what they keep stumbling.*" (Proverbs 4:19) The wicked are like a man who stumbles in the dark without knowing what stumbled him. Even when the ungodly seem to prosper because of their unrighteousness, their apparent success is only temporary. Concerning such ones, the psalmist sang: "Surely on slippery ground is where you place them. You [Jehovah] have made them fall to ruins."—Psalm 73:18.

#### **Maintain Vigilance**

The king of Israel goes on to say: "My son, to my words do pay attention. To my sayings incline your ear. May they not get away from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those finding them and health to all their flesh. More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart, for out of it are the sources of life."—Proverbs 4:20-23.

Solomon's own example testifies to the value of the counsel to safeguard the heart. True, he "proved to be a real son" to his

father in his youth and remained faithful to Jehovah well into his adulthood. Yet, the Bible relates: "It came about in the time of Solomon's growing old that his [foreign] wives themselves had inclined his heart to follow other gods; and his heart did not prove to be complete with Jehovah his God like the heart of David his father." (1 Kings 11:4) Without constant vigilance, even the best of hearts can be enticed to do what is bad. (Jeremiah 17:9) We must keep the reminders in God's Word close to our heart—'in the midst of it.' This includes the guidance provided in the 4th chapter of Proverbs.

### Examine the Condition of Your Heart

Are we successfully safeguarding our figurative heart? How can we know the condition of the inner person? "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," said Jesus Christ. (Matthew 12:34) He also stated: "Out of the heart come wicked reasonings, murders, adulteries, fornications, thieveries, false testimonies, blasphemies." (Matthew 15:19, 20) Yes, our words and actions speak volumes about what we are at heart.

Fittingly, Solomon admonishes us: "*Remove from yourself the crookedness of speech; and the deviousness of lips put far away from yourself. As for your eyes, straight ahead they should look, yes, your own beaming eyes should gaze straight in front of you. Smooth out the course of your foot, and may all your own ways be firmly established. Do not incline to the right hand or to the left.*" Re-



*Be persistent in your study of the Bible*

*move your foot from what is bad.*"—Proverbs 4:24-27.

In view of Solomon's admonition, we need to examine our speech and our actions. If we are to safeguard the heart and please God, crooked speech and deviousness must be avoided. (Proverbs 3:32) Therefore, we should prayerfully reflect on what our words and deeds reveal about us. Then let us seek Jehovah's help in order to correct any weakness we detect.—Psalm 139:23, 24.

Above all, may 'our eyes look straight ahead.' Let us keep them fixed on the goal of rendering whole-souled service to our heavenly Father. (Colossians 3:23) As you personally pursue such an upright course, may Jehovah grant you success in "all your own ways," and may he bless you richly for heeding the inspired counsel to "safeguard your heart."

# A Luxuriant Olive Tree in the House of God

IN THE land of Israel, there grows a tree that is practically indestructible. Even when chopped down, its root-stock soon sends up new shoots. And when its fruit is harvested, it rewards its owner with abundant oil that can be used for cooking, lighting, hygiene, and cosmetics.

According to an ancient parable recorded in the Bible



An ancient gnarled trunk found in Jávea, Alicante Province, Spain



book of Judges, "once upon a time the trees went to anoint a king over them." Which tree of the forest was their first choice? None other than the hardy, bountiful olive tree.—Judges 9:8.

Over 3,500 years ago, the prophet Moses described Israel as 'a good land, a land of olives.' (Deuteronomy 8:7, 8) Even today, olive groves dot the landscape from the foot of Mount Hermon in the north to the outskirts of Beersheba in the south. They still grace the coastal Plain of Sharon, the rocky hillsides of Samaria, and the fertile valleys of Galilee.

Bible writers often used the olive tree in a figurative sense. Features of this tree served to illustrate God's mercy, the resurrection promise, and happy family life. A closer look at the olive will help us to understand these Scriptural references and will deepen our appreciation for this unique tree that joins the rest of creation in praising its Maker.—Psalm 148:7, 9.

