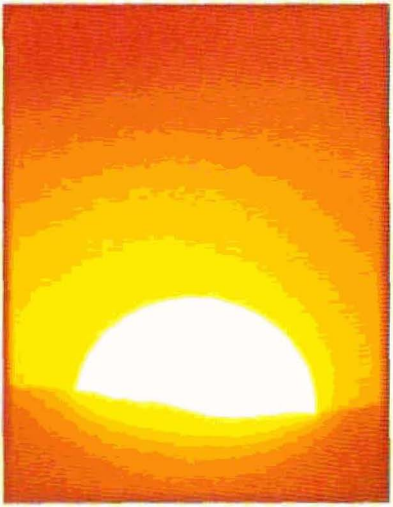
ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Light for All Mankind



VOLUME II

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A Prophet of God Brings Light for Mankind

WE LIVE in an age when virtually anything seems within man's reach. Space travel, computer technology, genetic engineering, and other scientific innovations have opened up new possibilities to the human race, bringing the hope of a better life—perhaps even a longer one.

2 Have such advances enabled you to remove the locks from your doors? Have they eliminated the threat of war? Have they cured disease or removed the sorrow of losing a loved one in death? Hardly! Human progress, remarkable as it may be, is limited. "We have figured out how to travel to the moon, make ever more powerful silicon chips, and transplant human genes," states a report by Worldwatch Institute. "But we have not yet been able to provide clean water to a billion people, slow the loss of thousands of species, or meet our energy needs without destabilizing the atmosphere." Understandably, many look to the future with anxiety, uncertain about where to turn for comfort and hope.

3 The situation we face today is similar to that of God's people during the eighth century B.C.E. At that time, God commissioned his servant Isaiah to bring a message of

1, 2. What present-day circumstances cause great anxiety for many?
3. What situation existed in Judah during the eighth century B.C.E.?

comfort to the inhabitants of Judah, and comfort was just what they needed. Turbulent events rocked the nation. The cruel Assyrian Empire would soon menace the land, filling many with dread. Where could God's people turn for salvation? The name of Jehovah was on their lips, but they preferred to put their trust in men.—2 Kings 16:7; 18:21.

Light Shining in the Darkness

4 As a result of Judah's rebellious course, Jerusalem was to be destroyed, and the inhabitants of Judah were to be taken captive to Babylon. Yes, dark times were coming. Jehovah commissioned his prophet Isaiah to foretell this ominous period, but He also instructed him to proclaim good news. After 70 years of exile, the Jews would be liberated from Babylon! A joyful remnant would return to Zion and have the privilege of restoring true worship there. With this happy message, Jehovah through his prophet caused light to shine in the darkness.

5 Judah was not desolated until more than a century after Isaiah recorded his prophecies. Why, then, did Jehovah reveal his purposes so far in advance? Would not those who had personally heard Isaiah's proclamations be long dead by the time the prophecies were fulfilled? That is true. Still, thanks to Jehovah's revelations to Isaiah, those living at the time of Jerusalem's destruction in 607 B.C.E. would have a written record of Isaiah's prophetic messages. This would provide irrefutable proof that Jehovah is "the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done."—Isaiah 46:10; 55:10, 11.

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4. What twofold message was Isaiah commissioned to proclaim?
5. Why did Jehovah reveal his purposes so far in advance?

6 Only Jehovah can rightfully make such a claim. A human might be able to predict the near future based on his understanding of the political or social climate of the day. But only Jehovah can foresee with absolute certainty what will happen at any point in time, even in the distant future. He can also empower his servants to foretell events long before they occur. The Bible states: "The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets."—Amos 3:7.

How Many "Isaiahs"?

7 The issue of prophecy is one thing that has caused many scholars to question the writership of Isaiah. These critics insist that the latter portion of the book must have been written by someone who lived in the sixth century B.C.E., either during or after the Babylonian exile. According to them, the prophecies of Judah's desolation were written after their fulfillment and hence were not really predictions at all. These critics also note that after chapter 40, the book of Isaiah speaks as if Babylon were the prevailing power and the Israelites were in captivity there. So they reason that whoever wrote the latter portion of Isaiah must have done so during that era—during the sixth century B.C.E. Is there a solid basis for such reasoning? Absolutely not!

8 It was not until the 12th century C.E. that the writership of Isaiah was called into question. This was by Jewish

---

6. What are some ways in which Jehovah is superior to all human forecasters?
7. How have many scholars questioned the writership of Isaiah, and why?
8. When did skepticism regarding the writership of Isaiah begin, and how did it spread?

commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra. "In his commentary on Isaiah," says the *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* "[Abraham Ibn Ezra] states that the second half, from chapter 40, was the work of a prophet who lived during the Babylonian Exile and the early period of the Return to Zion." During the 18th and 19th centuries, Ibn Ezra's views were adopted by a number of scholars, including Johann Christoph Doederlein, a German theologian who published his exegetical work on Isaiah in 1775, with a second edition in 1789. The *New Century Bible Commentary* notes: "All but the most conservative scholars now accept the hypothesis put forward by Doederlein . . . that the prophecies contained in chapters 40-66 of the book of Isaiah are not the words of the eighth-century prophet Isaiah but come from a later time."

9 However, questions about the writership of the book of Isaiah did not stop there. The theory regarding a second Isaiah—or Deutero-Isaiah—gave birth to the notion that a third writer may have been involved.* Then the book of Isaiah was dissected further, so that one scholar ascribes chapters 15 and 16 to an unknown prophet, while another questions the writership of chapters 23 to 27. Still another says that Isaiah could not have penned the words found in chapters 34 and 35. Why? Because the material closely resembles that found in chapters 40 to 66, which had already been credited to someone other than the eighth-century Isaiah! Bible commentator Charles

* The hypothetical third writer, supposedly responsible for chapters 56 to 66, is referred to by scholars as Trito-Isaiah.

9. (a) What dissecting of the book of Isaiah has taken place? (b) How does one Bible commentator summarize the controversy surrounding Isaiah's writership?

C. Torrey succinctly summarizes the result of this reasoning process. "The once great 'Prophet of the Exile,'" he says, "has dwindled to a very small figure, and is all but buried in a mass of jumbled fragments." However, not all scholars agree with such dissecting of the book of Isaiah.

Evidence of One Writer

10 There is strong reason to maintain that the book of Isaiah is the work of just one writer. One line of evidence pertains to consistency of expression. For example, the phrase "the Holy One of Israel" is found 12 times in Isaiah chapters 1 to 39 and 13 times in Isaiah chapters 40 to 66, yet this description of Jehovah appears only 6 times in

10. Give one example of how consistency of expression provides evidence of one writer for the book of Isaiah.

Evidence From Diachronic Analysis

Diachronic studies—which trace the subtle changes that take place in language over many years—provide further evidence that the book of Isaiah is the work of a single writer. If part of Isaiah were written in the eighth century B.C.E. and another portion 200 years later, there should be differences in the kind of Hebrew used in each section. But according to a study published in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, "the evidence from diachronic analysis overwhelmingly supports a pre-exilic date for Isaiah 40-66." The author of the study concludes: "If critical scholars continue to insist that Isaiah should be dated in the exilic or post-exilic period, they must do so in the face of contrary evidence from diachronic analysis."

the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. The repeated use of this otherwise infrequently used expression argues for unity of writership of Isaiah.

11 There are other similarities between Isaiah chapters 1 to 39 and chapters 40 to 66. Both portions contain frequent usage of the same distinctive figures of speech, such as a woman with birth pains and a "way" or a "highway."* There is also repeated reference to "Zion," a term that is used 29 times in chapters 1 to 39 and 18 times in chapters 40 to 66. In fact, Zion is referred to more in Isaiah than in any other Bible book! Such evidences, notes *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* "stamp the book with an individuality which it is difficult to account for" if the book was written by two, three, or more writers.

12 The strongest evidence that the book of Isaiah had just one writer is found in the inspired Christian Greek Scriptures. These clearly indicate that first-century Christians believed that the book of Isaiah was the work of one writer. Luke, for example, tells of an Ethiopian official who was reading material that is now found in Isaiah chapter 53, the very portion that modern-day critics ascribe to Deutero-Isaiah. Luke, however, says that the Ethiopian was "reading aloud the prophet Isaiah."—Acts 8:26-28.

13 Next consider the Gospel writer Matthew, who explains how the ministry of John the Baptizer fulfilled

* A woman with birth pains: Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; 26:17, 18; 42:14; 45:10; 54:1; 66:7. A "way" or a "highway": Isaiah 11:16; 19:23; 35:8; 40:3; 43:19; 49:11; 57:14; 62:10.

11. What similarities exist between chapters 1 to 39 and chapters 40 to 66 of Isaiah?

12, 13. How do the Christian Greek Scriptures indicate that the book of Isaiah was the work of one writer?

the prophetic words that we now find at Isaiah 40:3. To whom does Matthew attribute the prophecy? An unknown Deutero-Isaiah? No, he identifies the writer simply as "Isaiah the prophet."* (Matthew 3:1-3) On another occasion, Jesus read from a scroll the words we now find at Isaiah 61:1, 2. In relating the account, Luke states: "The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed him." (Luke 4: 17) In his letter to the Romans, Paul refers to both the earlier and the later portions of Isaiah, yet never does

* In the parallel accounts, Mark, Luke, and John use the same phrase. —Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4; John 1:23.

Portion of the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah. The end of chapter 39 is indicated with an arrow

he even hint that the writer was anyone other than the same person, Isaiah. (Romans 10:16, 20; 15:12) Clearly, first-century Christians did not believe that the book of Isaiah was the work of two, three, or more penmen.

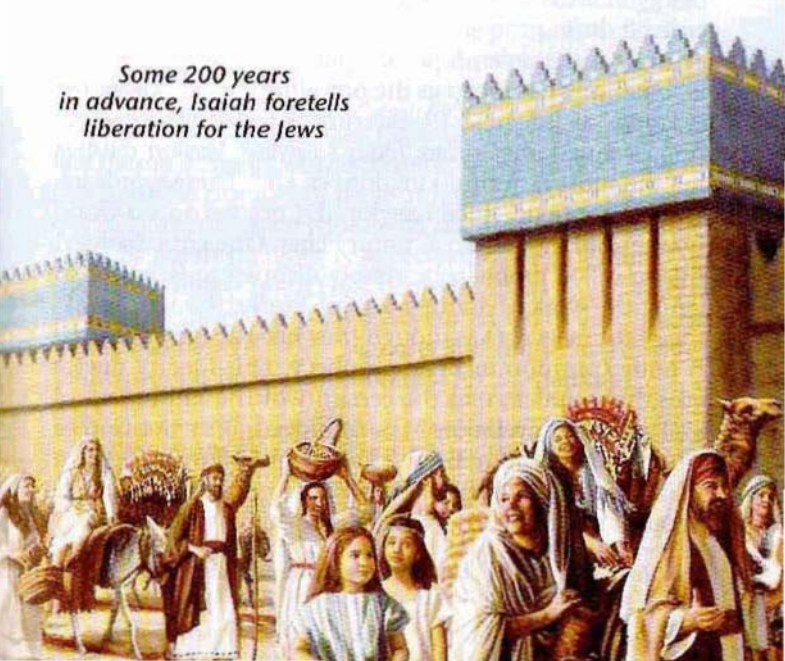
14 Consider, too, the testimony of the Dead Sea Scrolls —ancient documents, many of which date from before the time of Jesus. One manuscript of Isaiah, known as the Isaiah Scroll, dates from the second century B.C.E., and it refutes critics' claims that a Deutero-Isaiah took over the

14. How do the Dead Sea Scrolls shed light on the matter of Isaiah's writership?

writing at chapter 40. How so? In this ancient document, what we now know as chapter 40 begins on the last line of a column, the opening sentence being completed in the next column. The copyist was clearly unaware of any supposed change in writer or division in the book at that point.

15 Finally, consider the testimony of first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus. He not only indicates that the prophecies in Isaiah pertaining to Cyrus were written

15. What does first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus have to say about Isaiah's prophecies concerning Cyrus?



Some 200 years in advance, Isaiah foretells liberation for the Jews

in the eighth century B.C.E. but also says that Cyrus was aware of these prophecies. "These things Cyrus knew," Josephus writes, "from reading the book of prophecy which Isaiah had left behind two hundred and ten years earlier." According to Josephus, knowledge of these prophecies may even have contributed to Cyrus' willingness to send the Jews back to their homeland, for Josephus writes that Cyrus was "seized by a strong desire and ambition to do what had been written."—*Jewish Antiquities,* Book XI, chapter 1, paragraph 2.

16 As mentioned earlier, many critics point out that from Isaiah chapter 40 onward, Babylon is described as the prevailing power, and the Israelites are spoken of as already being in exile. Would this not indicate that the writer lived during the sixth century B.C.E.? Not necessarily. The fact is that even *before* chapter 40 of Isaiah, Babylon is sometimes described as the prevailing world power. For example, at Isaiah 13:19, Babylon is called "the decoration of kingdoms" or, as *Today's English Version* renders it, "the most beautiful kingdom of all." These words are clearly prophetic, since Babylon did not become a world power until more than a century later. One critic "solves" this so-called problem by simply dismissing Isaiah 13 as being the work of another writer! Really, though, speaking of future events as though they have already occurred is quite common in Bible prophecy. This literary device effectively underscores the certainty of the fulfillment of a prophecy. (Revelation 21:5, 6) Indeed, only the God of true prophecy can make the statement: "New things I am telling out. Before they begin to spring up, I cause you people to hear them."—Isaiah 42:9.

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16. What can be said about the critics' assertion that Babylon is described in the latter portion of Isaiah as the prevailing power?

A Book of Reliable Prophecy

17 To what conclusion, then, does the evidence point? That the book of Isaiah is the work of one inspired writer. This entire book has been passed down through the centuries as a single work, not two or more. True, some may say that the style of Isaiah's book changes somewhat from chapter 40 onward. Remember, though, that Isaiah served as God's prophet for no less than 46 years. During that time it is to be expected that the content of his message, and with it his way of expressing his message, would change. Indeed, Isaiah's commission from God was not simply to deliver severe warnings of judgment. He was also to convey Jehovah's words: "Comfort, comfort my people." (Isaiah 40:1) God's covenant people would truly be comforted by his promise that, after 70 years of exile, the Jews would be repatriated to their homeland.

18 The release of the Jews from Babylonian captivity is the theme of many of the chapters of Isaiah discussed in this book.* A number of these prophecies have a modern-day fulfillment, as we will see. In addition, we find in the book of Isaiah thrilling prophecies that were fulfilled in the life—and death—of God's only-begotten Son. Certainly, a study of the vital prophecies contained in the book of Isaiah will benefit God's servants and others earth wide. These prophecies are, indeed, light for all mankind.

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* The first 40 chapters of Isaiah are discussed in *Isaiah's Prophecy —Light for All Mankind I,* published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

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17. How can the change of style from Isaiah chapter 40 onward be explained?

18. What is a theme in the book of Isaiah that will be discussed in this publication?

Prophetic Words of Comfort That Involve You

Isaiah 41:1-29

ISAIAH wrote the book that bears his name almost 3,000 years ago, but it has real value for us today. We can learn vital principles from the historical events that he recorded. And we can build our faith through study of the prophecies that he wrote down in Jehovah's name. Yes, Isaiah was a prophet of the living God. Jehovah inspired him to record history *in advance*—to describe events before they happened. Jehovah thus demonstrated that he can both foretell and shape the future. After studying the book of Isaiah, true Christians are convinced that Jehovah will fulfill all that he has promised.

2 By the time Isaiah completed the writing of his prophecy, Jerusalem had survived the Assyrian threat. The temple was still standing, and people were going about their day-to-day affairs much as they had for hundreds of years. However, that situation would change. The time would come when the wealth of the Jewish kings would be carried away to Babylon and young Jews would be court officials in that city.* (Isaiah 39:6-7) This would occur more than 100 years later.—2 Kings 24:12-17; Daniel 1:19.

* See chapter 29 of *Isaiah's Prophecy—Light for All Mankind I.*

1. Why should we be interested in the prophecy of Isaiah?
2. What was the situation in Jerusalem when Isaiah recorded his prophetic book, and what change would occur?

3 God's message through Isaiah, however, is not merely a message of doom. Chapter 40 of his book begins with the word "Comfort."* The Jews would be comforted by the assurance that either they or their children would be able to return to their homeland. Chapter 41 continues that comforting message and foretells that Jehovah would raise up a powerful king to fulfill the divine will. It contains reassurances and gives encouragement to trust in God. It also exposes as powerless the false gods in whom people of the nations put their trust. In all of this, there is much to strengthen faith, both in Isaiah's day and in ours.

Jehovah Challenges the Nations

4 Jehovah through his prophet says: ***"Attend to me in silence, you islands; and let national groups themselves regain power. Let them approach. At that time let them speak. Let us come up close together for the judgment itself."*** **(*Isaiah 41:1*)** With these words Jehovah challenges the nations who oppose his people. Let them stand before him and gird themselves to speak! As will later be seen, Jehovah demands, as though he were a judge in a court, that these nations furnish proof that their idols are truly gods. Can these gods foretell acts of salvation for their worshipers or judgments against their enemies? If so, can they fulfill such prophecies? The answer is no. Jehovah alone can do these things.

5 As we consider Isaiah's prophecy, let us bear in mind that, as with many Bible prophecies, his words have more

* See chapter 30 of *Isaiah's Prophecy—Light for All Mankind I.*

3. What message is found in Isaiah chapter 41?
4. With what words does Jehovah challenge the nations?
5. Explain how Isaiah's prophecies have more than one fulfillment.

than one fulfillment. In 607 B.C.E., Judah will go off into exile in Babylon. However, Isaiah's prophecy reveals that Jehovah will deliver the Israelites held captive there. This happens in 537 B.C.E. That release had a parallel in the early days of the 20th century. During the first world war, Jehovah's anointed servants on earth passed through a period of tribulation. In 1918 pressure from Satan's world —incited by Christendom as the leading part of Babylon the Great—brought the organized preaching of the good news to a virtual halt. (Revelation 11:5-10) Some leading officers of the Watch Tower Society were sent to prison on trumped-up charges. To all intents and purposes, the world had triumphed in its battle against God's servants. Then, as happened back in 537 B.C.E., Jehovah unexpectedly brought about their liberation. In 1919 the imprisoned officers were released, and later the charges against them were dropped. A convention at Cedar Point, Ohio, in September 1919 reinvigorated Jehovah's servants to pick up the work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom. (Revelation 11:11, 12) From then till now, the scope of that preaching work has increased remarkably. Moreover, many of Isaiah's words will have wonderful fulfillment in the Paradise earth to come. Consequently, Isaiah's words of long ago involve all nations and peoples today.

A Deliverer Called Forth

6 Through Isaiah, Jehovah foretells a conqueror who will both save God's people from Babylon and bring judgment upon their enemies. Jehovah asks: ***"Who has roused up someone from the sunrise? Who proceeded in righteousness to call him to His feet, to give before him the***

6. How does the prophet describe a future conqueror?

Cyrus, though a pagan, is chosen to do God's work

nations, and to make him go subduing even kings? Who kept giving them like dust to his sword, so that they have been driven about like mere stubble with his bow? Who kept pursuing them, kept peacefully passing along on his feet over the path by which he did not proceed to come? Who has been active and has done this, calling out the generations from the start? I, Jehovah, the First One; and with the last ones I am the same."—Isaiah 41:2-4.