## The Rugged Olive Tree

An olive tree is not particularly impressive at first sight. It does not reach to the heavens like some stately cedars of Lebanon. Its timber is not so prized as the juniper, and its blossoms do not delight the eye like those of the almond tree. (Song of Solomon 1:17; Amos 2:9) The most important part of the olive tree lies unseen—under the ground. Its extensive roots, which may reach 20 feet beneath the surface and much farther horizontally, are the key to the tree's bounty and survival.

Such roots allow olive trees on stony hillsides to survive a drought when trees in the valley below have already died of thirst. The roots enable it to continue producing olives for centuries, even though the gnarled trunk may look fit only for firewood. All this rugged tree demands is room to grow and aerated



Olive groves in Granada  
Province, Spain



An ancient olive tree outside the walls of Jerusalem



The Bible mentions the grafting of branches onto an olive tree

This old olive tree is surrounded by slips of young branches



soil so that it can breathe, free from weeds or other vegetation that might harbor harmful pests. If these simple demands are met, one tree will supply up to 15 gallons of oil a year.

Undoubtedly the olive was beloved by the Israelites for its precious oil. Lamps with wicks drawing up olive oil illuminated their homes. (Leviticus 24:2) Olive oil was essential in cooking. It protected the skin against the sun, and it provided the Israelites with soap for washing. Grain, wine, and olives were the main crops of the land. Failure of the olive harvest would thus be a disaster for an Israelite family.—Deuteronomy 7:13; Habakkuk 3:17.

Usually, however, olive oil was abundant. Moses referred to the Promised Land as 'a land of olives' likely because the olive was the most commonly cultivated tree in the area. Nineteenth-century naturalist H. B. Tristram described the olive as "the one characteristic tree of the country." Because of its value and abundance, olive oil even served as useful international currency throughout the Mediterranean region. Jesus Christ himself referred to a debt that was calculated to be "a hundred bath measures of olive oil."—Luke 16:5, 6.

### "Like Slips of Olive Trees"

The useful olive tree aptly illustrates divine blessings. How would a God-fearing man be rewarded? "Your wife will be like a fruit-bearing vine in the innermost parts of your house," sang the psalmist. "Your sons will be like slips of olive trees all around your table." (Psalm 128:3) What are these "slips of olive trees," and why does the psalmist compare them to sons?

The olive tree is unusual in that new shoots constantly sprout from the base of its trunk.\* When, because of old age, the main trunk no longer bears the fruit it once did, cultivators may allow several slips, or new shoots, to grow until they become an integral part of the tree. After a time, the original tree will have three or four young, vigorous trunks surrounding it, like sons around a table. These slips have the same rootstock, and they share in producing a good crop of olives.

This characteristic of the olive tree aptly illustrates how sons and daughters can grow firm in faith, thanks to the strong spiritual roots of their parents. As offspring grow older, they also have a share in bearing fruit and supporting their parents, who rejoice to see their children serving Jehovah alongside them.  
—Proverbs 15:20.

\* Usually these new shoots are pruned every year so that they do not sap strength from the main tree.

### "There Exists Hope for Even a Tree"

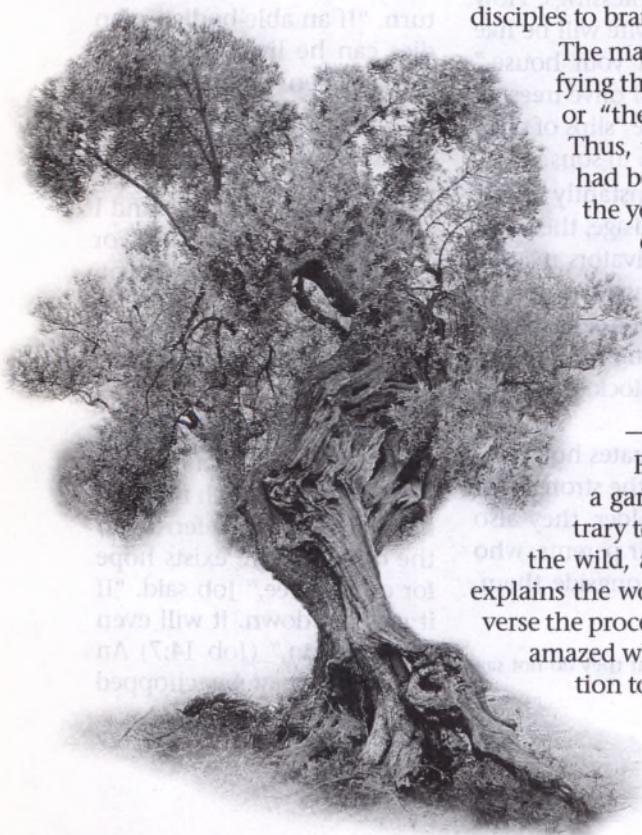
An elderly father who serves Jehovah delights in his godly children. But these same children mourn when their father eventually 'goes in the way of all the earth.' (1 Kings 2:2) To help us cope with such a family tragedy, the Bible assures us that there will be a resurrection.—John 5:28, 29; 11:25.