7 Who is the one to be roused from the sunrise, from eastern parts? The countries of Medo-Persia and Elam are located east of Babylon. From there marches Cyrus the Persian, along with his mighty armies. (Isaiah 41:25; 44: 28; 45:1-4, 13; 46:11) Though Cyrus is not a worshiper of Jehovah, he acts in harmony with the will of Jehovah, the righteous God. Cyrus subdues kings, and these are scattered like dust before him. In pursuit of conquest, he passes "peacefully," or safely, over paths not customarily traveled, overcoming all obstacles. By the year 539 B.C.E.,

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7. Who is the coming conqueror, and what does he accomplish?

Cyrus reaches the mighty city of Babylon and overthrows it. As a result, God's people are released so that they might return to Jerusalem to reestablish pure worship.—Ezra 1: 1-7.*

8 Thus, through Isaiah, Jehovah foretells the rise of Cyrus long before that king is born. Only the true God can accurately prophesy such a thing. Jehovah has no equal among the false gods of the nations. With good reason, Jehovah states: "To no one else shall I give my own glory." Only Jehovah can rightfully say: "I am the first and I am the last, and besides me there is no God."—Isaiah 42:8; 44:6, 7.

Frightened Peoples Trust in Idols

9 Isaiah now describes the reaction of the nations to this future conqueror: ***"The islands saw and began to fear. The very extremities of the earth began trembling. They drew near and kept coming. They went helping each one his companion, and one would say to his brother: 'Be strong.' So the craftsman went strengthening the metalworker; the one doing the smoothing out with the forge hammer him that is hammering away at the anvil, saying regarding the soldering: 'It is good.' Finally one fastened it with nails that it could not be made to totter."—Isaiah 41:5-7.***

10 Looking some 200 years into the future, Jehovah surveys the world scene. Mighty armies under Cyrus move swiftly, conquering all in opposition. Peoples—even the

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* The Greater Cyrus, who in 1919 liberated "the Israel of God" from spiritual captivity, is none other than Jesus Christ, who sits enthroned as King of God's heavenly Kingdom since 1914.—Galatians 6:16.

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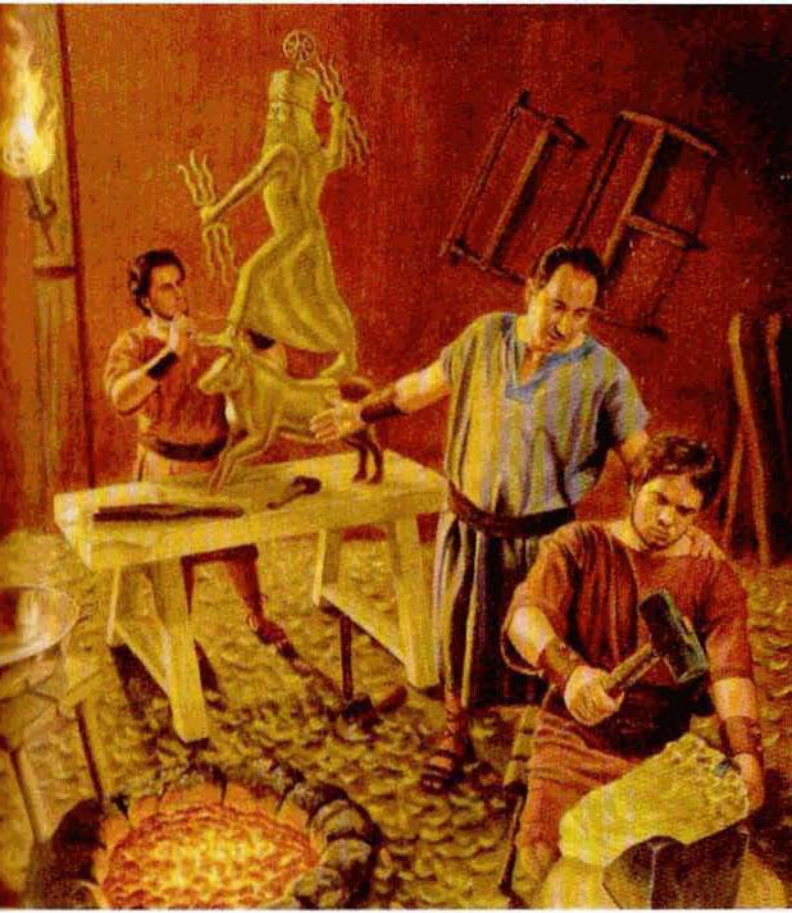
8. What can Jehovah alone do?

9-11. How do the nations react to the advance of Cyrus?



The nations trust in lifeless idols

inhabitants of the islands, those in the most distant places—tremble at his approach. In fear they unite to oppose the one whom Jehovah has called from the east to execute judgment. They try to encourage one another, saying: "Be strong."

11 Craftsmen work together to fashion idol gods to deliver the people. A wooden frame is fashioned by a carpenter, who then encourages the goldsmith to plate it with metal, perhaps gold. A sculptor hammers the metal smooth and approves of the soldering. Perhaps it is with some sarcasm that mention is made of fastening it with nails so that it does not totter or show weakness, as did the idol of Dagon that toppled before the ark of Jehovah. —1 Samuel 5:4.

Fear Not!

12 Now Jehovah turns his attention to his people. Unlike the nations who trust in lifeless idols, those who trust in the true God need never fear. Jehovah's reassurance begins with the reminder that Israel is the offspring of his friend Abraham. In a passage of great tenderness, Isaiah reports Jehovah's words: ***"You, O Israel, are my servant, you, O Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend; you, whom I have taken hold of from the extremities of the earth, and you, whom I have called even from the remote parts of it. And so I said to you, 'You are my servant; I have chosen you, and I have not rejected you. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not gaze about, for I am your God. I will fortify you. I will really help you. I will really keep fast hold of you with my right hand of righteousness.'"—Isaiah 41:8-10.***

13 How comforting these words will be to the faithful Jews held captive in a foreign land! How encouraging it will be to hear Jehovah call them "my servant" at the time when they are exiles, servants of the king of Babylon!

12. What reassurance does Jehovah give to Israel?
13. Why will Jehovah's words be of comfort to the captive Jews?

(2 Chronicles 36:20) Though Jehovah will discipline them because of their unfaithfulness, he will not reject them. Israel belongs to Jehovah, not to Babylon. There will be no reason for God's servants to tremble at the approach of the conquering Cyrus. Jehovah will be with his people to help them.

14 Those words have reassured and strengthened God's servants even down to our day. Back in 1918 they yearned to know Jehovah's will for them. They longed for deliverance from their spiritually captive state. Today we yearn for relief from the pressures inflicted on us by Satan, the world, and our own imperfection. But we appreciate that Jehovah knows precisely when and how to act in behalf of his people. Like young children, we hold on to his mighty hand, confident that he will help us to cope. (Psalm 63: 7, 8) Jehovah treasures those who serve him. He supports us today just as he supported his people through the difficult period of 1918-19 and just as he supported faithful Israelites so long ago.

15 Consider what Jehovah next says through Isaiah: ***"'Look! All those getting heated up against you will become ashamed and be humiliated. The men in a quarrel with you will become as nothing and will perish. You will search for them, but you will not find them, those men in a struggle with you. They will become as something nonexistent and as nothing, those men at war with you. For I, Jehovah your God, am grasping your right hand, the One saying to you, "Do not be afraid. I myself will help you." Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel. I***

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14. How do Jehovah's words to Israel comfort God's servants today?
15, 16. (a) What will become of Israel's enemies, and in what ways does Israel resemble a worm? (b) In view of what impending attack are Jehovah's words particularly encouraging today?

myself will help you,' is the utterance of Jehovah, even your Repurchaser, the Holy One of Israel."—Isaiah 41:11-14.

16 Israel's enemies will not prevail. Those who are heated up against Israel will be ashamed. Those who fight against her will perish. Though the captive Israelites seem as weak and defenseless as a worm squirming in the dust, Jehovah will help them. What encouragement this has been all through "the last days" as true Christians have faced the determined hostility of so many in the world! (2 Timothy 3:1) And how strengthening Jehovah's promise is in view of the impending attack by Satan, who is referred to in prophecy as "Gog of the land of Magog"! Under Gog's ferocious assault, Jehovah's people will seem as defenseless as a worm—a people "dwelling without wall" and not having "even bar and doors." Yet, those hoping in Jehovah will not need to quake with fear. The Almighty himself will fight to deliver them.—Ezekiel 38:2, 11, 14-16, 21-23; 2 Corinthians 1:3.

Comfort for Israel

17 Jehovah continues to comfort his people: ***"Look! I have made you a threshing sledge, a new threshing instrument having double-edged teeth. You will tread down the mountains and crush them; and the hills you will make just like the chaff. You will winnow them, and a wind itself will carry them away, and a windstorm itself will drive them different ways. And you yourself will be joyful in Jehovah. In the Holy One of Israel you will boast about yourself."—Isaiah 41:15, 16.***

18 Strength will be given to Israel to take the offensive and, in a spiritual sense, to subdue her mountainlike en-

17, 18. How does Isaiah describe the empowering of Israel, and of what fulfillment may we be assured?

emies. When Israel returns from exile, she will triumph over enemies who try to prevent the rebuilding of the temple and of Jerusalem's walls. (Ezra 6:12; Nehemiah 6: 16) However, Jehovah's words will be fulfilled on a grand scale with "the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:16) Jesus promises anointed Christians: "To him that conquers and observes my deeds down to the end I will give authority over the nations, and he shall shepherd the people with an iron rod so that they will be broken to pieces like clay vessels, the same as I have received from my Father." (Revelation 2:26, 27) The time will certainly come when Christ's brothers resurrected to heavenly glory will have a part in the destruction of Jehovah God's enemies.—2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; Revelation 20:4, 6.

19 In figurative language, Jehovah now reinforces his promise to bring succor to his people. Isaiah writes: ***"The afflicted ones and the poor ones are seeking for water, but there is none. Because of thirst their very tongue has become dry. I myself, Jehovah, shall answer them. I, the God of Israel, shall not leave them. Upon bare hills I shall open up rivers, and in the midst of the valley plains, springs. I shall make the wilderness into a reedy pool of water, and the waterless land into sources of water. In the wilderness I shall set the cedar tree, the acacia and the myrtle and the oil tree. In the desert plain I shall place the juniper tree, the ash and the cypress at the same time; in order that people may see and know and pay heed and have insight at the same time, that the very hand of Jehovah has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has himself created it."—Isaiah 41:17-20.***

20 Though the exiled Israelites reside in the capital city

19, 20. What does Isaiah write about the restoration of Israel to a place of beauty, and how is this fulfilled?

of a wealthy world power, it is to them like a waterless desert. They feel like David when he was hiding from King Saul. In 537 B.C.E., Jehovah opens the way for them to return to Judah and rebuild his temple in Jerusalem, thus restoring pure worship. Jehovah, in turn, blesses them. In a later prophecy, Isaiah foretells: "Jehovah will certainly comfort Zion. He will for certain comfort all her devastated places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert plain like the garden of Jehovah." (Isaiah 51:3) This really does occur after the Jews return to their homeland.

21 Something similar occurred in modern times when the Greater Cyrus, Christ Jesus, liberated his anointed followers from spiritual captivity so that they could work to restore pure worship. Those faithful ones were blessed with a rich spiritual paradise, a figurative garden of Eden. (Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-7) Soon, when God destroys his enemies, the entire earth will be transformed into a physical paradise, just as Jesus promised the evildoer on the stake. —Luke 23:43.

A Challenge to Israel's Enemies

22 Jehovah now returns to his controversy with the nations and their idol gods: "*'Bring your controversial case forward,' says Jehovah. 'Produce your arguments,' says the King of Jacob. 'Produce and tell to us the things that are going to happen. The first things—what they were—do tell, that we may apply our heart and know the future of them. Or cause us to hear even the things that are coming. Tell the things that are to come afterward, that we may*

21. What restoration occurred in modern times, and what will happen in the future?
22. With what words does Jehovah again challenge the nations?

know that you are gods. Yes, you ought to do good or do bad, that we may gaze about and see it at the same time. Look! You are something nonexistent, and your achievement is nothing. A detestable thing is anyone that chooses you.'" **(*Isaiah 41:21-24*)** Are the gods of the nations able to prophesy accurately and thus prove that they have supernatural knowledge? If they are, surely there should be some results, either good or bad, to support their claims. In fact, though, idol gods are not able to achieve anything and are as something nonexistent.

23 In our day some might wonder why Jehovah, through Isaiah and his fellow prophets, spent so much time condemning the folly of idolatry. The uselessness of

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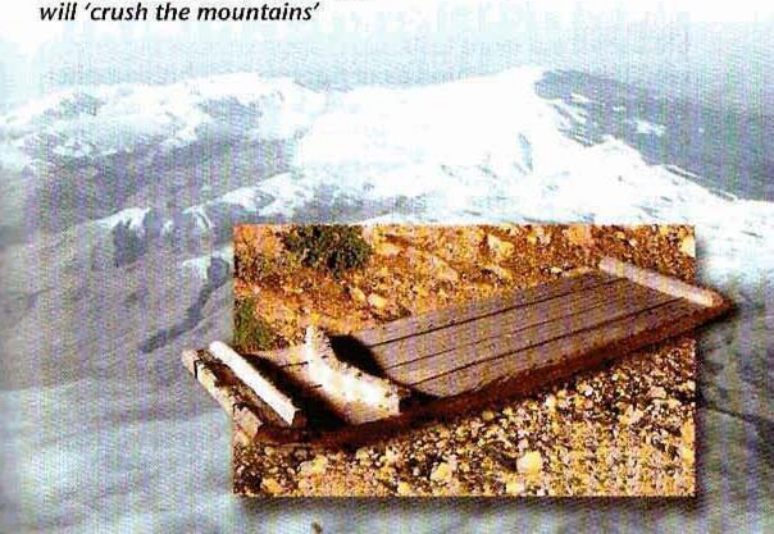
23. Why did Jehovah, through his prophets, condemn idols so persistently?

Israel, like "a threshing sledge," will 'crush the mountains'



man-made idols may seem obvious to many today. However, once a false system of belief has been established and widely accepted, it is hard to root it out of the minds of those who believe it. Many contemporary beliefs are as senseless as the belief that lifeless images are really gods. Yet, people cling to such beliefs despite persuasive arguments against them. It is only by hearing the truth again and again that some are moved to see the wisdom of trusting in Jehovah.

24 Jehovah again refers to Cyrus: ***"I have roused up someone from the north, and he will come. From the rising of the sun he will call upon my name. And he will come upon deputy rulers as if they were clay and just as a potter that tramples down the moist material." (Isaiah 41: 25)**** In contrast to the gods of the nations, Jehovah can accomplish things. When he brings Cyrus out of the east, from "the rising of the sun," God will demonstrate his ability to predict and then fashion the future to fulfill his prediction.

25 These words remind us of the apostle John's prophetic description of kings who would be roused to action in our time. At Revelation 16:12, we read that the way will be prepared "for the kings from the rising of the sun." These kings are none other than Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. Just as Cyrus delivered God's people long ago, these far mightier kings will annihilate Jehovah's enemies and shepherd his people through the great tribulation into a

* Although Cyrus' homeland was east of Babylon, when he made his final attack on the city, he came down from the north, from Asia Minor.

24, 25. How does Jehovah again refer to Cyrus, and of what other prophecy does this remind us?

new world of righteousness.—Psalm 2:8, 9; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 7:14-17.

Jehovah Is Supreme!

26 Again, Jehovah declares the truth that he alone is the true God. He asks: ***"Who has told anything from the start, that we may know, or from times past, that we may say, 'He is right'? Really there is no one telling. Really there is no one causing one to hear. Really there is no one that is hearing any sayings of you men."*** **(*Isaiah 41:26*)** No idol god announced the coming of a conqueror to liberate those trusting in it. All such gods are lifeless, silent. They are not gods at all.

27 After reporting these stirring prophetic words of Jehovah, Isaiah drives home a vital truth: ***"There is one first, saying to Zion: 'Look! Here they are!' and to Jerusalem I shall give a bringer of good news. And I kept seeing, and there was not a man; and out of these there was also no one that was giving counsel. And I kept asking them, that they might make a reply. Look! All of them are something nonexistent. Their works are nothing. Their molten images are wind and unreality."—Isaiah 41:27-29.***

28 Jehovah is first. He is supreme! He is the true God, who announces the deliverance of his people, bringing good news to them. And only his Witnesses proclaim his greatness to the nations. Scornfully, Jehovah denounces those who trust in idol worship, dismissing their idols as "wind and unreality." What a powerful reason to cling to the true God! Jehovah alone is worthy of our confident trust.

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26. What question does Jehovah now pose, and is it answered?
27, 28. What vital truth is emphasized in the concluding verses of Isaiah 41, and who only proclaim this?

"My Chosen One, Whom My Soul Has Approved!"

Isaiah 42:1-25

"'YOU are my witnesses,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'even my servant whom I have chosen.'" (Isaiah 43:10) This declaration by Jehovah, recorded by the prophet Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.E., shows that Jehovah's ancient covenant people were a nation of witnesses. They were God's chosen servant. Some 2,600 years later, in 1931, anointed Christians publicly declared that these words applied to them. They took the name Jehovah's Witnesses and wholeheartedly accepted the responsibilities associated with being God's earthly servant.

2 Jehovah's Witnesses earnestly desire to please God. For this reason, the 42nd chapter of the book of Isaiah is of intense interest to each one of them, for it provides a portrait of a servant whom Jehovah approves and another of a servant whom he rejects. Considering this prophecy and its fulfillment gives insight into what leads to God's approval and what leads to his disfavor.

"I Have Put My Spirit in Him"

3 Through Isaiah, Jehovah prophesies the coming of a servant whom he himself will choose: ***"Look! My servant, on whom I keep fast hold! My chosen one, whom my soul***

1, 2. Why is chapter 42 of Isaiah of interest to Christians today?
3. What does Jehovah prophesy through Isaiah about "my servant"?

has approved! I have put my spirit in him. Justice to the nations is what he will bring forth. He will not cry out or raise his voice, and in the street he will not let his voice be heard. No crushed reed will he break; and as for a dim flaxen wick, he will not extinguish it. In trueness he will bring forth justice. He will not grow dim nor be crushed until he sets justice in the earth itself; and for his law the islands themselves will keep waiting."—Isaiah 42:1-4.

4 Who is the Servant referred to here? We are not left in doubt. We find these words quoted in the Gospel of Matthew and applied to Jesus Christ. (Matthew 12:15-21) Jesus is the beloved Servant, the "chosen one." When did Jehovah put his spirit upon Jesus? In 29 C.E., at the time of Jesus' baptism. The inspired record describes that baptism and says that after Jesus rose from the water, "the heaven was opened up and the holy spirit in bodily shape like a dove came down upon him, and a voice came out of heaven: 'You are my Son, the beloved; I have approved you.' " In this way Jehovah personally identified his beloved Servant. Jesus' subsequent ministry and the miraculous works that he performed proved that Jehovah's spirit was indeed upon him.—Luke 3:21, 22; 4:14-21; Matthew 3:16, 17.

'He Will Bring Forth Justice to the Nations'

5 Jehovah's Chosen One was to "bring forth," or make stand out, true justice. "What justice is he will make clear to the nations." (Matthew 12:18) How this was needed in the first century C.E.! The Jewish religious leaders taught a distorted view of justice and righteousness. They sought

4. Who is the foretold "chosen one," and how do we know this?
5. Why was clarification of justice needed in the first century C.E.?