Job, the father of many children, was keenly aware of man's short life span. He compared it to a blossom that quickly withers. (Job 1:2; 14:1, 2) Job longed for death as a way to escape from his agony, viewing the grave as a place of concealment from which he could return. "If an able-bodied man dies can he live again?" Job asked. Then he confidently answered: "All the days of my compulsory service I shall wait, until my relief comes. You [Jehovah] will call, and I myself shall answer you. For the work of your hands you will have a yearning."—Job 14:13-15.

How did Job illustrate his conviction that God would call him forth from the grave? By means of a tree, the description of which makes it likely that he was referring to the olive. "There exists hope for even a tree," Job said. "If it gets cut down, it will even sprout again." (Job 14:7) An olive tree may be chopped

down, but that will not destroy it. Only if the tree is uprooted will it die. If the roots remain intact, the tree will sprout again with renewed vigor.

Even if a prolonged drought severely withers an old olive tree, the shriveled stump can come back to life. "If its root grows old in the earth and in the dust its stump dies, at the scent of water it will sprout and it will certainly produce a bough like a new plant." (Job 14:8, 9) Job lived in a dry, dusty land where he had probably observed many an old olive stump that looked dried up and lifeless. When the rains came, however, such a "dead" tree returned to life



and a new trunk emerged from its roots as if it were "a new plant." This remarkable resilience led one Tunisian horticulturist to observe: "You can say that olive trees are immortal."

Just as a farmer longs to see his withered olive trees sprout again, so Jehovah yearns to resurrect his faithful servants. He looks forward to the time when faithful individuals like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and many others will be restored to life. (Matthew 22:31, 32) How wonderful it will be to welcome back the dead and see them living full and fruitful lives once more!

### The Symbolic Olive Tree

God's mercy is manifest in his impartiality as well as in his provision for a resurrection. The apostle Paul used the olive tree to illustrate how Jehovah's mercy extends to people regardless of their race or background. For centuries the Jews had prided themselves on being God's chosen people, 'the offspring of Abraham.'—John 8:33; Luke 3:8.

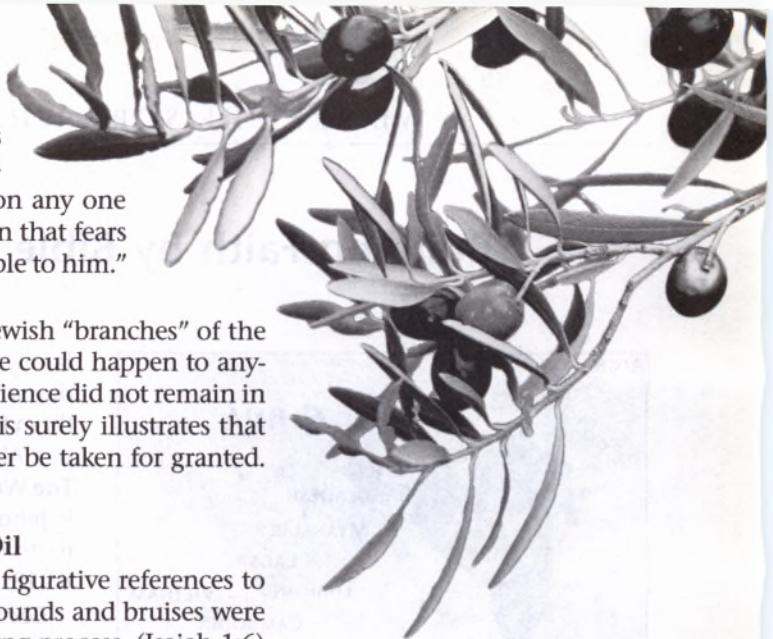
Being born into the Jewish nation was not in itself a requirement for obtaining divine favor. Jesus' earliest disciples, however, were all Jews, and they had the privilege of being the first humans selected by God to make up the promised seed of Abraham. (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:29) Paul likened these Jewish disciples to branches of a symbolic olive tree.