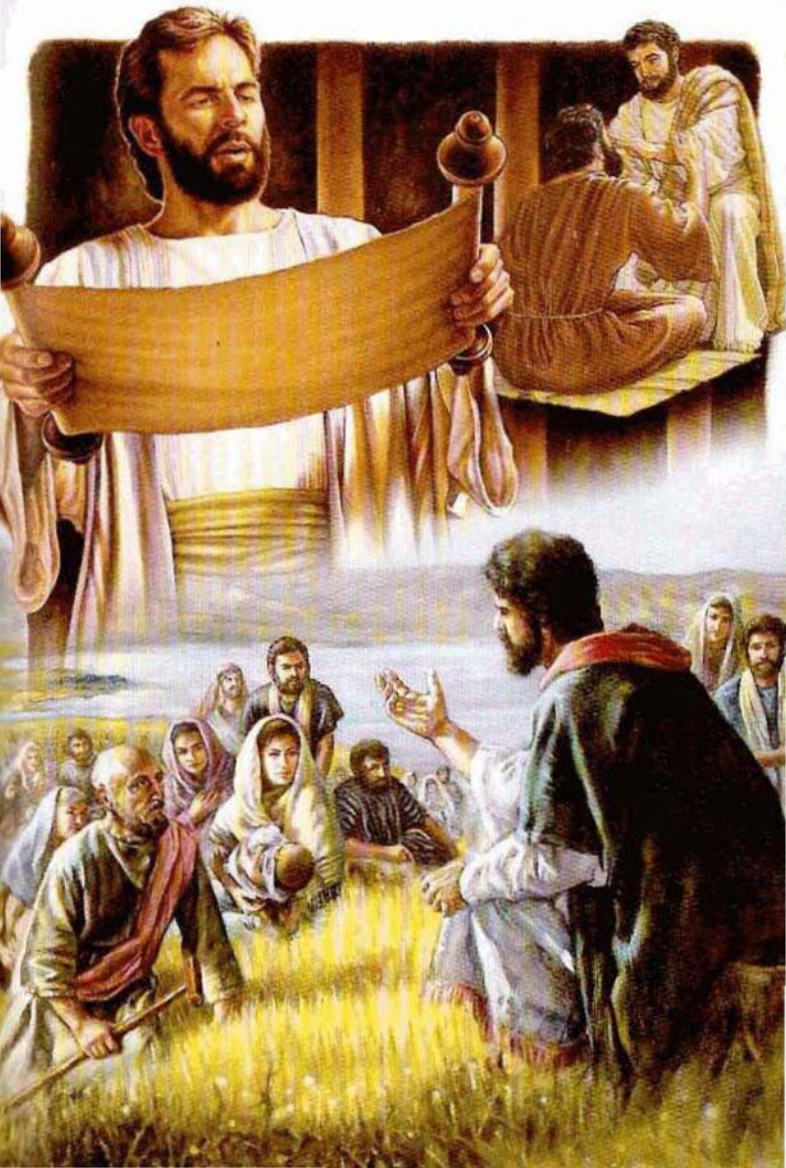
to attain righteousness by following a rigid code of laws —many of their own making. Their legalistic justice was void of mercy and compassion.

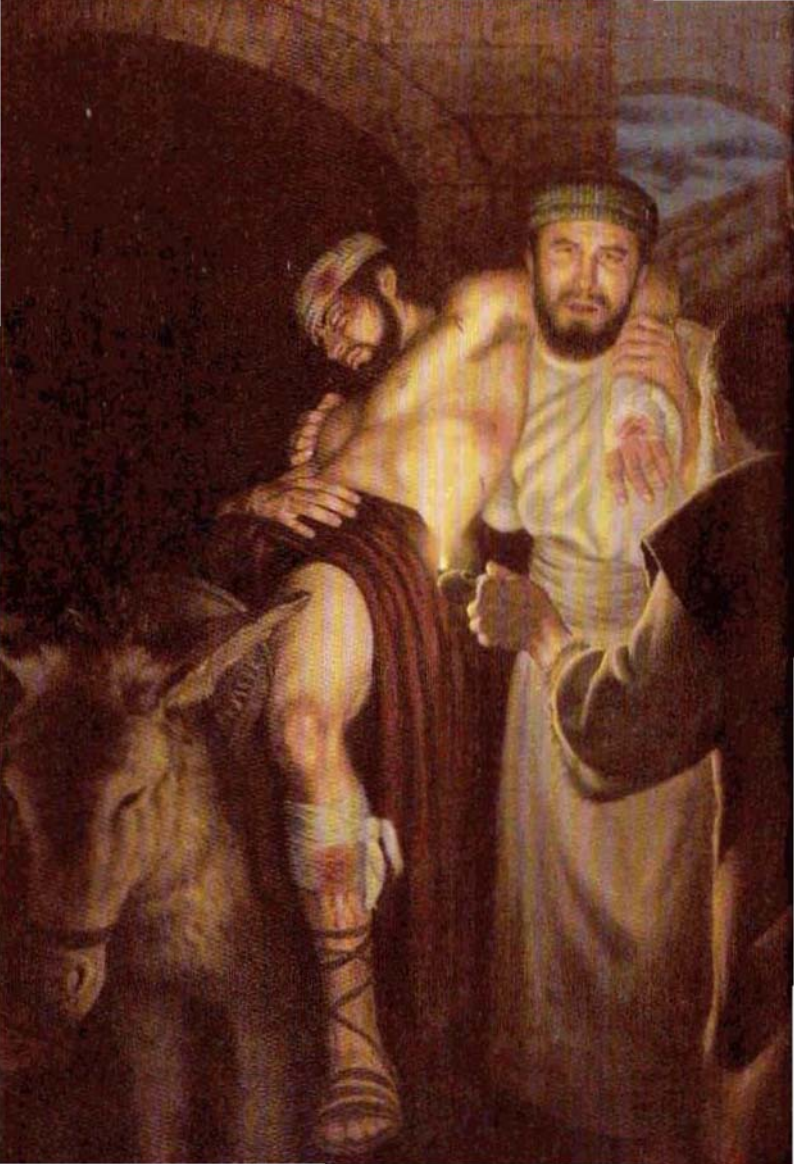
6 In contrast, Jesus revealed God's view of justice. By what he taught and how he lived, Jesus showed that true justice is compassionate and merciful. Just consider his famous Sermon on the Mount. (Matthew, chapters 5-7) What a masterful explanation of how justice and righteousness should be practiced! When we read the Gospel accounts, are we not touched by Jesus' compassion for the poor and afflicted? (Matthew 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; Luke 7:13) He carried his comforting message to many who were like bruised reeds, bent over and knocked about. They were like a smoldering flaxen wick, their last spark of life almost smothered. Jesus neither broke a "crushed reed" nor extinguished "a dim flaxen wick." Rather, his loving and compassionate words and actions lifted up the hearts of the meek.—Matthew 11:28-30.

7 Why, though, does the prophecy say that Jesus would 'not cry out or raise his voice, and he would not let his voice be heard in the street'? Because he did not promote himself, as did many in his day. (Matthew 6:5) When curing a leper, he told the healed man: "See that you tell nobody a thing." (Mark 1:40-44) Rather than seeking publicity and having people reach conclusions on the basis of secondhand reports, Jesus wanted them to discern for themselves on the basis of solid evidence that he was the Christ, Jehovah's anointed Servant.

6. In what ways did Jesus make true justice known?
7. Why could the prophecy say that Jesus would 'not cry out or raise his voice in the street'?

True justice is compassionate and merciful





8 The Chosen Servant was to bring forth "justice to the nations." This Jesus did. Apart from emphasizing the compassionate nature of godly justice, Jesus taught that it should embrace all people. On one occasion Jesus reminded a man versed in the Law that he should love God and his neighbor. The man asked Jesus: "Who really is my neighbor?" Perhaps he expected Jesus to answer: "Your fellow Jew." But Jesus told the parable of the neighborly Samaritan. In the parable a Samaritan came to the aid of a man set upon by robbers, while a Levite and a priest had refused to help. The questioner had to admit that on this occasion the despised Samaritan was the neighbor, not the Levite or the priest. Jesus concluded his illustration with the advice: "Be doing the same yourself." —Luke 10:25-37; Leviticus 19:18.

"He Will Not Grow Dim nor Be Crushed"

9 Since Jesus made clear the nature of true justice, his disciples learned to display this quality. So must we. First of all, we need to accept God's standards of good and bad, since he has the right to determine what is just and righteous. As we strive to do things Jehovah's way, our upright conduct will speak volumes about what true justice is.—1 Peter 2:12.

10 We also display true justice when we diligently engage

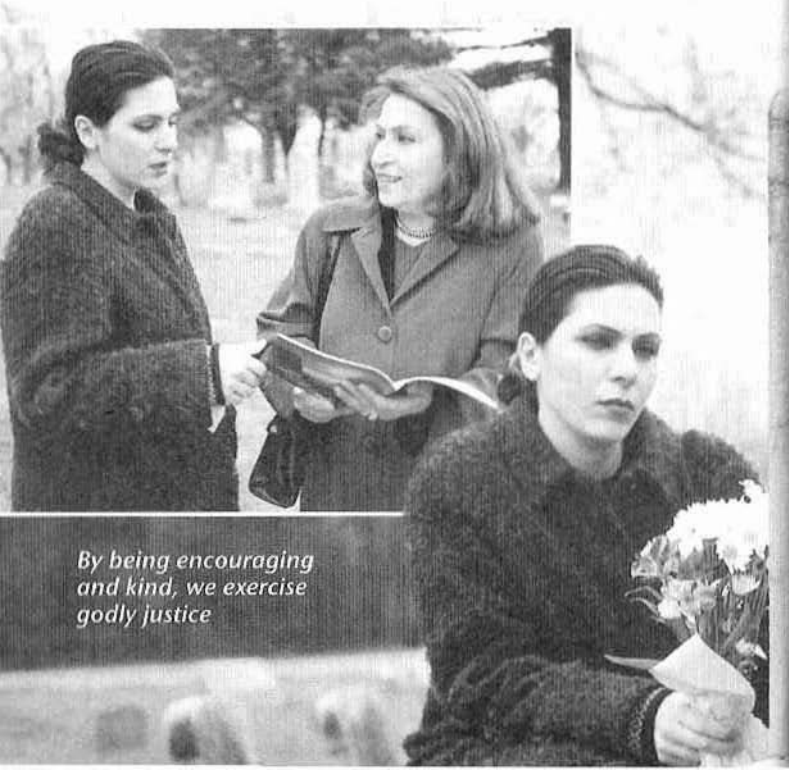
8. (a) How did Jesus bring forth "justice to the nations"? (b) What does Jesus' illustration about the neighborly Samaritan teach us about justice?

9. How will an understanding of the nature of true justice affect us?

10. Why does displaying justice entail sharing in the preaching and teaching work?

In the parable of the neighborly Samaritan, Jesus showed that true justice embraces all people

in the preaching and teaching activity. Jehovah has generously provided lifesaving knowledge of himself, his Son, and his purposes. (John 17:3) It would not be right or just to keep that knowledge to ourselves. "Do not hold back good from those to whom it is owing, when it happens to be in the power of your hand to do it," says Solomon. (Proverbs 3:27) Let us wholeheartedly share what we know about God with all people, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or national background.—Acts 10:34, 35.



By being encouraging and kind, we exercise godly justice

11 Further, a genuine Christian treats others as Jesus did. Many today face disheartening problems and are in need of compassion and encouragement. Even some dedicated Christians may be so battered by circumstances that they come to resemble crushed reeds or smoldering wicks. Do they not need our support? (Luke 22:32; Acts 11:23) How refreshing to be part of an association of true Christians, who try to imitate Jesus in exercising justice!

12 Will there ever be justice for all? Yes, indeed. Jehovah's Chosen One "will not grow dim nor be crushed until he sets justice in the earth itself." Very soon the enthroned King, the resurrected Christ Jesus, will 'bring vengeance upon those who do not know God.' (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Revelation 16:14-16) Human rulership will be replaced by God's Kingdom. Justice and righteousness will abound. (Proverbs 2:21, 22; Isaiah 11:3-5; Daniel 2: 44; 2 Peter 3:13) With eager expectation, Jehovah's servants everywhere—even those in remote places, "the islands"—await that day.

'I Will Give Him as a Light of the Nations'

13 Isaiah continues: ***"This is what the true God, Jehovah, has said, the Creator of the heavens and the Grand One stretching them out; the One laying out the earth and its produce, the One giving breath to the people on it, and spirit to those walking in it." (Isaiah 42:5)*** What a powerful description of Jehovah, the Creator! This reminder of Jehovah's might gives great weight to his utterance. Jehovah says: ***"I myself, Jehovah, have called you in***

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11. In imitation of Jesus, how should we treat others?
12. Why can we be confident that justice for all will soon become a reality?
13. What does Jehovah prophesy about his Chosen Servant?

righteousness, and I proceeded to take hold of your hand. And I shall safeguard you and give you as a covenant of the people, as a light of the nations, for you to open the blind eyes, to bring forth out of the dungeon the prisoner, out of the house of detention those sitting in darkness." —Isaiah 42:6, 7.

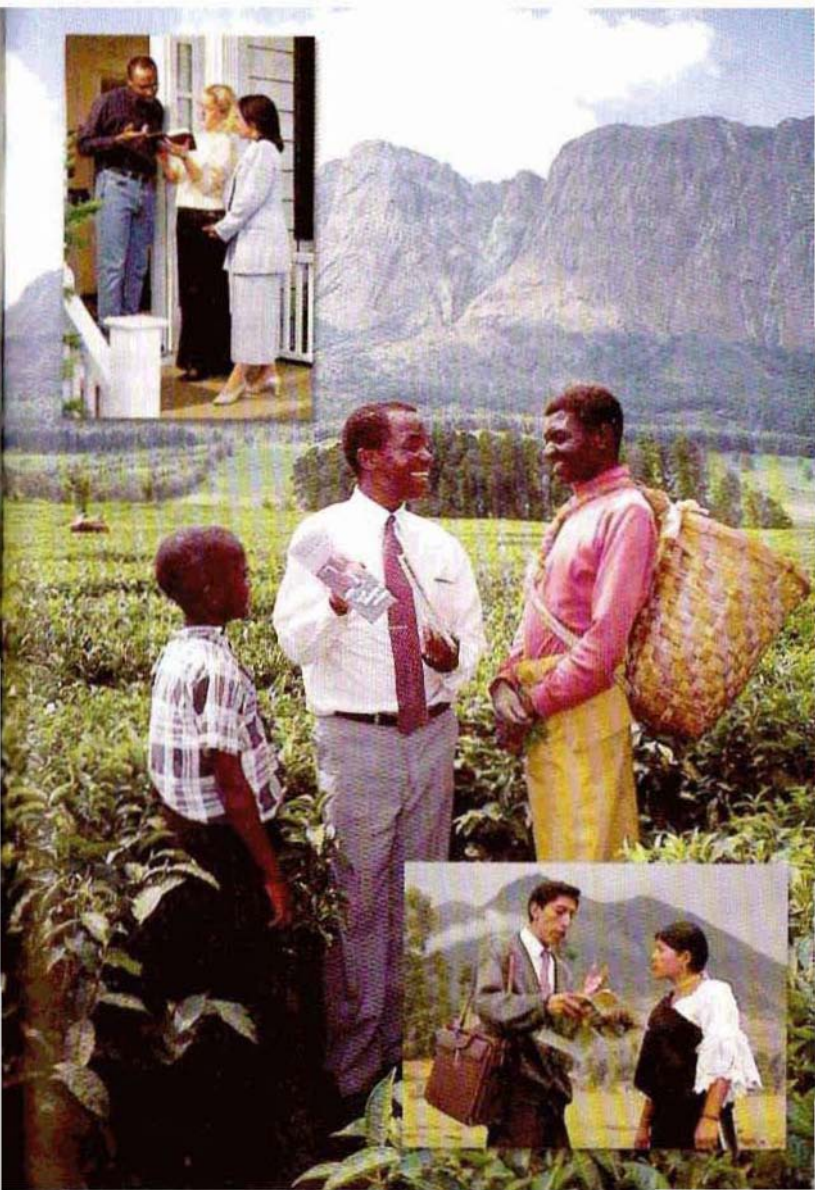
14 The Grand Creator of the universe, the Giver and Sustainer of life, takes hold of his Chosen Servant's hand and promises full and constant support. How reassuring that is! Furthermore, Jehovah keeps him safe so as to give him as "a covenant of the people." A covenant is a contract, a compact, a solemn promise. It is a sure ordinance. Yes, Jehovah has made his Servant "a pledge to the people."—*An American Translation.*

15 As "a light of the nations," the promised Servant will open "the blind eyes" and liberate "those sitting in darkness." This Jesus did. By bearing witness to the truth, Jesus glorified the name of his heavenly Father. (John 17: 4, 6) He laid bare religious falsehoods, preached the good news of the Kingdom, and opened the door to spiritual freedom for those in religious bondage. (Matthew 15: 3-9; Luke 4:43; John 18:37) He warned against performing works that belong to darkness and exposed Satan as "the father of the lie" and "the ruler of this world."—John 3:19-21; 8:44; 16:11.

16 Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." (John 8: 12) He proved to be so in an outstanding way when he

14. (a) What is meant by Jehovah's taking hold of the hand of his approved Servant? (b) What role does the Chosen Servant play?

15, 16. In what way did Jesus serve as "a light of the nations"?



offered his perfect human life as a ransom. Thus he opened up the way for those who exercise faith to have forgiveness of sins, an approved relationship with God, and the prospect of eternal life. (Matthew 20:28; John 3:16) By maintaining perfect godly devotion throughout his life, Jesus upheld Jehovah's sovereignty and proved the Devil a liar. Jesus truly was a giver of sight to the blind and a liberator of those imprisoned in spiritual darkness.

17 In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his disciples: "You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14) Are

17. In what ways do we serve as light bearers?

The approved Servant was given "as a light of the nations"

we not also light bearers? By our way of life and by our preaching work, we have the privilege of directing others to Jehovah, the Source of true enlightenment. In imitation of Jesus, we make known Jehovah's name, uphold His sovereignty, and proclaim His Kingdom as mankind's only hope. Further, as light bearers we expose religious falsehoods, warn against unclean works that belong to darkness, and expose Satan, the wicked one.—Acts 1:8; 1 John 5:19.

"Sing to Jehovah a New Song"

18 Now Jehovah turns his attention to his people, saying: ***"I am Jehovah. That is my name; and to no one else shall I give my own glory, neither my praise to graven images. The first things—here they have come, but new things I am telling out. Before they begin to spring up, I cause you people to hear them."*** **(*Isaiah 42:8, 9*)** The prophecy about "my servant" was uttered, not by one of the valueless gods, but by the only living and true God. It was bound to come true, and it did. Jehovah God is indeed the Author of new things, and he causes his people to know of them before they occur. How should we respond?

19 Isaiah writes: ***"Sing to Jehovah a new song, his praise from the extremity of the earth, you men that are going down to the sea and to that which fills it, you islands and you inhabiting them. Let the wilderness and its cities raise their voice, the settlements that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of the crag cry out in joy. From the top of the mountains let people cry aloud. Let them attribute to***

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18. What does Jehovah cause his people to know?

19, 20. (a) What song must be sung? (b) Who today are singing the song of praise to Jehovah?

Jehovah glory, and in the islands let them tell forth even his praise."—Isaiah 42:10-12.

20 The inhabitants of cities, of villages in the wilderness, of islands, even of "Kedar," or encampments in deserts —people everywhere—are urged to sing a song of praise to Jehovah. How exciting it is that in our day millions have responded to this prophetic appeal! They have embraced the truth of God's Word and have made Jehovah their God. Jehovah's people are singing this new song—attributing glory to Jehovah—in more than 230 lands. How thrilling it is to sing in this multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial chorus!

21 Can opposers stand up against God and silence this song of praise? Impossible! ***"Like a mighty man Jehovah himself will go forth. Like a warrior he will awaken zeal. He will shout, yes, he will let out a war cry; over his enemies he will show himself mightier." (Isaiah 42:13)*** What power can stand up against Jehovah? Some 3,500 years ago, the prophet Moses and the sons of Israel sang out: "Jehovah is a manly person of war. Jehovah is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his military forces he has cast into the sea, and the choice of his warriors have been sunk in the Red Sea." (Exodus 15:3, 4) Jehovah was victorious over the most powerful military force of that time. No enemy of God's people can succeed when Jehovah goes forth as a mighty warrior.

"I Have Kept Quiet for a Long Time"

22 Jehovah is fair and just, even when executing judgment against his enemies. He says: ***"I have kept quiet for a***

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21. Why can the enemies of God's people not succeed in silencing the song of praise to Jehovah?

22, 23. Why does Jehovah 'keep quiet for a long time'?

long time. I continued silent. I kept exercising self-control. Like a woman giving birth I am going to groan, pant, and gasp at the same time. I shall devastate mountains and hills, and all their vegetation I shall dry up. And I will turn rivers into islands, and reedy pools I shall dry up."—Isaiah 42:14, 15.

23 Before taking judicial action, Jehovah allows time to pass in order to give wrongdoers an opportunity to turn from their bad ways. (Jeremiah 18:7-10; 2 Peter 3:9) Consider the case of the Babylonians, who, as the dominant world power, desolate Jerusalem in the year 607 B.C.E. Jehovah permits this so as to discipline the Israelites because of their unfaithfulness. However, the Babylonians fail to recognize the role that they are playing. They treat God's people far more harshly than God's judgment requires. (Isaiah 47:6, 7; Zechariah 1:15) How it must hurt the true God to see his people suffer! But he withholds taking action until his due time. Then, he labors—like a woman giving birth—to liberate his covenant people and brings them forth as an independent nation. To accomplish this, in 539 B.C.E., he dries up and devastates Babylon and her defenses.

24 How thrilled God's people must be when, after so many years of exile, the way home finally opens up for them! (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23) They must be delighted to experience the fulfillment of Jehovah's promise: ***"I will make the blind ones walk in a way that they have not known; in a roadway that they have not known I shall cause them to tread. I shall turn a dark place before them into light, and rugged terrain into level land. These are the things that I will do for them, and I will not leave them." —Isaiah 42:16.***

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24. What prospect does Jehovah open up for his people Israel?

25 How do these words apply today? Well, for a long time now—for centuries—Jehovah has let the nations go their own way. However, his appointed time for settling matters is close. In modern times he has raised up a people to bear witness to his name. Leveling any opposition against them, he has smoothed the way for them to worship him "with spirit and truth." (John 4:24) He promised: "I will not leave them," and he has kept his word. What of those who persist in worshiping false gods? Jehovah says: ***"They must be turned back, they will be very much ashamed, those who are putting trust in the carved image, those who are saying to a molten image: 'You are our gods.'"*** **(*Isaiah 42:17*)** How vital that we remain faithful to Jehovah, as did his Chosen One!

'A Servant Who Is Deaf and Blind'

26 God's Chosen Servant, Jesus Christ, remained faithful to death. Jehovah's people Israel, though, prove to be an unfaithful servant, deaf and blind in a spiritual sense. Addressing them, Jehovah says: ***"Hear, you deaf ones; and look forth to see, you blind ones. Who is blind, if not my servant, and who is deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as the one rewarded, or blind as the servant of Jehovah? It was a case of seeing many things, but you did not keep watching. It was a case of opening the ears, but you did not keep listening. Jehovah himself for the sake of his righteousness has taken a delight in that he should magnify the law and make it majestic." —Isaiah 42:18-21.***

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25. (a) Of what can Jehovah's people today be certain? (b) What should be our determination?

26, 27. How does Israel prove to be 'a servant deaf and blind,' and with what consequences?

27 What a lamentable failure Israel is! Her people repeatedly fall away to worshiping the demon gods of the nations. Again and again, Jehovah keeps sending his messengers, but his people pay no heed. (2 Chronicles 36:14-16) Isaiah foretells the consequences: ***"It is a people plundered and pillaged, all of them being trapped in the holes, and in the houses of detention they have been kept hidden. They have come to be for plunder without a deliverer, for pillage without anyone to say: 'Bring back!' Who among you people will give ear to this? Who will pay attention and listen for later times? Who has given Jacob for mere pillage, and Israel to the plunderers? Is it not Jehovah, the One against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they did not want to walk and to whose law they did not listen? So He kept pouring out upon him rage, his anger, and the strength of war. And it kept consuming him all around, but he took no note; and it kept blazing up against him, but he would lay nothing to heart."—Isaiah 42:22-25.***

28 Because of the unfaithfulness of her inhabitants, Jehovah allows the land of Judah to be plundered and pillaged in 607 B.C.E. The Babylonians burn Jehovah's temple, desolate Jerusalem, and take the Jews captive. (2 Chronicles 36:17-21) May we take to heart this warning example and never turn a deaf ear to Jehovah's instructions or a blind eye to his written Word. Rather, may we seek Jehovah's approval by imitating Christ Jesus, the Servant whom Jehovah himself approved. Like Jesus, may we make true justice known by what we say and do. In this way, we will remain among Jehovah's people, serving as light bearers who praise the true God and give him glory.

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28. (a) What can we learn from the example of the inhabitants of Judah? (b) How may we seek Jehovah's approval?

"You Are My Witnesses"!

Isaiah 43:1-28

THE ability to predict the future is one thing that distinguishes the true God from all false gods. But when Jehovah prophesies, he has more in mind than proving his Godship. As demonstrated in Isaiah chapter 43, Jehovah makes prophecy a proof both of his Godship and of his love for his covenant people. His people, in turn, are not to discern fulfilled prophecy and yet remain mute; they are to bear testimony to what they have seen. Yes, they are to be Jehovah's witnesses!

2 Sadly, by Isaiah's time Israel is in such a deplorable state that Jehovah considers the people spiritually disabled. ***"Bring forth a people blind though eyes themselves exist, and the ones deaf though they have ears."*** **(*Isaiah 43:8*)** How can people who are spiritually blind and deaf serve Jehovah as his living witnesses? There is only one way. Their eyes and ears must be miraculously opened. And open them, Jehovah does! How? First, Jehovah administers severe discipline—the inhabitants of the northern kingdom of Israel go into exile in 740 B.C.E., and those of Judah, in 607 B.C.E. Then, Jehovah acts with power in behalf of his people by liberating them and bringing a spiritually revitalized, repentant remnant back to their home-

1. How does Jehovah use prophecy, and how are his people to respond to fulfilled prophecy?

2. (a) What is the spiritual condition of Israel in Isaiah's time? (b) How does Jehovah open the eyes of his people?

land in 537 B.C.E. In fact, Jehovah is so confident that his purpose in this regard cannot be thwarted that some 200 years in advance, he speaks of Israel's liberation as though it has already occurred.

3 ***"This is what Jehovah has said, your Creator, O Jacob, and your Former, O Israel: 'Do not be afraid, for I have repurchased you. I have called you by your name. You are mine. In case you should pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not flood over you. In case you should walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, neither will the flame itself singe you. For I am Jehovah your God, the Holy One of Israel your Savior.'" —Isaiah 43:1-3a.***

4 Jehovah has a special interest in Israel because the nation belongs to him. It is his own personal creation in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. (Genesis 12:1-3) Thus, Psalm 100:3 says: "Know that Jehovah is God. It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasturage." As Israel's Creator and Repurchaser, Jehovah will bring his people safely back to their homeland. Impediments, such as waters, flooding rivers, and fiery deserts, will not hinder or harm them, just as similar things did not slow their forefathers when en route to the Promised Land a thousand years earlier.

5 Jehovah's words also give comfort to the modern-day remnant of spiritual Israel, the members of which are a spirit-begotten "new creation." (2 Corinthians 5:17) Having stepped boldly before "the waters" of mankind, they

3. What encouragement does Jehovah give to the future exiles?
4. How is it that Jehovah is Israel's Creator, and what assurance does he give his people in regard to their return to their homeland?
5. (a) How do Jehovah's words comfort spiritual Israel? (b) Who are the companions of spiritual Israel, and by whom were these prefigured?

have enjoyed God's loving protection through figurative floods. Fire emanating from their enemies has not harmed them but, rather, has served to refine them. (Zechariah 13:9; Revelation 12:15-17) Jehovah's watchcare has also extended to the "great crowd" of "other sheep," who have joined God's spiritual nation. (Revelation 7:9; John 10:16) These ones were prefigured by the "vast mixed company" that made the Exodus from Egypt along with the Israelites and also by the non-Jews who returned with the freed exiles from Babylon.—Exodus 12:38; Ezra 2:1, 43, 55, 58.

6 Jehovah promises to deliver his people from Babylon by means of the armies of Media and Persia. (Isaiah 13:17-

6. How does Jehovah show himself to be a God of justice in regard to the ransoming of (a) fleshly Israel? (b) spiritual Israel?

Jehovah will support the Jews on their way home to Jerusalem

19; 21:2, 9; 44:28; Daniel 5:28) As a God of justice, Jehovah will pay his Medo-Persian "employees" a suitable ransom in exchange for Israel. ***"I have given Egypt as a ransom for you, Ethiopia and Seba in place of you. Owing to the fact that you have been precious in my eyes, you have been considered honorable, and I myself have loved you. And I shall give men in place of you, and national groups in place of your soul."*** ***(Isaiah 43:3b, 4)*** History confirms that the Persian Empire did conquer Egypt, Ethiopia, and nearby Seba, just as God foretold. (Proverbs 21:18) In 1919 by means of Jesus Christ, Jehovah similarly released the remnant of spiritual Israel from captivity. For his services, however, Jesus needed no reward. He was no pagan ruler. And he was liberating his own spiritual brothers. Besides, in 1914, Jehovah had already given him "nations as [his]

inheritance and the ends of the earth as [his] own possession."—Psalm 2:8.

7 Notice how Jehovah openly expresses his tender feelings toward the repurchased exiles. He tells them that they are "precious" and "honorable" to him and that he 'loves' them. (Jeremiah 31:3) He feels the same way—and even more so—toward his loyal servants today. Anointed Christians have been brought into a relationship with God, not by birth, but by the operation of God's holy spirit following their personal dedication to their Creator. Jehovah has drawn these ones to his Son and to himself and written his laws and principles on their receptive hearts.—Jeremiah 31:31-34; John 6:44.

8 Offering still more reassurance to the exiles, Jehovah adds: ***"Do not be afraid, for I am with you. From the sunrising I shall bring your seed, and from the sunset I shall collect you together. I shall say to the north, 'Give up!' and to the south, 'Do not keep back. Bring my sons from far off, and my daughters from the extremity of the earth, everyone that is called by my name and that I have created for my own glory, that I have formed, yes, that I have made.'"*** ***(Isaiah 43:5-7)*** Not even the remotest parts of the earth will be beyond Jehovah's reach when the time comes to free his sons and daughters and to bring them back to their beloved homeland. (Jeremiah 30:10, 11) No doubt, in their eyes this liberation will eclipse the nation's earlier deliverance from Egypt.—Jeremiah 16:14, 15.

9 By reminding his people that they are called by his

7. How does Jehovah feel toward his people, both in ancient and in modern times?
8. What reassurance does Jehovah give the exiles, and how will they feel about their deliverance?
9. In what two ways does Jehovah relate his acts of deliverance to his name?

name, Jehovah confirms his promise to deliver Israel. (Isaiah 54:5, 6) What is more, Jehovah attaches his name to his promises of liberation. In so doing, he ensures that *he* will receive the glory when his prophetic word is fulfilled. Not even Babylon's conqueror will be entitled to the honor due the one and only living God.

The Gods on Trial

10 Jehovah now makes his promise to free Israel the basis for a universal court case in which he puts the gods of the nations on trial. We read: ***"Let the nations all be collected together at one place, and let national groups be gathered together. Who [of their gods] is there among them that can tell this? Or can they cause us to hear even the first things? Let them [their gods] furnish their witnesses, that they may be declared righteous, or let them hear and say, 'It is the truth!'"*** **(*Isaiah 43:9*)** Jehovah places a formidable challenge before the nations of the world. In effect, he says: 'Let your gods prove that they are gods by accurately foretelling the future.' As only the true God can prophesy unerringly, this test will expose all impostors. (Isaiah 48:5) But the Almighty adds yet another legal stipulation: All who claim to be true gods must furnish witnesses, both to their predictions and to the fulfillment of these. Naturally, Jehovah does not exclude himself from this legal requirement.

11 Being impotent, false gods can furnish no witnesses. Hence, the witness stand remains embarrassingly empty. But now comes Jehovah's time to confirm his Godship. Looking toward his people, he says: ***"You are my witnesses, . . . even my servant whom I have chosen, in order that***

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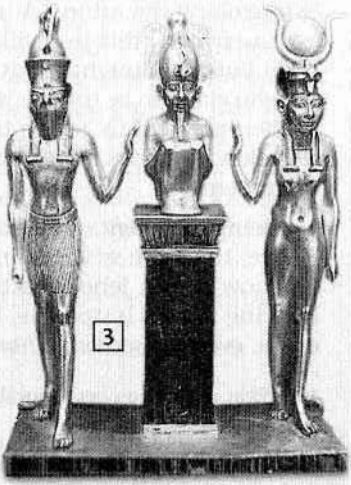
10. What challenge does Jehovah put before the nations and their gods?

11. What commission does Jehovah give to his servant, and what does Jehovah reveal about his Godship?

Jehovah challenges the nations to produce witnesses for their gods

1. Bronze statue of Baal 2. Clay figurines of Ashtoreth 3. Egyptian triad of Horus, Osiris, and Isis 4. Greek gods Athena (left) and Aphrodite



you may know and have faith in me, and that you may understand that I am the same One. Before me there was no God formed, and after me there continued to be none. I—I am Jehovah, and besides me there is no savior. I myself have told forth and have saved and have caused it to be heard, when there was among you no strange god. So you are my witnesses, . . . and I am God. Also, all the time I am the same One; and there is no one effecting deliverance out of my own hand. I shall get active, and who can turn [my hand] back?"—Isaiah 43:10-13.

12 In response to Jehovah's words, the witness stand soon overflows with a joyful throng of witnesses. Their testimony is clear and unassailable. Like Joshua, they testify that 'everything Jehovah has spoken has come true. Not one word has failed.' (Joshua 23:14) Still ringing in the ears of Jehovah's people are the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets who, as with one voice, foretold Judah's exile and their miraculous deliverance from exile. (Jeremiah 25:11, 12) Judah's deliverer, Cyrus, was named well before he was even born!—Isaiah 44:26–45:1.

13 In view of this mountain of evidence, who can deny that Jehovah is the only true God? Unlike pagan gods, Jehovah alone is uncreated; he alone is the true God.* Consequently, the people bearing Jehovah's name have the unique and thrilling privilege of relating his wonderful deeds to future generations and to others who inquire about him. (Psalm 78:5-7) In a similar way, Jehovah's modern-day Witnesses have the privilege of declaring Jehovah's name in all the earth. In the 1920's the Bible

* In the mythologies of the nations, many gods are "born" and have "children."

12, 13. (a) What abundant testimony do Jehovah's people have to present? (b) How has Jehovah's name come to the fore in modern times?

Students became increasingly aware of the deep significance of God's name, Jehovah. Then, on July 26, 1931, at a convention in Columbus, Ohio, the Society's president, Joseph F. Rutherford, presented a resolution entitled "A New Name." The words, "We desire to be known as and called by the name, to wit, *Jehovah's witnesses,*" thrilled the conventioners, who approved the resolution with a resounding "Aye!" Since then, Jehovah's name has gained worldwide prominence.—Psalm 83:18.

14 Jehovah cares for those who bear his name honorably, viewing them as "the pupil of his eye." He reminds the Israelites of this, telling them how he delivered them from Egypt and led them safely through the wilderness. (Deuteronomy 32:10, 12) At that time there was no strange god among them, for they saw with their own eyes the utter humiliation of all the gods of Egypt. Yes, the entire Egyptian pantheon could neither protect Egypt nor prevent Israel's departure. (Exodus 12:12) Likewise, mighty Babylon, whose urban landscape is dominated by at least 50 temples to false gods, will be unable to check the hand of the Almighty when he frees his people. Clearly, "there is no savior" besides Jehovah.

War-Horses Fall, Prisons Open

15 ***"This is what Jehovah has said, the Repurchaser of you people, the Holy One of Israel: 'For your sakes I will send to Babylon and cause the bars of the prisons to come down, and the Chaldeans in the ships with whining cries on their part. I am Jehovah your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.' This is what Jehovah has said, the One making a way through the sea itself and a roadway even through***

14. Of what does Jehovah remind the Israelites, and why is this reminder timely?
15. What does Jehovah prophesy concerning Babylon?

strong waters, the One bringing forth the war chariot and the horse, the military force and the strong ones at the same time: 'They will lie down. They will not get up. They will certainly be extinguished. Like a flaxen wick they must be put out.'"—Isaiah 43:14-17.

16 Babylon is like a prison to the exiles in that it prevents their return to Jerusalem. But Babylon's defenses are no obstacle to the Almighty, the One who earlier made "a way through the [Red Sea] itself and a roadway even through strong waters"—apparently those of the Jordan. (Exodus 14:16; Joshua 3:13) In a similar way, Jehovah's agent, Cyrus, will make the mighty Euphrates recede, allowing his warriors entry into the city. Chaldean merchants plying Babylon's canals—waterways for thousands of commercial galleys and for barges carrying the Babylonian gods—will whine in grief when their mighty capital falls. Like Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea, Babylon's swift chariots will be helpless. They will not save her. As easily as one extinguishes the flaxen wick of an oil lamp, the invader will snuff out the lives of any would-be defenders.

Jehovah Leads His People Safely Home

17 Comparing his earlier acts of deliverance with what he is about to do, Jehovah says: ***"Do not remember the first things, and to the former things do not turn your consideration. Look! I am doing something new. Now it will spring up. You people will know it, will you not? Really, through the wilderness I shall set a way, through the desert rivers. The wild beast of the field will glorify me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I shall have given water even in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to cause my people, my***

16. What will befall Babylon, the Chaldean merchants, and any would-be defenders of Babylon?

17, 18. (a) What "new" thing does Jehovah prophesy? (b) In what way are the people not to remember the former things, and why?

chosen one, to drink, the people whom I have formed for myself, that they should recount the praise of me."—Isaiah 43:18-21.

18 In saying, "do not remember the first things," Jehovah is not suggesting that his servants erase his past acts of salvation from their minds. In fact, many of these acts are part of Israel's divinely inspired history, and Jehovah commanded that the escape from Egypt be remembered annually at the Passover celebration. (Leviticus 23:5; Deuteronomy 16:1-4) However, Jehovah now wants his people to glorify him on the basis of "something new"—something they will experience firsthand. This includes not just their deliverance from Babylon but also their miraculous journey home, perhaps by the more direct desert route. In that barren land, Jehovah will make "a way" for them and will perform powerful works reminiscent of what he did for the Israelites in Moses' day—indeed, he will feed the returnees in the desert and quench their thirst with veritable rivers. So bounteous will Jehovah's provisions be that even the wild beasts will glorify God and refrain from attacking the people.

19 Similarly, in 1919 the remnant of spiritual Israel were freed from Babylonish captivity, and they set off on a route Jehovah had prepared for them, "the Way of Holiness." (Isaiah 35:8) Unlike the Israelites, they did not have to move through the burning desert from one geographical location to another, and their journey was not concluded after a few months with an arrival in Jerusalem. However, "the Way of Holiness" did lead the remnant of anointed Christians into a spiritual paradise. In their case, they remain on that "Way of Holiness," since they still have to journey through this system of things. As long as they re-

19. How do the remnant of spiritual Israel and their companions walk upon "the Way of Holiness"?

main on the highway—as long as they observe God's standards of cleanness and holiness—they remain in the spiritual paradise. And what a joy for them to be joined by a great crowd of "non-Israelite" companions! In sharp contrast with those who look to Satan's system, both the remnant and their companions continue to enjoy a rich spiritual banquet at Jehovah's hand. (Isaiah 25:6; 65:13, 14) Discerning Jehovah's blessing on his people, many beastlike ones have changed their ways and glorified the true God.—Isaiah 11:6-9.