The majority of the natural Jews rejected Jesus, disqualifying themselves as future members of the "little flock," or "the Israel of God." (Luke 12:32; Galatians 6:16) Thus, they became like symbolic olive branches that had been lopped off. Who would take their place? In the year 36 C.E., Gentiles were chosen to become part

of Abraham's seed. It was as if Jehovah had grafted wild olive branches onto the garden olive tree. Those who would make up the promised seed of Abraham would include people of the nations. Gentile Christians could now become 'sharers of the olive's root of fatness.'

—Romans 11:17.

For a farmer, grafting a wild olive branch onto a garden olive tree would be unthinkable and "contrary to nature." (Romans 11:24) "Graft the good upon the wild, and, as the Arabs say, it will conquer the wild," explains the work *The Land and the Book*, "but you cannot reverse the process with success." Jewish Christians were likewise amazed when Jehovah "for the first time turned his attention to the nations to take out of them a people for his



name." (Acts 10:44-48; 15:14) This was a clear sign, however, that the outworking of God's purpose did not depend on any one nation. No, for "in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him."

—Acts 10:35.

Paul indicated that since unfaithful Jewish "branches" of the olive tree had been lopped off, the same could happen to anyone else who through pride and disobedience did not remain in Jehovah's favor. (Romans 11:19, 20) This surely illustrates that God's undeserved kindness should never be taken for granted.

—2 Corinthians 6:1.

### Greasing With Oil

The Scriptures make both literal and figurative references to the use of olive oil. In ancient times, wounds and bruises were 'softened with oil' to promote the healing process. (Isaiah 1:6) According to one of Jesus' illustrations, the neighborly Samaritan poured olive oil and wine on the wounds of the man he encountered on the road to Jericho.—Luke 10:34.

Applying olive oil to one's head is refreshing and soothing. (Psalm 141:5) And in handling cases of spiritual sickness, Christian elders may 'grease a member of the congregation with oil in the name of Jehovah.' (James 5:14) The elders' loving Scriptural counsel and heartfelt prayers in behalf of their spiritually sick fellow believer are compared to soothing olive oil. Interestingly, in idiomatic Hebrew a good man is sometimes described as "pure olive oil."

### "A Luxuriant Olive Tree in God's House"

In view of the foregoing points, it is not surprising that servants of God can be likened to olive trees. David desired to be like "a luxuriant olive tree in God's house." (Psalm 52:8) Just as Israelite families often had olive trees surrounding their houses, so David wished to be close to Jehovah and to produce fruit to God's praise.—Psalm 52:9.

While faithful to Jehovah, the two-tribe kingdom of Judah was like "a luxuriant olive tree, pretty with fruit and in form." (Jeremiah 11:15, 16) But the people of Judah lost that privileged position when 'they refused to obey Jehovah's words and walked after other gods.'—Jeremiah 11:10.

To become a luxuriant olive tree in God's house, we must obey Jehovah and be willing to accept the discipline by which he "prunes" us so that we can bear more Christian fruitage. (Hebrews 12:5, 6) Moreover, just as a natural olive tree

needs extensive roots to survive a period of drought, we need to fortify our spiritual roots in order to endure trials and persecution.—Matthew 13:21; Colossians 2:6, 7.