Jehovah Reveals His Hurt

20 In ancient times the restored remnant of Israel are a changed people when compared with Isaiah's wicked generation. Of the latter, Jehovah says: ***"You have not called even me, O Jacob, because you have grown weary of me, O Israel. You have not brought me the sheep of your whole burnt offerings, and with your sacrifices you have not glorified me. I have not compelled you to serve me with a gift, nor have I made you weary with frankincense. For me you have bought no sweet cane with any money; and with the fat of your sacrifices you have not saturated me. In reality you have compelled me to serve because of your sins; you have made me weary with your errors."—Isaiah 43:22-24.***

21 In saying, "I have not compelled you to serve me with a gift, nor have I made you weary with frankincense," Jehovah is not suggesting that sacrifice and frankincense (a component of holy incense) are not required. Indeed, these are an integral part of true worship under the Law covenant. The same is true of the "cane," which refers to aromatic calamus, a sweet-smelling ingredient of

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20. How has the Israel of Isaiah's day failed Jehovah?
21, 22. (a) Why can it be said that Jehovah's requirements are not burdensome? (b) How do the people, in effect, make Jehovah serve them?

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holy anointing oil. The Israelites have been neglecting the use of these in temple service. But are such requirements burdensome? No indeed! Jehovah's requirements are light when compared with those of false gods. For instance, the false god Molech demanded child sacrifice—something that Jehovah has never required!—Deuteronomy 30:11; Micah 6:3, 4, 8.

22 If only the Israelites had spiritual perception, for then they would never 'grow weary of Jehovah.' By looking in his Law, they would see his deep love for them and gladly offer him "the fat," the best part of their sacrifices. Instead, they greedily keep the fat for themselves. (Leviticus 3:9-11, 16) How this wicked nation weighs Jehovah down with the burden of their sins—in effect, making him serve them!—Nehemiah 9:28-30.

Discipline Reaps Fruitage

23 Although severe, and deservedly so, Jehovah's discipline achieves the desired results, making mercy possible. ***"I—I am the One that is wiping out your transgressions for my own sake, and your sins I shall not remember. Remind me; let us put ourselves on judgment together; tell your own account of it in order that you may be in the right. Your own father, the first one, has sinned, and your own spokesmen [*"interpreters," footnote*] have transgressed against me. So I shall profane the princes of the holy place, and I will give Jacob over as a man devoted to destruction and Israel over to words of abuse." (Isaiah 43:25-28)*** Like all the nations of the world, Israel descends from Adam, "the first one." Hence, no Israelite can prove himself to be

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23. (a) Why is Jehovah's discipline well deserved? (b) What is involved in God's disciplining of Israel?

"in the right." Even Israel's "spokesmen"—her teachers, or interpreters, of the Law—have sinned against Jehovah and taught falsehoods. In turn, Jehovah will hand his entire nation over "to destruction" and "to words of abuse." He will also profane all those officiating at his "holy place," or sanctuary.

24 Notice, though, that the resulting divine mercy will not simply be because of Israel's contrition; it will be for Jehovah's own sake. Yes, his name is involved. Were he to abandon Israel to permanent exile, his own name would be reproached by onlookers. (Psalm 79:9; Ezekiel 20:8-10) Likewise today, the salvation of humans is secondary to the sanctification of Jehovah's name and the vindication of his sovereignty. Nonetheless, Jehovah loves those who accept his discipline without reservation and who worship him with spirit and truth. He demonstrates his love for these ones—whether anointed or other sheep—by wiping out their transgressions on the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.—John 3:16; 4:23, 24.

25 Furthermore, Jehovah will soon demonstrate his love for a great crowd of his loyal worshipers when he does something new in their behalf by delivering them through "the great tribulation" into a cleansed "new earth." (Revelation 7:14; 2 Peter 3:13) They will witness the most awesome manifestation of Jehovah's power ever seen by humans. The certain prospect of that event causes the anointed remnant and all those who will make up the great crowd to rejoice and to live each day in accord with that lofty commission: "You are my witnesses"!—Isaiah 43:10.

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24. For what primary reason will Jehovah forgive his people—both ancient and modern—yet, what are his feelings toward them?
25. What awe-inspiring things will Jehovah perform in the near future, and how can we demonstrate our appreciation now?

The True God Foretells Deliverance

Isaiah 44:1-28

'WHO is the true God?' This question has been asked throughout the centuries. How surprising, then, that in the book of Isaiah, Jehovah himself raises the question! He invites humans to consider: 'Is Jehovah the only true God? Or is there another who can challenge his position?' After initiating the discussion, Jehovah provides reasonable criteria for settling the issue of Godship. The reasoning presented leads honesthearted people to one irresistible conclusion.

2 During the days of Isaiah, images are widely worshiped. In the frank and clear discussion recorded in chapter 44 of Isaiah's prophetic book, how futile image worship is shown to be! Yet, God's own people have fallen into the trap of worshiping idols. Hence, as seen in previous chapters of Isaiah, the Israelites are in line for strong discipline. Lovingly, though, Jehovah offers the nation reassurance that although he will allow the Babylonians to take his people into captivity, he will deliver them in his own due time. The fulfillment of the prophecies of deliverance from captivity and of restoration of pure worship will prove beyond doubt that Jehovah

1, 2. (a) What questions does Jehovah raise? (b) How will Jehovah prove that he alone is the true God?

alone is the true God, to the shame of all who worship the lifeless gods of the nations.

3 The prophecies in this part of Isaiah and their fulfillment in ancient times strengthen the faith of Christians today. Moreover, Isaiah's prophetic words have a fulfillment in our day and even in the future. And those events involve a deliverer and a deliverance even greater than the ones predicted for God's ancient people.

Hope for Those Who Belong to Jehovah

4 Chapter 44 begins on a positive note with a reminder that Israel has been chosen by God, separated from the surrounding nations to become his servant. The prophecy says: ***"Now listen, O Jacob my servant, and you, O Israel, whom I have chosen. This is what Jehovah has said, your Maker and your Former, who kept helping you even from the belly, 'Do not be afraid, O my servant Jacob, and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.'"*** **(*Isaiah 44:1, 2*)** Jehovah has cared for Israel from its mother's womb, as it were, ever since Israel became a nation after coming out of Egypt. He calls his people collectively "Jeshurun," meaning "Upright One," a title expressing affection and tenderness. The name is also a reminder that the Israelites must remain upright, which they have often failed to do.

5 How pleasant and refreshing are Jehovah's next words! He says: ***"I shall pour out water upon the thirsty***

3. How do Isaiah's prophetic words help Christians today?
4. How does Jehovah encourage Israel?
5, 6. What refreshing provisions does Jehovah supply for Israel, and with what result?

***one, and trickling streams upon the dry place. I shall pour out my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your descendants. And they will certainly spring up as among the green grass, like poplars by the water ditches."* (Isaiah 44:3, 4)** Even in hot, dry country, stands of trees can flourish by water sources. When Jehovah provides his life-giving waters of truth and pours out his holy spirit, Israel will flourish mightily, like trees alongside irrigation canals. (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7, 8) Jehovah will give his people the strength to carry out their role as witnesses to his Godship.

6 One result of this outpouring of holy spirit will be a renewed appreciation by some individuals of Israel's relationship with Jehovah. Thus, we read: ***"This one will say: 'I belong to Jehovah.' And that one will call himself by the name of Jacob, and another will write upon his hand: 'Belonging to Jehovah.' And by the name of Israel one will betitle himself." (Isaiah 44:5)*** Yes, there will be honor in carrying the name of Jehovah, for he will be seen to be the only true God.

A Challenge to the Gods

7 Under the Mosaic Law, a repurchaser—normally a male next of kin—could buy a person out of bondage. (Leviticus 25:47-54; Ruth 2:20) Jehovah now identifies himself as Israel's Repurchaser—the one who will redeem the nation, to the embarrassment of Babylon and all her gods. (Jeremiah 50:34) He confronts the false gods and their worshipers, saying: ***"This is what Jehovah has said, the King of Israel and the Repurchaser of him, Jehovah of armies, 'I am the first and I am the last, and besides me***

7, 8. How does Jehovah challenge the gods of the nations?

there is no God. And who is there like me? Let him call out, that he may tell it and present it to me. From when I appointed the people of long ago, both the things coming and the things that will enter in let them tell on their part. Do not be in dread, you people, and do not become stupefied. Have I not from that time on caused you individually to hear and told it out? And you are my witnesses. Does there exist a God besides me? No, there is no Rock. I have recognized none.'"—Isaiah 44:6-8.

8 Jehovah challenges the gods to present their case. Can they call the things that are not as if they are, predicting future events with such accuracy that it appears as if they are already happening? Only 'the first and the last,' who existed before all the false gods were thought of and will still be there when they are long forgotten, can do such a thing. His people need not fear to bear witness to this truth, since they have the support of Jehovah, who is as firm and stable as a massive rock!—Deuteronomy 32:4; 2 Samuel 22:31, 32.

The Vanity of Image Worship

9 Jehovah's challenge to the false gods brings to mind the second of the Ten Commandments. That commandment clearly stated: "You must not make for yourself a carved image or a form like anything that is in the heavens above or that is on the earth underneath or that is in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them nor be induced to serve them." (Exodus 20: 4, 5) Of course, this prohibition did not mean that the Israelites were not to make decorative representations of things. Jehovah himself directed that representations of

9. Was it wrong for the Israelites to make any kind of representation of a living thing? Explain.

plants, animals, and cherubs be placed in the tabernacle. (Exodus 25:18; 26:31) However, these were not to be venerated, or worshiped. No one was to pray to or offer sacrifices to those representations. The divinely inspired commandment prohibited the making of any kind of image to be used as an object of worship. Worshiping images or bowing down to them in reverence constitutes idolatry. —1 John 5:21.

10 Isaiah now describes the uselessness of lifeless images and the shame awaiting those who make them: ***"The formers of the carved image are all of them an unreality, and their darlings themselves will be of no benefit; and as their witnesses they see nothing and know nothing, in order that they may be ashamed. Who has formed a god or cast a mere molten image? Of no benefit at all has it been. Look! All his partners themselves will be ashamed, and the craftsmen are from earthling men. They will all of them collect themselves together. They will stand still. They will be in dread. They will be ashamed at the same time."—Isaiah 44:9-11.***

11 Why does God regard these images as so shameful? First, it is impossible to represent the Almighty accurately with material things. (Acts 17:29) Moreover, to worship a created thing rather than the Creator is an affront to Jehovah's Godship. And is it not really beneath the dignity of man, who was created "in God's image"?—Genesis 1: 27; Romans 1:23, 25.

12 Can physical matter somehow acquire holiness because it has been crafted to become something to be worshiped? Isaiah reminds us that making an image is just a

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10, 11. Why does Jehovah view images as shameful?

12, 13. Why can man not craft any image worthy of worship?

human endeavor. The tools and techniques of an image maker are the same as those used by any other artisan: ***"As for the carver of iron with the billhook, he has been busy at it with the coals; and with the hammers he proceeds to form it, and he keeps busy at it with his powerful arm. Also, he has become hungry, and so without power. He has not drunk water; so he gets tired. As for the wood carver, he has stretched out the measuring line; he traces it out with red chalk; he works it up with a wood scraper; and with a compass he keeps tracing it out, and gradually he makes it like the representation of a man, like the beauty of mankind, to sit in a house."—Isaiah 44:12, 13.***

13 The true God made all the living creatures on this earth, including man. Sentient life is a wonderful testimony to Jehovah's Godship, but of course, everything that Jehovah created is inferior to him. Is it possible that man can do better than that? Can he make something superior to himself—so superior that it is worthy of his devotion? When a man makes an image, he gets tired, hungry, and thirsty. These are human limitations, but at least they show that the man is alive. The image he makes may look like a man. It may even be beautiful. But it is lifeless. Images are in no way divine. Further, no carved image has ever 'fallen from heaven,' as if its source were anything more than mortal man.—Acts 19:35.

14 Isaiah proceeds to show that image makers are completely dependent on natural processes and materials that Jehovah created: ***"There is one whose business is to cut down cedars; and he takes a certain species of tree, even a massive tree, and he lets it become strong for***

14. How are image makers completely dependent on Jehovah?

himself among the trees of the forest. He planted the laurel tree, and the pouring rain itself keeps making it get big. And it has become something for man to keep a fire burning. So he takes part of it that he may warm himself. In fact he builds a fire and actually bakes bread. He also works on a god to which he may bow down. He has made it into a carved image, and he prostrates himself to it. Half of it he actually burns up in a fire. Upon half of it he roasts well the flesh that he eats, and he becomes satisfied. He also warms himself and says: 'Aha! I have warmed myself. I have seen the firelight.' But the remainder of it he actually makes into a god itself, into his carved image. He prostrates himself to it and bows down and prays to it and says: 'Deliver me, for you are my god.' "—Isaiah 44:14-17.

15 Can an unburned piece of firewood deliver anybody? Of course not. Only the true God can provide deliverance. How can people idolize inanimate things? Isaiah shows that the real problem lies in a person's heart: ***"They have not come to know, nor do they understand, because their eyes have been besmeared so as not to see, their heart so as to have no insight. And no one recalls to his heart or has knowledge or understanding, saying: 'The half of it I have burned up in a fire, and upon its coals I have also baked bread; I roast flesh and eat. But the rest of it shall I make into a mere detestable thing? To the dried-out wood of a tree shall I prostrate myself?' He is feeding on ashes. His own heart that has been trifled with has led him astray. And he does not deliver his soul, nor does he say: 'Is there not a falsehood in my right hand?' "*** (*Isaiah 44:18-20*) Yes, imagining that idolatry can provide anything good spiritually is like eating ashes instead of nutritious food.

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15. What total lack of understanding is shown by a maker of images?

16 Idolatry really got its start in the heavens when the powerful spirit creature who became Satan coveted the worship due Jehovah alone. So strong was Satan's desire that it alienated him from God. That was really the beginning of idolatry, since the apostle Paul said that covetousness is the same as idolatry. (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:13-15, 17; Colossians 3:5) Satan induced the first human couple to entertain selfish thoughts. Eve coveted what Satan offered her: "Your eyes are bound to be opened and you are bound to be like God, knowing good and bad." Jesus stated that covetousness issues from the heart. (Genesis 3:5; Mark 7:20-23) Idolatry becomes possible when hearts are corrupted. How important, then, for all of us to 'safeguard our hearts,' never allowing anyone or anything to occupy Jehovah's rightful place there! —Proverbs 4:23; James 1:14.

Jehovah Appeals to Hearts

17 Jehovah next appeals to the Israelites to recall that they are in a privileged, responsible position. They are his witnesses! He says: ***"Remember these things, O Jacob, and you, O Israel, because you are my servant. I have formed you. You are a servant belonging to me. O Israel, you will not be forgotten on my part. I will wipe out your transgressions just as with a cloud, and your sins just as with a cloud mass. Do return to me, for I will repurchase you. Joyfully cry out, you heavens, for Jehovah has taken action! Shout in triumph, all you lowest parts of the earth! Become cheerful, you mountains, with joyful outcry, you forest and all you trees in it! For Jehovah has repurchased Jacob, and on Israel he shows his beauty."—Isaiah 44:21-23.***

16. How did idolatry originate, and what makes it possible?
17. What should Israel take to heart?

18 Israel did not form Jehovah. He is not a man-made god. Rather, Jehovah formed Israel to be his chosen servant. And he will prove his Godship once again when he delivers the nation. He addresses his people tenderly, assuring them that if they repent, he will completely cover over their sins, hiding their transgressions as if behind impenetrable clouds. What a reason for Israel to rejoice! Jehovah's example motivates his modern-day servants to imitate his mercy. They can do so by seeking to help erring ones—trying to reestablish them spiritually if possible.—Galatians 6:1, 2.

The Climax of the Test of Godship

19 Jehovah now brings his legal argument to a powerful climax. He is about to present his own answer to the severest test of Godship—the ability to foretell the future accurately. One Bible scholar called the next five verses of Isaiah chapter 44 a "poem of the transcendence of the God of Israel," the one and only Creator, the sole Revealer of the future and Israel's hope of deliverance. The passage rises in a dramatic crescendo to the announcement by name of the man who would liberate the nation from Babylon.

20 ***"This is what Jehovah has said, your Repurchaser and the Former of you from the belly: 'I, Jehovah, am doing everything, stretching out the heavens by myself, laying out the earth. Who was with me? I am frustrating the signs of the empty talkers, and I am the One that makes diviners themselves act crazily; the One turning wise men***

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18. (a) Why does Israel have reason to rejoice? (b) How can Jehovah's servants imitate his example of mercy today?

19, 20. (a) In what way does Jehovah bring his case to a climax? (b) What heartwarming things does Jehovah prophesy for his people, and who will be his agent to bring these things about?

backwards, and the One that turns even their knowledge into foolishness; the One making the word of his servant come true, and the One that carries out completely the counsel of his own messengers; the One saying of Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited," and of the cities of Judah, "They will be rebuilt, and her desolated places I shall raise up"; the One saying to the watery deep, "Be evaporated; and all your rivers I shall dry up"; the One saying of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and all that I delight in he will completely carry out"; even in my saying of Jerusalem, "She will be rebuilt," and of the temple, "You will have your foundation laid."'"—Isaiah 44:24-28.

21 Yes, Jehovah has not only the ability to foretell future events but also the power to carry out his revealed purpose in its entirety. This declaration will serve as a source of hope to Israel. It is a guarantee that although the Babylonian armies will desolate the land, Jerusalem and her dependent cities will rise again and true worship will be reestablished there. But how?

22 Uninspired diviners usually dare not be too specific in their predictions for fear that time will prove them wrong. By contrast, through Isaiah, Jehovah reveals the very name of the man he will use to free his people from captivity so that they can go home and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. His name is Cyrus, and he is known as Cyrus the Great of Persia. Jehovah also gives details of the strategy that Cyrus will use to penetrate Babylon's massive and elaborate defense system. Babylon will be protected by high walls and by waterways that run through and around the city. Cyrus will turn a main element of

21. What guarantee do Jehovah's words provide?
22. Describe how the Euphrates River evaporates.

that system—the Euphrates River—to his advantage. According to ancient historians Herodotus and Xenophon, at a location upstream from Babylon, Cyrus diverted the waters of the Euphrates until the level of the river dropped low enough for his soldiers to wade through. As far as its ability to protect Babylon is concerned, the mighty Euphrates evaporates.

23 What about the promise that Cyrus will release God's people and that he will see to it that Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt? Cyrus himself, in an official proclamation preserved in the Bible, declares: "This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has said, 'All the kingdoms of the earth Jehovah the God of the heavens has given me, and he himself has commissioned me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, may his God prove to be with him. So let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel—he is the true God—which was in Jerusalem.'" (Ezra 1:2, 3) Jehovah's word through Isaiah is completely fulfilled!

Isaiah, Cyrus, and Christians Today

24 The 44th chapter of Isaiah magnifies Jehovah as the one true God and the Deliverer of his ancient people. Moreover, the prophecy has deep meaning for all of us today. Cyrus' decree to rebuild Jerusalem's temple, given in 538/537 B.C.E., set in motion events that culminated in the fulfillment of another remarkable prophecy. Cyrus' decree was followed by that of a later ruler, Arta-

23. What record exists of the fulfillment of the prophecy that Cyrus would liberate Israel?

24. What relationship is there between the going forth of Artaxerxes' command "to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem" and the coming of the Messiah?

xerxes, who decreed that the city of Jerusalem should be rebuilt. The book of Daniel revealed that "from the going forth of the word to restore and to rebuild Jerusalem [in 455 B.C.E.] until Messiah the Leader," there would be 69 "weeks" of 7 years each. (Daniel 9:24, 25) This prophecy also came true. Right on schedule in the year 29 C.E., 483 years after Artaxerxes' decree went into effect in the Promised Land, Jesus was baptized and began his earthly ministry.*

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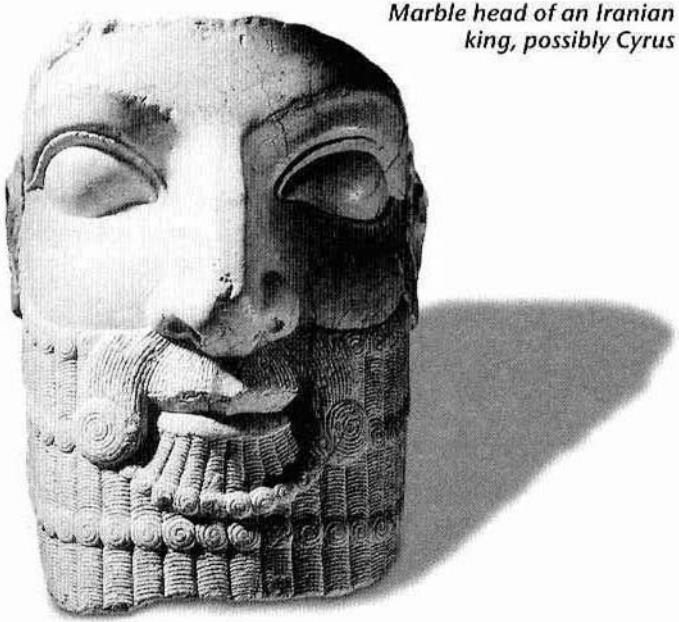
* See chapter 11 of the book *Pay Attention to Daniel's Prophecy!*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



Marble head of an Iranian king, possibly Cyrus

25 The release of loyal Jews from exile, made possible by the fall of Babylon, foreshadowed the release in 1919 of anointed Christians from spiritual exile. That release was evidence that another Babylon, described as a harlot, Babylon the Great—a symbol of all the world's false religions viewed collectively—had experienced a fall. As recorded in the book of Revelation, the apostle John foresaw her fall. (Revelation 14:8) He also foresaw her sudden destruction. John's description of the destruction of that idol-laden world empire resembles in some ways Isaiah's description of Cyrus' successful conquest of the ancient city of Babylon. Just as Babylon's protective waterways failed to save her from Cyrus, so the 'waters' of mankind that support and protect Babylon the Great will be "dried up" before she is justly destroyed.—Revelation 16:12.*

26 From our perspective, more than two-and-a-half millenniums after Isaiah delivered his prophecy, we can see that God indeed "carries out completely the counsel of his own messengers." (Isaiah 44:26) The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy is therefore an outstanding example of the trustworthiness of *all* the prophecies in the Holy Scriptures.

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* See chapters 35 and 36 of the book *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

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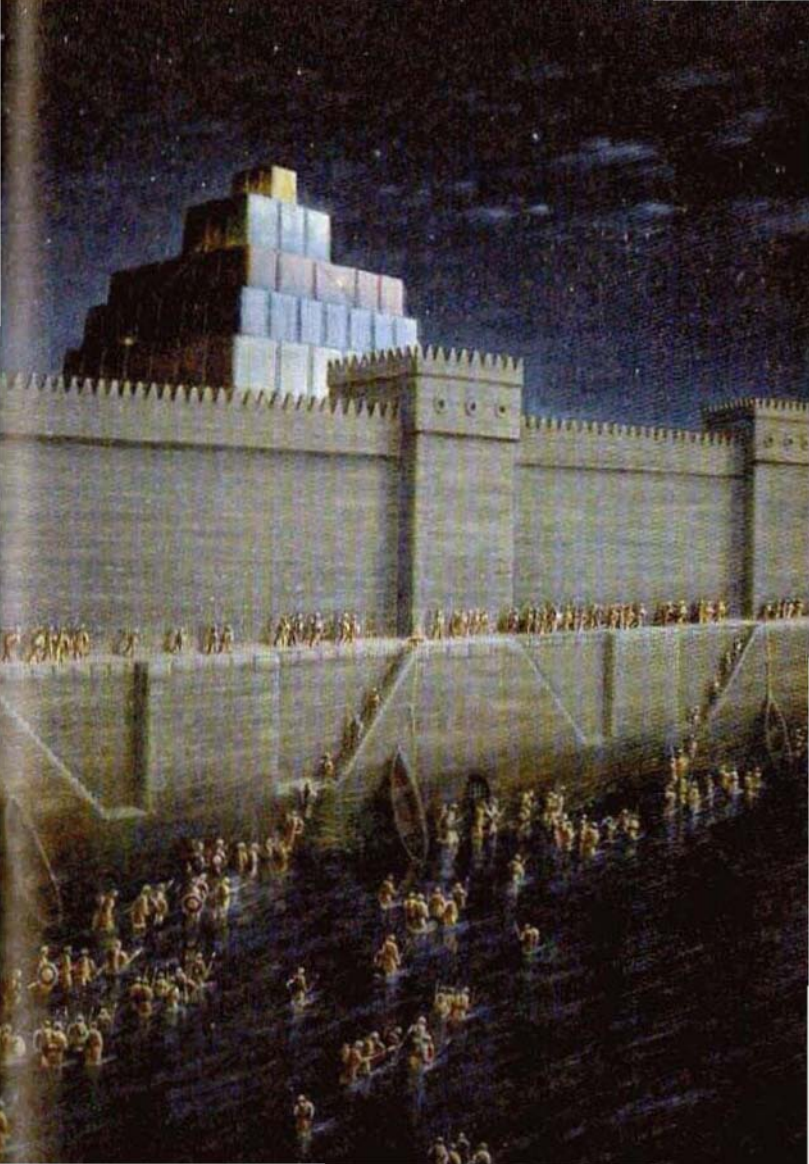
25. What does the fall of Babylon at Cyrus' hands point to in modern times?

26. How does Isaiah's prophecy and its fulfillment strengthen our faith?

Cyrus fulfills prophecy by diverting the waters of the Euphrates



Jehovah—"A Righteous God and a Savior"

Isaiah 45:1-25

JEHOVAH'S promises are reliable. He is the God of revelation and the God of creation. Time and again he has proved to be a righteous God and a Savior of people of all nations. These are some of the heartwarming assurances found in Isaiah chapter 45.

2 In addition, Isaiah chapter 45 contains a remarkable example of Jehovah's prophetic ability. God's spirit enables Isaiah to gaze upon distant countries and to survey events in centuries to come, and it moves him to describe an episode that only Jehovah, the God of true prophecy, could foretell with such accuracy. What is that event? How does it affect God's people in Isaiah's day? What significance does it have for us today? Let us examine the prophet's words.

Jehovah's Pronouncement Against Babylon

3 *"This is what Jehovah has said to his anointed one, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue before him nations, so that I may ungird even the hips of kings; to open before him the two-leaved doors, so that even the gates will not be shut: 'Before you I myself shall*

1, 2. What assurances are given in Isaiah chapter 45, and what questions will be considered?

3. With what vivid expressions does Isaiah 45:1-3a describe Cyrus' conquest?

go, and the swells of land I shall straighten out. The copper doors I shall break in pieces, and the iron bars I shall cut down. And I will give you the treasures in the darkness and the hidden treasures in the concealment places.'" —Isaiah 45:1-3a.

4 Jehovah, through Isaiah, speaks to Cyrus as if he were alive, although in Isaiah's day Cyrus has not yet been born. (Romans 4:17) Since Jehovah appoints Cyrus in advance to accomplish a specific task, Cyrus can be said to be God's "anointed one." With God leading him, he will subdue nations, rendering kings weak and incapable of resistance. Then, when Cyrus attacks Babylon, Jehovah will see to it that the doors of the city are left open, making them as useless as gates that have been shattered. He will go before Cyrus, smoothing out all obstacles. In the end, Cyrus' troops will conquer the city and take possession of its "hidden treasures," its wealth stored in dark vaults. This is what Isaiah foretells. Do his words come true?

5 In the year 539 B.C.E.—some 200 years after Isaiah records this prophecy—Cyrus does indeed arrive at the walls of Babylon to attack the city. (Jeremiah 51:11, 12) The Babylonians, however, are not concerned. They feel that their city is unconquerable. Its towering walls loom over deep moats filled with water from the Euphrates River, which forms part of the city's defense system. For over a hundred years, no enemy has been able to take Babylon by storm! In fact, Babylon's ruler in residence, Belshazzar, feels so secure that he feasts with members of his court.

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4. (a) Why does Jehovah call Cyrus his "anointed one"? (b) How will Jehovah ensure victory for Cyrus?

5, 6. When and how does the prophecy about the fall of Babylon come true?

(Daniel 5:1) That night—the night of October 5/6—Cyrus completes a brilliant military maneuver.

6 Upstream from Babylon, Cyrus' engineers have cut through the bank of the Euphrates River, diverting its waters so that they no longer flow southward toward the city. Before long, the water level of the river in and around Babylon falls so low that Cyrus' troops are able to slosh along the riverbed toward the heart of the city. (Isaiah 44:27; Jeremiah 50:38) Amazingly, just as Isaiah foretold, the gates along the river are open. Cyrus' forces swarm into Babylon, take the palace, and put King Belshazzar to death. (Daniel 5:30) In one night the conquest is all over. Babylon has fallen, and the prophecy is fulfilled to the letter.

7 The precise fulfillment of this prophecy strengthens the faith of Christians today. It gives them strong reason to believe that Bible prophecies not yet fulfilled are also completely reliable. (2 Peter 1:20, 21) Jehovah's worshipers know that the event foreshadowed by the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.—the fall of "Babylon the Great"—already occurred back in 1919. Still, they look forward to the destruction of that modern-day religious organization as well as the promised removal of the political system under Satan's control, the abyssing of Satan, and the coming of new heavens and a new earth. (Revelation 18:2, 21; 19:19-21; 20:1-3, 12, 13; 21:1-4) They know that Jehovah's prophecies are, not empty promises, but descriptions of definite, future events. The confidence of true Christians is strengthened when they remember the fulfillment of all the details of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the fall of Babylon. They know that Jehovah always fulfills his word.

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7. How are Christians strengthened by the remarkable fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy regarding Cyrus?

Why Jehovah Will Favor Cyrus

8 After stating who will conquer Babylon and how this will be done, Jehovah goes on to explain one reason why Cyrus will be given the victory. Jehovah, prophetically speaking to Cyrus, says that it is ***"in order that you may know that I am Jehovah, the One calling you by your name, the God of Israel."*** **(*Isaiah 45:3b*)** It is fitting that the ruler of the fourth world power of Bible history recognizes that his greatest victory comes as a result of the support of one who is greater than he is—Jehovah, the Universal Sovereign. Cyrus should acknowledge that the one who calls, or commissions, him is Jehovah, the God of Israel. The Bible record shows that Cyrus did indeed acknowledge that his great victory came from Jehovah.—Ezra 1:2, 3.

9 Jehovah explains the second reason why he brings Cyrus to conquer Babylon: ***"For the sake of my servant Jacob and of Israel my chosen one, I even proceeded to call you by your name; I proceeded to give you a name of honor, although you did not know me."*** **(*Isaiah 45:4*)** Cyrus' victory over Babylon is earth-shattering. It marks the fall of one world power and the ascent of another, and it leaves its mark on history for generations to come. Yet, those of the nations round about who are anxiously watching events would likely be astounded to know that it all happens for the sake of a few thousand "insignificant" exiles in Babylon—the Jews, descendants of Jacob. In Jehovah's eyes, however, these survivors of the ancient nation of Israel are far from insignificant. They are his "servant."

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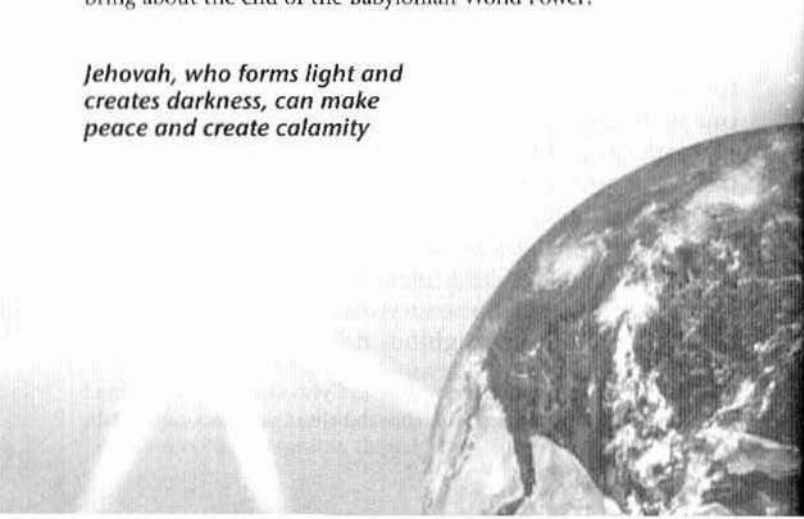
8. What is one reason that Jehovah gives Cyrus victory over Babylon?
9. For what second reason does Jehovah bring Cyrus to conquer Babylon?

Of all the nations of the earth, they are his "chosen one." Even though Cyrus previously did not know Jehovah, he is used by Jehovah as His anointed one to overthrow the city that refused to give up its captives. It is not God's purpose that his chosen people languish forever on foreign soil.

10 There is a third, even more important reason why Jehovah uses Cyrus to overthrow Babylon. Jehovah says: ***"I am Jehovah, and there is no one else. With the exception of me there is no God. I shall closely gird you, although you have not known me, in order that people may know from the rising of the sun and from its setting that there is none besides me. I am Jehovah, and there is no one else."*** **(*Isaiah 45:5, 6*)** Yes, the fall of the Babylonian World Power is a demonstration of Jehovah's Godship, proof to everyone that he alone is worthy of worship. Because God's people are released, individuals from many nations—from east to

10. What is the most important reason why Jehovah uses Cyrus to bring about the end of the Babylonian World Power?

Jehovah, who forms light and creates darkness, can make peace and create calamity



west—will come to acknowledge that Jehovah is the only true God.—Malachi 1:11.

11 Remember that this prophecy of Isaiah was recorded some 200 years before the event. Upon hearing it some may have wondered, 'Does Jehovah truly have the power to fulfill it?' As history testifies, the answer is yes. Jehovah explains why it is reasonable to believe that he can accomplish what he says: ***"Forming light and creating darkness, making peace and creating calamity, I, Jehovah, am doing all these things."*** **(*Isaiah 45:7*)** Everything in creation —from light to darkness—and everything in history—from peace to calamity—is subject to Jehovah's control. Just as he creates the light of day and the darkness of night, so he will make peace for Israel and calamity for Babylon. Jehovah has the power to create the universe, and he also has the power to fulfill his prophecies. That is reassuring to Christians today, who closely study his prophetic word.

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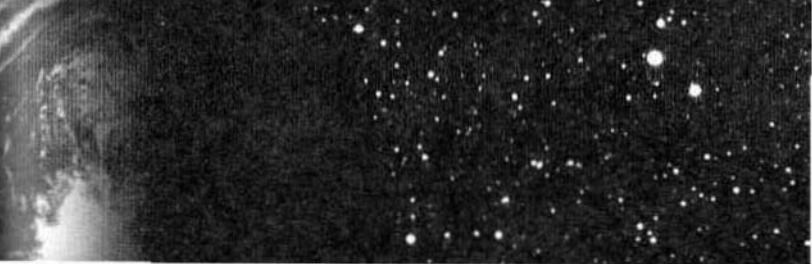
11. How does Jehovah illustrate that he has the power to fulfill his purpose regarding Babylon?



12 Fittingly, Jehovah uses events that regularly occur in creation to illustrate things that await the captive Jews: ***"O you heavens, cause a dripping from above; and let the cloudy skies themselves trickle with righteousness. Let the earth open up, and let it be fruitful with salvation, and let it cause righteousness itself to spring up at the same time. I myself, Jehovah, have created it."*** **(*Isaiah 45:8*)** Just as the literal heavens cause life-giving rain to fall, Jehovah will cause righteous influences to shower from the figurative heavens upon his people. And just as the literal earth opens to produce bountiful harvests, Jehovah will call on the figurative earth to produce events in harmony with his righteous purpose—especially salvation for his captive people in Babylon. In 1919, Jehovah caused 'heaven' and "earth" to produce events in a similar way in order to liberate his people. Seeing such things causes Christians today to rejoice. Why? Because those events strengthen their faith as they look forward to the time when the figurative heavens, God's Kingdom, will bring blessings to a righteous earth. At that time the righteousness and salvation coming forth from the figurative heavens and earth will be on a far grander scale than when ancient Babylon was overthrown. What a glorious final fulfillment of Isaiah's words that will be!—2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1.

Blessings From Recognizing Jehovah's Sovereignty

13 After this description of future joyful blessings, the tone of the prophecy changes abruptly, and Isaiah pronounces a double woe: ***"Woe to the one that has con-***

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12. (a) What does Jehovah cause the figurative heavens and earth to produce? (b) What comforting promise do the words of Isaiah 45:8 contain for Christians today?

13. Why is it ridiculous for humans to challenge Jehovah's purposes?

tended with his Former, as an earthenware fragment with the other earthenware fragments of the ground! Should the clay say to its former: 'What do you make?' And your achievement say: 'He has no hands'? Woe to the one saying to a father: 'What do you become father to?' and to the wife: 'What are you in birth pains with?'" (Isaiah 45: 9, 10) Apparently, the sons of Israel object to what Jehovah foretells. Perhaps they do not believe that Jehovah will allow his people to go into exile. Or maybe they find fault with the idea that Israel will be liberated by a king of a heathen nation instead of a king of David's house. To

Jehovah will cause the "heavens" to rain down blessings and "the earth" to bring forth salvation

Should discarded scraps of pottery question the wisdom of their maker?

portray the absurdity of such objections, Isaiah compares objectors to discarded lumps of clay and scraps of pottery that would dare to question the wisdom of their maker. The very thing the potter has formed is now stating that the potter has no hands or power to form. How foolish! The objectors are like little children daring to criticize their parents' authority.

14 Isaiah gives Jehovah's reply to such objectors: *"This is what Jehovah has said, the Holy One of Israel and the Former of him: 'Ask me even about the things that are coming concerning my sons; and concerning the activity of my hands you people should command me. I myself have made the earth and have created even man upon it. I—my own hands have stretched out the heavens, and all the army of them I have commanded. I my-*

14, 15. What do the expressions "the Holy One" and "the Former" reveal about Jehovah?

self have roused up someone in righteousness, and all his ways I shall straighten out. He is the one that will build my city, and those of mine in exile he will let go, not for a price nor for bribery,' Jehovah of armies has said."—Isaiah 45:11-13.

15 Describing Jehovah as "the Holy One" stresses his sanctity. Calling him "the Former" emphasizes his right as the Creator to decide how things will work out. Jehovah is able to inform the sons of Israel about things to come and to take care of his handiwork, that is, his people. Once again the principles of creation and revelation are shown to be related. As the Creator of the entire universe, Jehovah has the right to guide events in the way he decides. (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12) In the case being discussed, the Sovereign Ruler has decided to raise up Cyrus, a heathen, as liberator of Israel. Cyrus' coming, although still future, is as certain as the existence of heaven and earth. Which son of Israel, then, would dare to criticize the Father, "Jehovah of armies"?