The olive tree well symbolizes the faithful Christian, who may be unknown to the world but is recognized by God. If such a person should die in this system, he will live again in the new world to come.—2 Corinthians 6:9; 2 Peter 3:13.

The practically indestructible olive tree that keeps on bearing fruit year after year reminds us of God's promise: "Like the days of a tree will the days of my people be; and the work of their own hands my chosen ones will use to the full." (Isaiah 65:22) That prophetic promise will be fulfilled in God's new world.—2 Peter 3:13.

## Building Faith by Bible Study in India



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**F**ROM the majestic, snow-covered Himalaya Mountains in the north to the steamy shores of the Indian Ocean to the south, India is a land of diversity, geographically and religiously. Of its population of over one billion, about 83 percent are Hindus, 11 percent are Muslims, and the remainder are composed primarily of nominal Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains. All enjoy freedom of worship. "Religion plays a vital role in the Indian way of life," says *The World Book Encyclopedia*.

Living in accord with their Christian faith well describes Jehovah's Witnesses, who number more than 21,200 in India. Like their spiritual companions in other parts of the world, the Witnesses in India view it as a privilege to help their neighbors build a strong faith in God's Word, the Holy Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Consider how one family in Chennai in the south of India came to a knowledge of Bible truth.

Prior to their contact with Jehovah's Witnesses, this family was actively involved in Catholic charismatic movements, claiming to see visions, speak in tongues, and heal the sick. They were prominent in the church and the community, people even addressing some members of the

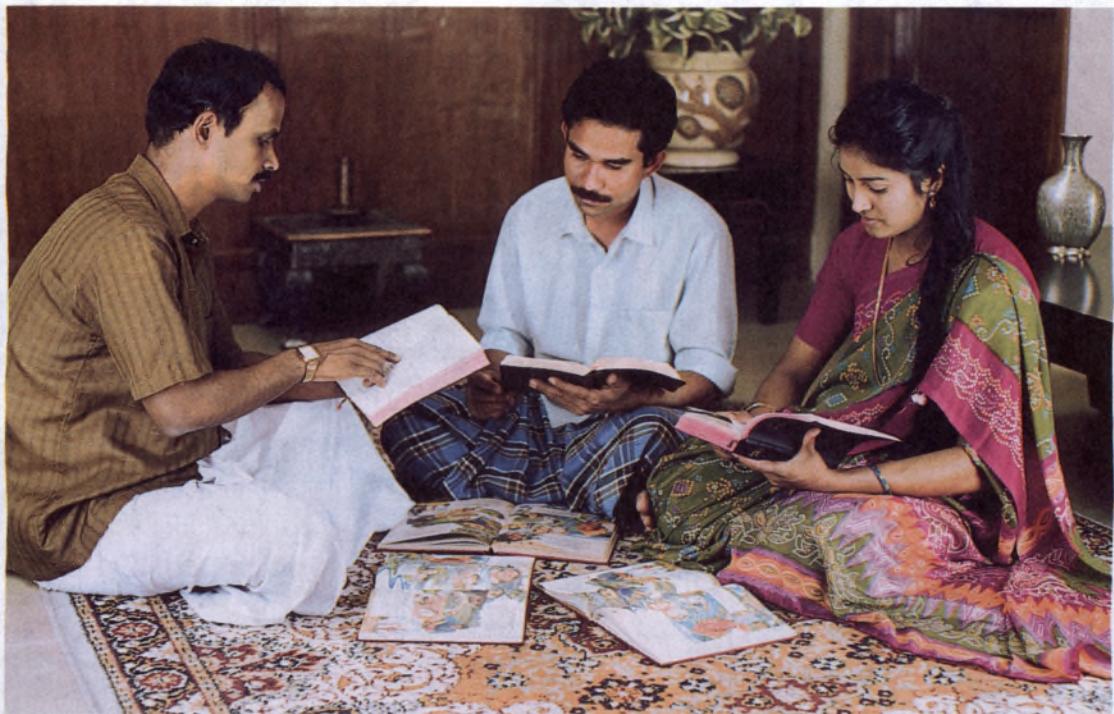
family as "swami," meaning "lord." Then one day a Witness visited the family and showed them from the Bible that Jesus is the Son of God, not Almighty God, as is commonly believed. The Witness also showed them that God's name is Jehovah and that Jehovah's purpose for the earth is to make it a beautiful paradise.—Psalm 83:18; Luke 23:43; John 3:16.