16 These same verses of Isaiah contain yet another reason why God's servants should subject themselves to him. His decisions are always in the best interests of his servants. (Job 36:3) He made laws to help his people benefit themselves. (Isaiah 48:17) The Jews in Cyrus' day who accept Jehovah's sovereignty find this to be true. Cyrus, acting in harmony with Jehovah's righteousness, sends them home from Babylon so that they can rebuild the temple. (Ezra 6:3-5) Likewise today, blessings are experienced by those who apply God's laws in their daily lives and who submit to his sovereignty.—Psalm 1:1-3; 19:7; 119:105; John 8:31, 32.

16. Why should Jehovah's servants subject themselves to him?

Blessings for Other Nations

17 Israel will not be the only nation to benefit from the fall of Babylon. Isaiah says: ***"This is what Jehovah has said: 'The unpaid laborers of Egypt and the merchants of Ethiopia and the Sabeans, tall men, will themselves come over even to you, and yours they will become. Behind you they will walk; in fetters they will come over, and to you they will bow down. To you they will pray, saying, "Indeed God is in union with you, and there is no one else; there is no other God."'"*** **(*Isaiah 45:14*)** In Moses' day, "a vast mixed company" of non-Israelites accompanied the Israelites on their Exodus from Egypt. (Exodus 12:37, 38) In a similar way, foreigners will accompany the Jewish exiles who return home from Babylon. These non-Jews will not be forced to go but "will themselves come over." When Jehovah says, "to you they will bow down" and "to you they will pray," he is referring to the willing subjection and allegiance shown to Israel by these foreigners. If they wear fetters, it will be in a voluntary sense, signifying their willingness to serve God's covenant people, to whom they will say: "God is in union with you." They will worship Jehovah as proselytes, under the provisions of his covenant with Israel.—Isaiah 56:6.

18 Since 1919 when "the Israel of God" was released from spiritual captivity, Isaiah's words have had a greater fulfillment than in Cyrus' day. Millions earth wide show a willingness to serve Jehovah. (Galatians 6:16; Zechariah 8:23) Like the "laborers" and "the merchants" mentioned by Isaiah, they cheerfully offer their physical strength and

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17. Besides Israel, who will benefit from Jehovah's saving acts, and how?

18. Who today have benefited from Jehovah's liberating "the Israel of God," and in what ways?

financial resources to support true worship. (Matthew 25:34-40; Mark 12:30) They dedicate themselves to God and walk in his paths, gladly becoming his slaves. (Luke 9:23) They worship only Jehovah, enjoying the benefits of associating with Jehovah's "faithful and discreet slave," who are in a special covenant relationship with God. (Matthew 24:45-47; 26:28; Hebrews 8:8-13) While not participants in that covenant, those "laborers" and "merchants" benefit from it and obey the laws associated with it, boldly proclaiming: "There is no other God." How thrilling to be eyewitnesses today of the grand increase in the number of such willing supporters of true worship! —Isaiah 60:22.

19 After the disclosure that people of the nations will join in worshiping Jehovah, the prophet exclaims: ***"Truly you are a God keeping yourself concealed, the God of Israel, a Savior"! (Isaiah 45:15)*** Although Jehovah refrains from showing his power at present, in the future he will no longer hide himself. He will show himself to be the God of Israel, the Savior of his people. However, Jehovah will not be the Savior of those who trust in idols. Of such ones Isaiah says: ***"They will certainly be ashamed and even be humiliated, all of them. Together in humiliation the manufacturers of idol forms will have to walk." (Isaiah 45:16)*** Their humiliation will be more than a temporary sense of disgrace and shame. It will mean death—the opposite of what Jehovah next promises Israel.

20 ***"As for Israel, he will certainly be saved in union with Jehovah with a salvation for times indefinite. You people will not be ashamed, nor will you be humiliated***

19. What will happen to those who insist on worshiping idols?
20. In what way will Israel experience "a salvation for times indefinite"?

for the indefinite times of eternity." (Isaiah 45:17) Jehovah promises eternal salvation for Israel, but this is conditional. Israel must remain "in union with Jehovah." When Israel breaks that union by rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, the nation will lose its prospect of "salvation for times indefinite." However, some in Israel will exercise faith in Jesus, and these will become the nucleus of the Israel of God, which will take the place of fleshly Israel. (Matthew 21:43; Galatians 3:28, 29; 1 Peter 2:9) Spiritual Israel will never be humiliated. It will be taken into "an everlasting covenant."—Hebrews 13:20.

In Creation and in Revelation, Jehovah Is Reliable

21 Can the Jews rely on Jehovah's promise of eternal salvation for Israel? Isaiah answers: ***"This is what Jehovah has said, the Creator of the heavens, He the true God, the Former of the earth and the Maker of it, He the One who firmly established it, who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited: 'I am Jehovah, and there is no one else. In a place of concealment I spoke not, in a dark place of the earth; nor said I to the seed of Jacob, "Seek me simply for nothing, you people." I am Jehovah, speaking what is righteous, telling what is upright.'" (Isaiah 45:18, 19)*** For the fourth and final time in this chapter, Isaiah opens a weighty prophetic passage with the phrase: "This is what Jehovah has said." (Isaiah 45:1, 11, 14) What does Jehovah say? That both in creation and in revelation, he is reliable. He did not create the earth "simply for nothing." Likewise, he does not ask his people, Israel, to seek him "simply for noth-

21. How does Jehovah show himself completely reliable in creation and in revelation?

ing." Just as God's purpose for the earth will be carried out, so God's purpose for his chosen people will be carried out. In contrast with the obscure utterances of those who serve false gods, Jehovah's words are openly spoken. His words are just, and they will come true. Those who serve him will not serve him in vain.

22 For God's exiled people in Babylon, those words are an assurance that the Promised Land will not remain desolate. It will be reinhabited. And Jehovah's promises to them come true. By extension, Isaiah's words are an assurance to God's people today that the earth will not

22. (a) Of what can the Jews exiled in Babylon be sure? (b) What assurance do Christians today have?

Jehovah did not create the earth for nothing

become a desolate ruin—charred by fire, as some believe, or destroyed by nuclear bombs, as others fear. God purposes that the earth will remain forever, robed in paradisaic beauty and populated by righteous inhabitants. (Psalm 37:11, 29; 115:16; Matthew 6:9, 10; Revelation 21: 3, 4) Yes, as in Israel's case, Jehovah's words will prove reliable.

Jehovah Extends His Mercy

23 The salvation of Israel is emphasized in Jehovah's next words: ***"Collect yourselves and come. Bring yourselves up close together, you escapees from the nations. Those carrying the wood of their carved image have not come to any knowledge, neither have those praying to a god that cannot save. Make your report and your presentation. Yes, let them consult together in unity. Who has caused this to be heard from a long time ago? Who has reported it from that very time? Is it not I, Jehovah, besides whom there is no other God; a righteous God and a Savior, there being none excepting me?" (Isaiah 45:20, 21)*** Jehovah summons the "escapees" to compare their salvation with what happens to those who worship idols. (Deuteronomy 30:3; Jeremiah 29:14; 50:28) Because idolaters pray to and serve powerless gods that cannot save them, they "have not come to any knowledge." Their worship is in vain—simply for nothing. Those who worship Jehovah, however, find that he has the power to bring about events that he foretold "a long time ago," including the salvation of his exiled people in Babylon. Such power and foresight set Jehovah apart from all other gods. Truly, he is "a righteous God and a Savior."

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23. What is the outcome for those who worship idols, and how do those who worship Jehovah fare?

"Salvation We Owe to Our God"

24 Jehovah's mercy moves him to extend an invitation: ***"Turn to me and be saved, all you at the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no one else. By my own self I have sworn—out of my own mouth in righteousness the word has gone forth, so that it will not return—that to me every knee will bend down, every tongue will swear, saying, 'Surely in Jehovah there are full righteousness and strength. All those getting heated up against him will come straight to him and be ashamed. In Jehovah all the seed of Israel will prove to be right and will boast about themselves.'"—Isaiah 45:22-25.***

25 Jehovah promises Israel that he will save those in Babylon who turn to him. Failure of his prophecy is an impossibility because Jehovah has both the desire and the ability to rescue his people. (Isaiah 55:11) God's words are reliable in themselves, but they are all the more so when Jehovah adds his oath to confirm them. (Hebrews 6:13) He rightfully requires submission ("every knee will bend down") and commitment ("every tongue will swear") on the part of those desiring his favor. The Israelites who persevere in worshiping Jehovah will be saved. They will be able to boast of what Jehovah does for them.—2 Corinthians 10:17.

26 God's invitation to turn to him, however, is not limited to the exiles in ancient Babylon. (Acts 14:14, 15; 15:19; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4) This invitation is still going out, and

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24, 25. (a) What invitation does Jehovah extend, and why is his promise sure of fulfillment? (b) What does Jehovah rightfully require?

26. How are "a great crowd" from all nations responding to Jehovah's invitation to turn to him?

"a great crowd . . . out of all nations" respond and proclaim: "Salvation we owe to our God . . . and to the Lamb [Jesus]." (Revelation 7:9, 10; 15:4) Every year, hundreds of thousands of new ones swell the great crowd by turning to God, fully recognizing his sovereignty and publicly declaring their allegiance to him. In addition, they loyally support spiritual Israel, the 'seed of Abraham.' (Galatians 3:29) They express their love for Jehovah's righteous rule by proclaiming worldwide: "Surely in Jehovah there are full righteousness and strength."* In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul quoted the *Septuagint* rendering of Isaiah 45:23 to show that eventually everyone alive will acknowledge God's sovereignty and will praise his name continually.—Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:9-11; Revelation 21:22-27.

27 Why can members of the great crowd trust that turning to God means salvation? Because Jehovah's promises are reliable, as the prophetic words found in Isaiah chapter 45 so clearly show. Just as Jehovah had the power and wisdom to create the heavens and the earth, so he has the power and wisdom to cause his prophecies to come true. And just as he saw to it that the prophecy concerning Cyrus came true, so he will fulfill any other Bible prophecy that still awaits fulfillment. Worshipers of Jehovah, therefore, can be confident that soon Jehovah will again prove to be "a righteous God and a Savior."

* The *New World Translation* uses the expression "full righteousness" because the Hebrew text has the word "righteousnesses" in the plural form. The plural is here used to express the abundant degree of Jehovah's righteousness.

27. Why can Christians today have absolute trust in Jehovah's promises?

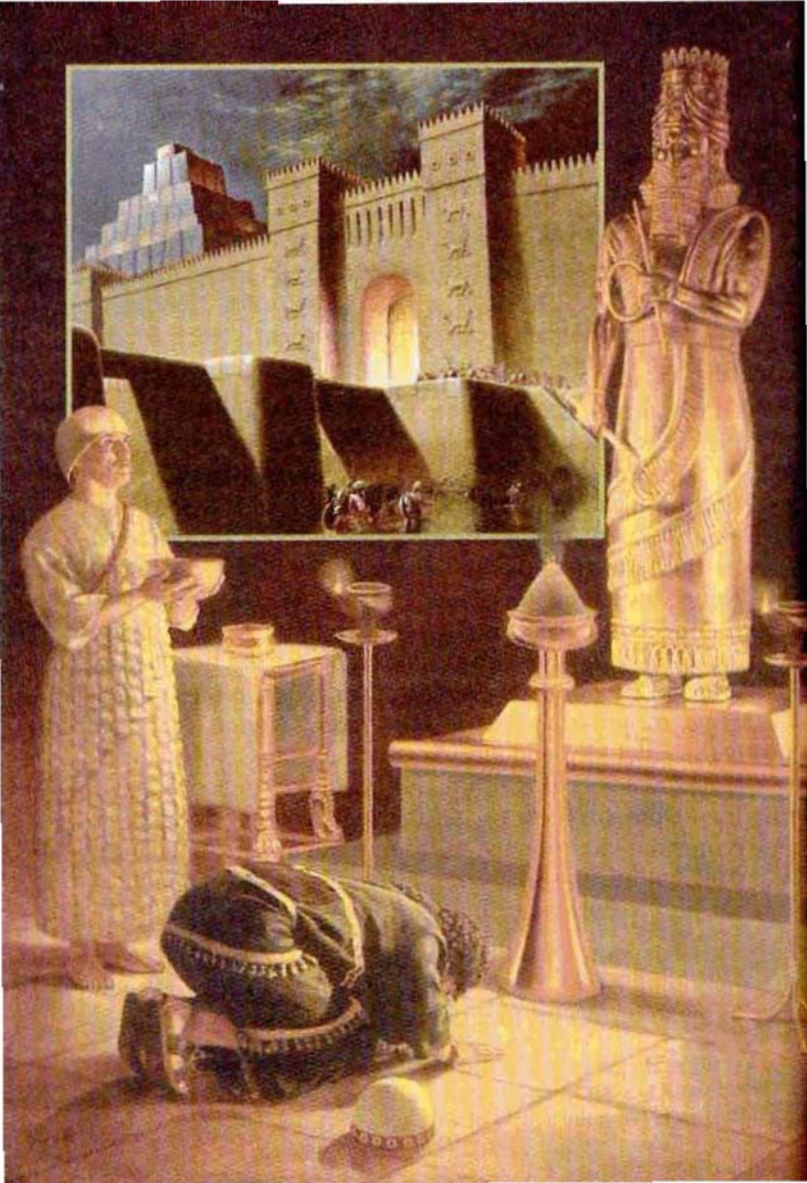
Return to the Worship of Jehovah

Isaiah 46:1-13

WHEN Israel is exiled in Babylon, she will be surrounded by false worship. During Isaiah's time, Jehovah's people are still in their own land, and they have the temple and the priesthood. Yet, many of God's dedicated nation have succumbed to idolatry. It is vital, then, to prepare them in advance so that they will not be overawed by the false gods of Babylon or tempted to serve them. Hence, speaking prophetically of two of the main Babylonian gods, Isaiah says: ***"Bel has bent down, Nebo is stooping over; their idols have come to be for the wild beasts and for the domestic animals, their loads, pieces of luggage, a burden for the tired animals."*** **(*Isaiah 46:1*)** Bel is the chief idol god among the Chaldeans. Nebo is venerated as a god of wisdom and learning. The respect that many have for these two gods is seen by the fact that their names are incorporated into a number of personal names of Babylonians—*Bel*shazzar, *Nabo*polassar, *Nebu*chadnezzar, and *Nebu*zaradan, to mention just a few.

2 Isaiah says that Bel has "bent down" and Nebo is "stooping over." These false gods will be laid low. When Jehovah brings his judgment acts against Babylon, these

1. What are the names of two of Babylon's principal gods, and what is foretold about them?
2. How is the helplessness of Babylon's gods emphasized?



gods will be unable to come to the aid of their worshipers. They will not even be able to save themselves! Bel and Nebo will no longer be carried in the honored place in processions, such as during the Babylonian New Year's Day festival. Instead, they will have to be carted off like common luggage by those who worship them. Praise and adoration of them will give way to derision and contempt.

3 What a shock for the Babylonians to learn that their cherished idols are no more than a burden to be carried off by tired beasts! Similarly today, the world's gods —the things in which people put their trust and in whose behalf they expend their energy and even give their lives—are an illusion. Wealth, armaments, pleasures, rulers, the fatherland or symbols thereof, and many other things have come to be objects of devotion. The emptiness of such gods will be exposed in Jehovah's due time. —Daniel 11:38; Matthew 6:24; Acts 12:22; Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:5; Revelation 13:14, 15.

4 Further highlighting the utter failure of Babylon's gods, the prophecy continues: ***"They must stoop over; they must each alike bend down; they are simply unable to furnish escape for the burden, but into captivity their own soul must go."*** **(*Isaiah 46:2*)** Babylon's gods seem to "stoop over" and "bend down" as if wounded in battle or decrepit with age. They cannot even lighten the load or furnish escape for the lowly beasts that carry them. So, should Jehovah's covenant people, even though captive

3. (a) What will shock the Babylonians? (b) What can be learned today from what happened to Babylon's gods?
4. In what sense do Babylon's gods "stoop over" and "bend down"?

Babylon's gods do not protect her from destruction

in Babylon, give any honor to them? No! In a similar way, Jehovah's anointed servants, even when in spiritual captivity, gave no honor to the false gods of "Babylon the Great," which were unable to prevent her fall in 1919 and will be unable to save her from the calamity that will befall her during the "great tribulation."—Revelation 18:2, 21; Matthew 24:21.

5 True Christians today do not bow down to idols of any kind. (1 John 5:21) Crucifixes, prayer beads, and images of saints do not make the Creator more accessible. They cannot intercede in our behalf. In the first century, Jesus taught his disciples the proper way to worship God when he said: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."—John 14:6, 14.

"Carried From the Womb"

6 Having exposed the vanity of worshiping Babylon's idol gods, Jehovah says to his people: ***"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, and all you remaining ones of the house of Israel, you the ones conveyed by me from the belly, the ones carried from the womb."* (*Isaiah 46:3*)** What a difference there is between Jehovah and the graven images of Babylon! Babylon's gods can do nothing for their worshipers. If they are to move, they have to be carried by some beast of burden. In contrast, Jehovah has been carrying his people. He has sustained them "from the womb," from the time when the nation was formed. Warm memories of being carried by Jehovah should encourage the Jews to shun idol worship and to place their trust in him as their Father and Friend.

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5. How do Christians today avoid repeating the mistakes of the idol-worshiping Babylonians?
6. How is Jehovah different from the gods of the nations?

7 Jehovah has further tender words for his people: ***"Even to one's old age I am the same One; and to one's grayheadedness I myself shall keep bearing up. I myself shall certainly act, that I myself may carry and that I myself may bear up and furnish escape."*** **(*Isaiah 46:4*)** Jehovah's care for his people overshadows that of the most attentive human parent. As children grow up, parents may feel less and less responsibility toward them. When the parents grow old, the children often care for them. It is never like that with Jehovah. He never stops caring for his human children—even in their old age. God's worshipers today trust and love their Creator and find great comfort in these words of Isaiah's prophecy. They need not be anxious about the remaining days or years that they have to spend in this system of things. Jehovah promises to "keep bearing up" those who are advanced in years, giving them the needed strength to endure and remain faithful. He will carry them, strengthen them, and furnish escape.—Hebrews 6:10.