Because they respected God's Word and liked what they heard, members of this family agreed to a regular Bible study with Jehovah's Witnesses. This brought ridicule from their church acquaintances. Nonetheless, the family remained determined to continue their Bible study. As their knowledge increased and their faith grew stronger, they discontinued their false religious practices. Today, three members of this family are zealous, baptized Witnesses, and the mother serves as an auxiliary pioneer whenever possible.

### Faith to Overcome Handicaps

Sunder Lal, a young man living in a village in the Punjab, needed a great deal of faith and courage in order to share the good news of God's Kingdom with others. (Matthew 24:14) For one thing, he had left the polytheistic beliefs of his family and village to worship the true God, Jehovah. For another, Sunder Lal has no legs.

Until 1992, Sunder Lal's life was routine. He worked as a doctor's assistant and joined his own family in the worship of various deities under the guidance of their chosen guru. Then one night, he fell while crossing a railway track. A train ran over him and cut off both of his legs at the thigh. Although he lived, his world was shattered. Understandably, Sunder Lal became deeply depressed and even contemplated sui-



cide. His family was supportive, but his future looked hopeless.

Then one of Jehovah's Witnesses called on Sunder Lal and showed him from the Bible that God has promised to make the earth a delightful paradise and to give perfect health to all who love and fear him. Sunder Lal agreed to a Bible study, and for one year he studied diligently. He was invited to attend Christian meetings and finally went along on the back of a friend's bicycle. Although it was a painful ride, the reward was great. What he had learned in his personal Bible study fell into place as he met others who truly believed the promises of God's Word and lived in harmony with Bible teachings.

Sunder Lal began to share the good news with his neighbors, and in 1995 he was baptized. At first, he engaged in the ministry by dragging himself from door to door in his village, which was his normal way of getting around. But now he has a gift from his spiritual brothers—a tricycle that is specially equipped to

be "pedaled" by hand. Thanks to his tricycle, he is now more independent and is able by himself to make the seven-mile journey to attend congregation meetings. Sometimes he wheels himself along through torrential monsoons; at other times the temperature is over 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

In addition to attending meetings, Sunder Lal conducts many Bible studies with others who desire help to build strong faith in the true God, Jehovah. In fact, seven of his former Bible students are now baptized, as are three other persons he contacted but with whom fellow Witnesses have studied the Bible.

"Faith," according to the Bible, "is not a possession of all people." (2 Thessalonians 3:2) But for those "rightly disposed for everlasting life," a regular study of God's Word can build strong faith. (Acts 13:48) Such a study also makes the eyes shine with hope of a wonderful future—something in which a growing number of people in India are exercising faith.



# Parents Object to a Teacher's Prejudice

An elementary-school teacher in Cassano Murge, Italy, sent stickers home with some of his pupils. These stickers, which were intended to be put on the front door, bore the notice: "We are Catholics. Jehovah's Witnesses are asked not to knock on this door."

Some of the parents of the pupils, although not Jehovah's Witnesses themselves, objected strongly to the teacher's actions. According to the news journal *Muoviti Muoviti*, the parents charged that 'giving children this kind of message contributes to their rejecting anyone who does not think as they do or to their excluding someone because he is religiously "different."' One parent who wrote to the journal called the sticker "the seed of a weed, the daughter of ignorance and stupidity."

As this report demonstrates, many fair-minded people recognize the dangers of sowing seeds of prejudice. They also have respect for the Christian ministry performed by Jehovah's Witnesses throughout Italy and the whole world. Why not ask the Witnesses for 'a reason for the hope in them'? They will be eager to discuss it with you, doing so with "deep respect."—1 Peter 3:15.