Beware of Modern-Day Idols

8 Imagine the disappointment in store for the Babylonians who put their trust in idols, which will prove to be completely useless! Should Israel believe that those gods are to be compared to Jehovah? Of course not. Rightly, Jehovah asks: ***"To whom will you people liken me or make me equal or compare me that we may resemble each other?"*** **(*Isaiah 46:5*)** How inexcusable that some of Isaiah's fellow countrymen have turned to the worship of speechless, lifeless, and helpless statues! For a nation that knows

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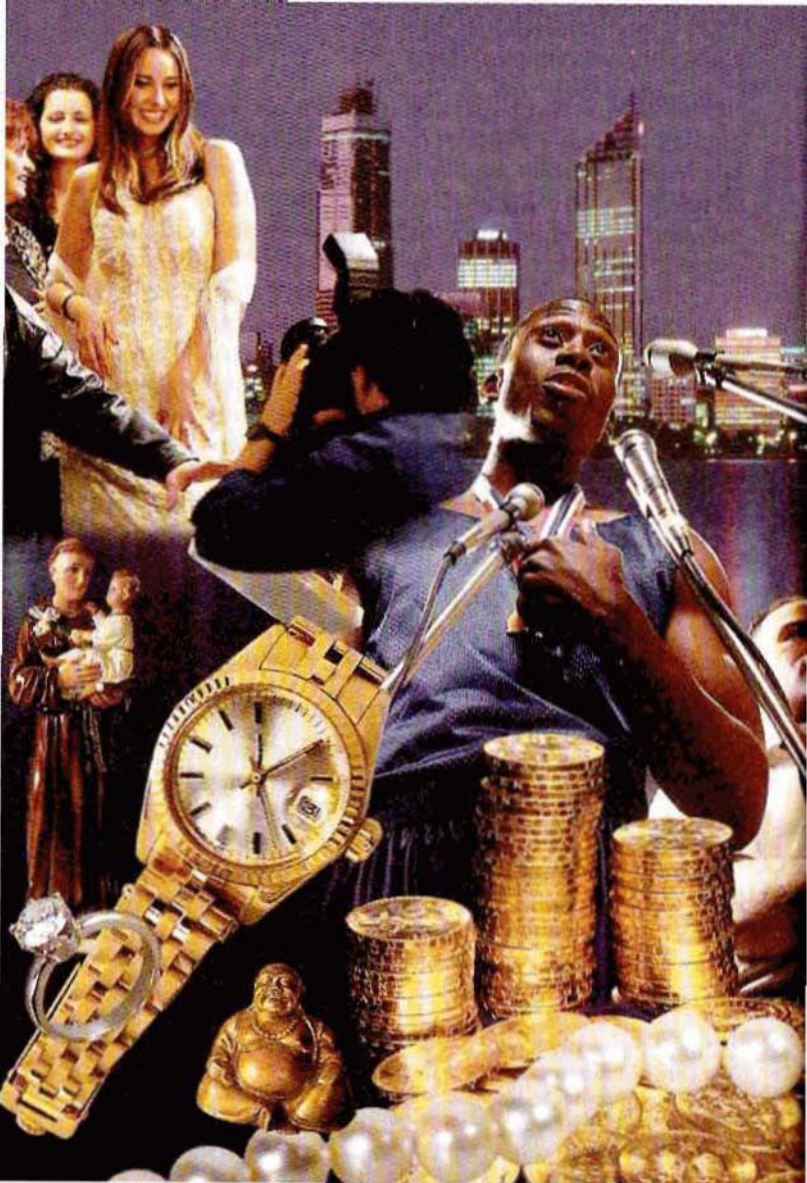
7. How is Jehovah's tender care for his worshipers even greater than the care of human parents for their children?

8. What inexcusable sin have some of Isaiah's fellow countrymen committed?



Jehovah, relying on lifeless, defenseless images made by human hands is foolish indeed.

9 Consider the empty-headed reasoning of idol worshipers. The prophecy continues: ***"There are those who are lavishing out the gold from the purse, and with the scale beam they weigh out the silver. They hire a metalworker, and he makes it into a god. They prostrate themselves, yes, they bow down."*** **(*Isaiah 46:6*)** As if an expensive idol had greater saving power than one made of wood, worshipers spare no expense in building their deity. Still, no matter how much effort is expended or how costly the materials, a lifeless idol remains a lifeless idol, nothing more.

10 Further highlighting the foolishness of idol worship, the prophecy continues: ***"They carry it upon the shoulder, they bear it and deposit it in its place that it may stand still. From its standing place it does not move away. One even cries out to it, but it does not answer; out of one's distress it does not save one."*** **(*Isaiah 46:7*)** How ridiculous to pray to an image that lacks the ability either to hear or to act! The psalmist well describes the uselessness of such objects of worship: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of the hands of earthling man. A mouth they have, but they cannot speak; eyes they have, but they cannot see; ears they have, but they cannot hear. A nose they have, but they cannot smell. Hands are theirs, but they cannot feel. Feet are theirs, but they cannot walk; they utter no sound with their throat. Those making them will become just like them, all those who are trusting in them."—Psalm 115:4-8.

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9. Describe the empty-headed reasoning of some idol worshipers.
10. How is the absolute futility of idol worship described?

Christians today must beware of modern-day idols

"Muster up Courage"

11 Having demonstrated the futility of idol worship, Jehovah now gives his people reasons why they should serve him: ***"Remember this, that you people may muster up courage. Lay it to heart, you transgressors. Remember the first things of a long time ago, that I am the Divine One and there is no other God, nor anyone like me."*** **(*Isaiah 46:8, 9*)** Those who waver between true worship and idolatry should remember history. They should bear in mind the things Jehovah has done. This will help them muster up courage and do the right thing. It will help them return to worshiping Jehovah.

12 This encouragement is still needed today. Like the Israelites, sincere Christians have to fight against temptations and their own imperfections. (Romans 7:21-24) In addition, they are locked in a spiritual battle with an unseen but immensely powerful enemy. The apostle Paul says: "We have a wrestling, not against blood and flesh, but against the governments, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the wicked spirit forces in the heavenly places."—Ephesians 6:12.

13 Satan and his demons will stop at nothing to turn Christians aside from true worship. To wage a successful fight, Christians need to follow Jehovah's counsel and muster up courage. How? The apostle Paul explains: "Put on the complete suit of armor from God that you may be able to stand firm against the machinations of the Devil." Jehovah does not send his servants into battle ill-equipped. Their spiritual armor includes "the large shield of faith, with which [they] will be able to quench all the

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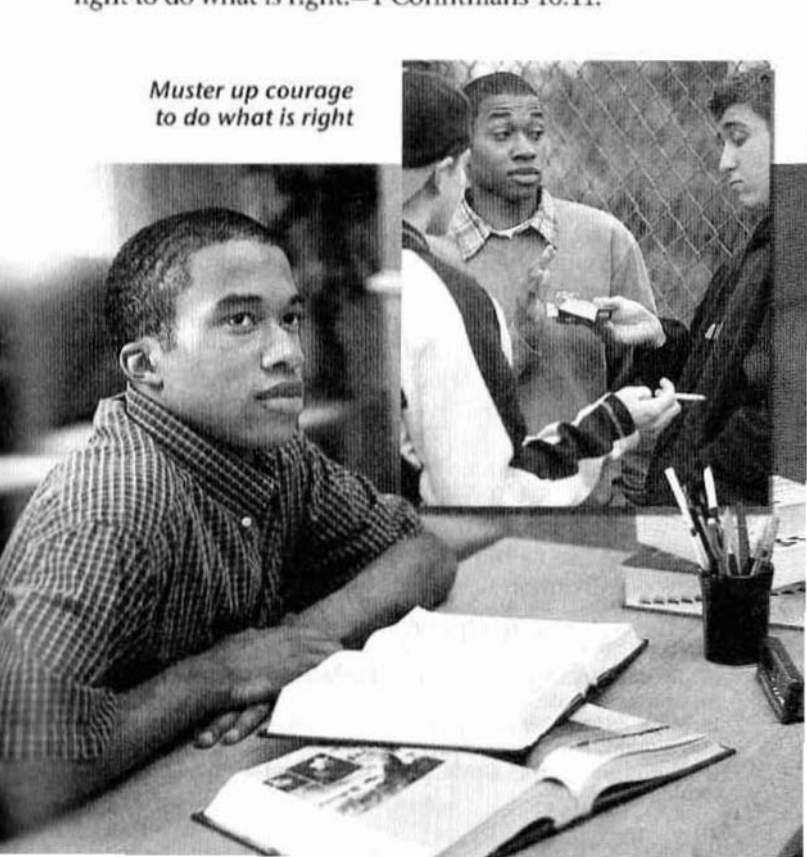
11. What will help those who waver to "muster up courage"?
12, 13. What struggles are Christians caught up in, and how can they come off victorious?

wicked one's burning missiles." (Ephesians 6:11, 16) The Israelites were transgressors because they ignored the spiritual provisions that Jehovah had made for them. If they had reflected on the powerful acts that Jehovah repeatedly performed in their behalf, they would never have turned to disgusting idol worship. May we learn from their example and be determined never to waver in the fight to do what is right.—1 Corinthians 10:11.



Muster up courage to do what is right

14 Jehovah is ***"the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done; the One saying, 'My own counsel will stand, and everything that is my delight I shall do.'"*** **(*Isaiah 46:10*)** What other god can compare to Jehovah in this regard? The ability to predict the future is an outstanding proof of the Creator's Godship. However, it takes more than foresight to ensure the fulfillment of things that are foretold. The declaration "my own counsel will stand" stresses the unchangeableness of God's established purpose. Since Jehovah has unlimited power, nothing in the universe can prevent him from accomplishing his will. (Daniel 4:35) Therefore, we can be certain that any prophecies that are yet to be fulfilled will indeed come true in God's due time.—Isaiah 55:11.

15 A striking example of Jehovah's ability to foretell future events and then bring about the fulfillment of his words is next drawn to our attention by Isaiah's prophecy: ***"The One calling from the sunrising a bird of prey, from a distant land the man to execute my counsel. I have even spoken it; I shall also bring it in. I have formed it, I shall also do it."*** **(*Isaiah 46:11*)** As "the One telling from the beginning the finale," Jehovah God will shape the circumstances in human affairs in order to carry out his counsel. He will call Cyrus "from the sunrising," or Persia in the east, where Cyrus' favorite capital, Pasargadae, will be. Cyrus will be like "a bird of prey," pouncing suddenly and unexpectedly upon Babylon.

16 The certainty of Jehovah's prediction concerning Bab-

14. To what ability does Jehovah point in order to show that he is the only true God?
15. What remarkable example of Jehovah's ability to foretell the future is drawn to our attention?
16. How does Jehovah confirm the certainty of his prediction concerning Babylon?

ylon is confirmed by the words, "I have even spoken it; I shall also bring it in." While imperfect man is prone to make impulsive promises, the Creator never fails to fulfill his word. Because Jehovah is the God "who cannot lie," we can be certain that if he has "formed it," he will "also do it."—Titus 1:2.

Faithless Hearts

17 Once again, Jehovah prophetically turns his attention to the Babylonians, saying: ***"Listen to me, you the ones powerful at heart, you the ones far away from righteousness."*** **(*Isaiah 46:12*)** The expression "the ones powerful at heart" describes those who are stubborn and confirmed in their opposition to the will of God. Without a doubt, the Babylonians are far away from God. Their hatred for Jehovah and his people moves them to destroy Jerusalem and its temple and to carry its inhabitants into exile.

18 Today those with skeptical and unbelieving hearts stubbornly refuse to listen to the Kingdom message, which is being preached in all the inhabited earth. (Matthew 24:14) They do not want to acknowledge Jehovah as the rightful Sovereign. (Psalm 83:18; Revelation 4:11) With hearts "far away from righteousness," they resist and oppose his will. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Like the Babylonians, they refuse to listen to Jehovah.

God's Salvation Will Not Be Late

19 The closing words of Isaiah chapter 46 highlight aspects of Jehovah's personality: ***"I have brought near my***

17, 18. Who can be described as "ones powerful at heart" (a) in ancient times? (b) today?

19. In what way will Jehovah perform an act of righteousness for Israel?

righteousness. It is not far away, and my own salvation will not be late. And I will give in Zion salvation, to Israel my beauty." (Isaiah 46:13) God's liberation of Israel will be an act of righteousness. He will not allow his people to linger in exile. Zion's salvation will come at the appropriate time, it "will not be late." Following their release from captivity, the Israelites will become a spectacle to the nations round about. Jehovah's deliverance of his nation will be a testimony to his saving power. The uselessness of Babylon's gods Bel and Nebo will be exposed for all to see, their impotence revealed.—1 Kings 18:39, 40.

20 In 1919, Jehovah brought about the release of his people from spiritual captivity. He was not late. That event, as well as the events in ancient times when Babylon fell to Cyrus, encourages us today. Jehovah has promised to bring an end to this wicked system of things, including its false worship. (Revelation 19:1, 2, 17-21) Looking at things from a human standpoint, some Christians may feel that their salvation has been delayed. However, Jehovah's exercise of patience until his own due time to fulfill that promise is really an act of righteousness. After all, "[Jehovah] does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Be assured, therefore, that just as in the days of ancient Israel, "salvation will not be late." Indeed, as the day of salvation draws closer, Jehovah lovingly continues to extend the invitation: "Search for Jehovah, you people, while he may be found. Call to him while he proves to be near. Let the wicked man leave his way, and the harmful man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will forgive in a large way."—Isaiah 55:6, 7.

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20. How can Christians be sure that Jehovah's "salvation will not be late"?

False Religion—Its Dramatic End Foreseen

Isaiah 47:1-15

"RELIGION Makes a Comeback." That was the message proclaimed by an article in *The New York Times Magazine.* The article indicated that religion still seems to have a tenacious grip on the hearts and minds of millions of people. It may therefore be difficult to believe that a radical change in the world's religious climate is about to take place. But such a change is indicated in the 47th chapter of Isaiah.

2 Isaiah's words were fulfilled 2,500 years ago. However, the words recorded at Isaiah 47:8 are quoted in the book of Revelation and given a future application. There the Bible foretells the end of the harlotlike organization called "Babylon the Great"—the world empire of false religion. (Revelation 16:19) The designation "Babylon" for the false religions of the world is appropriate, since it was in ancient Babylon that false religion got its start. From there it spread to the four corners of the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9) Religious doctrines that originated in Babylon, such as the immortality of the soul, hellfire, and the worship of triune gods, are shared by virtually all religions,

1, 2. (a) Why does it seem unlikely to some that there will soon be a radical change in the world's religious climate? (b) How do we know that the words of Isaiah chapter 47 have a future application? (c) Why is "Babylon the Great" an appropriate designation for all false religion?

including Christendom.* Does Isaiah's prophecy throw any light on the future of religion?

Babylon Brought Down to the Dust

3 Listen to this stirring divine declaration: ***"Come down and sit down in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon. Sit down on the earth where there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans. For you will not experience again that people call you delicate and dainty."*** **(*Isaiah 47:1*)** For years Babylon has been enthroned as the dominating world power. She has been "the decoration of kingdoms" —a thriving religious, commercial, and military center. (Isaiah 13:19) At Babylon's peak her empire extends as far south as the border of Egypt. And when she defeats Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E., it seems that God himself is unable to halt her conquests! Thus, she sees herself as a "virgin daughter," one who will never suffer a foreign invasion.#

4 However, this haughty "virgin" is to be knocked off her throne as the undisputed world power and made to 'sit in the dust' in humiliation. (Isaiah 26:5) She will no longer be considered "delicate and dainty," like a pampered queen. Jehovah thus commands: ***"Take a hand mill and grind out flour. Uncover your veil. Strip off the flowing skirt. Uncover the leg. Cross over the rivers."*** **(*Isaiah 47:2*)** After having enslaved the entire nation of Judah,

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* For detailed information on the development of false religious doctrines, see the book *Mankind's Search for God,* published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

In Hebrew "virgin daughter of Babylon" is an idiom referring to Babylon or the inhabitants of Babylon. She is "virgin" because she has not been despoiled by a conqueror since she became a world power.

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3. Describe the greatness of the Babylonian World Power.
4. What will Babylon experience?

Babylon will now be treated as a slave herself! The Medes and the Persians, who unseat her from her position of power, will force her to do humiliating labor in their behalf.

5 Babylon will thus be stripped of her 'veil and flowing skirt,' losing every vestige of her former greatness and dignity. "Cross over the rivers," her taskmasters will command. Perhaps some Babylonians will actually be ordered to perform slavish outdoor labor. Or the prophecy may mean that some will literally be dragged across rivers as they are taken into exile. In any event, Babylon will no longer travel in the grand style of a queen who is transported across a stream in a chair or by carriage. Instead, she will be like a slave who has to forsake modesty, raising her skirt and exposing her legs in order to wade across a river. How humiliating!

6 Jehovah continues his taunt: ***"You ought to uncover your nakedness. Also, your reproach ought to be seen. Vengeance is what I shall take, and I shall not meet any man kindly." (Isaiah 47:3)**** Yes, Babylon will suffer shame and dishonor. The wickedness and cruelty she perpetrates against God's people will be openly exposed. No human can head off God's vengeance!

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* The Hebrew expression rendered "I shall not meet any man kindly" has been described by scholars as "an extremely difficult phrase" to translate. The *New World Translation* inserts the word "kindly" so as to convey the thought that no outsiders would be allowed to come to Babylon's rescue. A translation by the Jewish Publication Society renders this clause: "I will . . . let no man intercede."

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5. (a) How will Babylon be stripped of her 'veil and flowing skirt'? (b) What may be indicated by the command for her to "cross over the rivers"?

6. (a) In what sense will Babylon's nakedness be uncovered? (b) How does God "not meet any man kindly"? (See footnote.)

7 After having been held captive in mighty Babylon for 70 years, God's people will rejoice greatly at her fall. They will cry out: ***"There is One repurchasing us. Jehovah of armies is his name, the Holy One of Israel."* (*Isaiah 47:4*)** Under the Mosaic Law, if an Israelite sold himself into slavery in order to pay off his debts, a repurchaser (a blood relative) could buy him, or repurchase him, out of slavery. (Leviticus 25:47-54) Since the Jews will have been sold into slavery to Babylon, they will need to be repurchased, or set free. For slaves, conquest normally means little more than a change of masters. But Jehovah will move conquering King Cyrus to release the Jews from slavery. Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba will be given to Cyrus as "a ransom" in place of the Jews. (Isaiah 43:3) Appropriately, Israel's Redeemer is called "Jehovah of armies." Babylon's seemingly powerful military force is puny when compared with Jehovah's invisible, angelic hosts.

The Price of Cruelty

8 Jehovah resumes his prophetic denunciation of Babylon: ***"Sit down silently and come into the darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you will not experience again that people call you Mistress of Kingdoms." (Isaiah 47:5)*** There will be nothing but darkness and gloom for Babylon. No longer will she dominate other kingdoms as a cruel mistress.—Isaiah 14:4.

9 Why is Babylon allowed to harm God's people in the first place? Jehovah explains: ***"I grew indignant at my***

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7. (a) How will Jewish exiles respond to the news of Babylon's fall? (b) In what way will Jehovah repurchase his people?
8. In what sense will Babylon "come into the darkness"?
9. Why does Jehovah become indignant at the Jews?

people. I profaned my inheritance, and I proceeded to give them into your hand." (Isaiah 47:6a) Jehovah has good reason to be indignant at the Jews. Formerly, he warned them that disobedience to his Law would result in their expulsion from the land. (Deuteronomy 28: 64) When they fell into idolatry and sexual immorality, Jehovah lovingly sent prophets to help restore them to pure worship. But "they were continually making jest at the messengers of the true God and despising his words and mocking at his prophets, until the rage of Jehovah came up against his people, until there was no healing." (2 Chronicles 36:16) God therefore allows his inheritance, Judah, to be profaned when Babylon invades the land and defiles His holy temple.—Psalm 79:1; Ezekiel 24:21.

10 In view of that, is not Babylon simply performing God's will when she enslaves the Jews? No, for God says: ***"You showed them no mercies. Upon the old man you made your yoke very heavy. And you kept saying: 'To time indefinite I shall prove to be Mistress, forever.' You did not take these things to your heart; you did not remember the finale of the matter." (Isaiah 47:6b, 7)*** God has not commanded Babylon to act with excessive cruelty, showing no favor "even to the old men." (Lamentations 4:16; 5: 12) Neither has he urged them to take sadistic pleasure in mocking their Jewish captives.—Psalm 137:3.

11 Babylon fails to grasp that her hold on the Jews is temporary. She has ignored the warnings of Isaiah that, in time, Jehovah will free his people. She behaves as if she were entitled to have permanent dominion over the Jews and to remain mistress over her vassal nations

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10, 11. Why is Jehovah angry at Babylon, even though it is his will that she conquer his people?

forever. She fails to heed the message that there will be a "finale" to her oppressive rule!

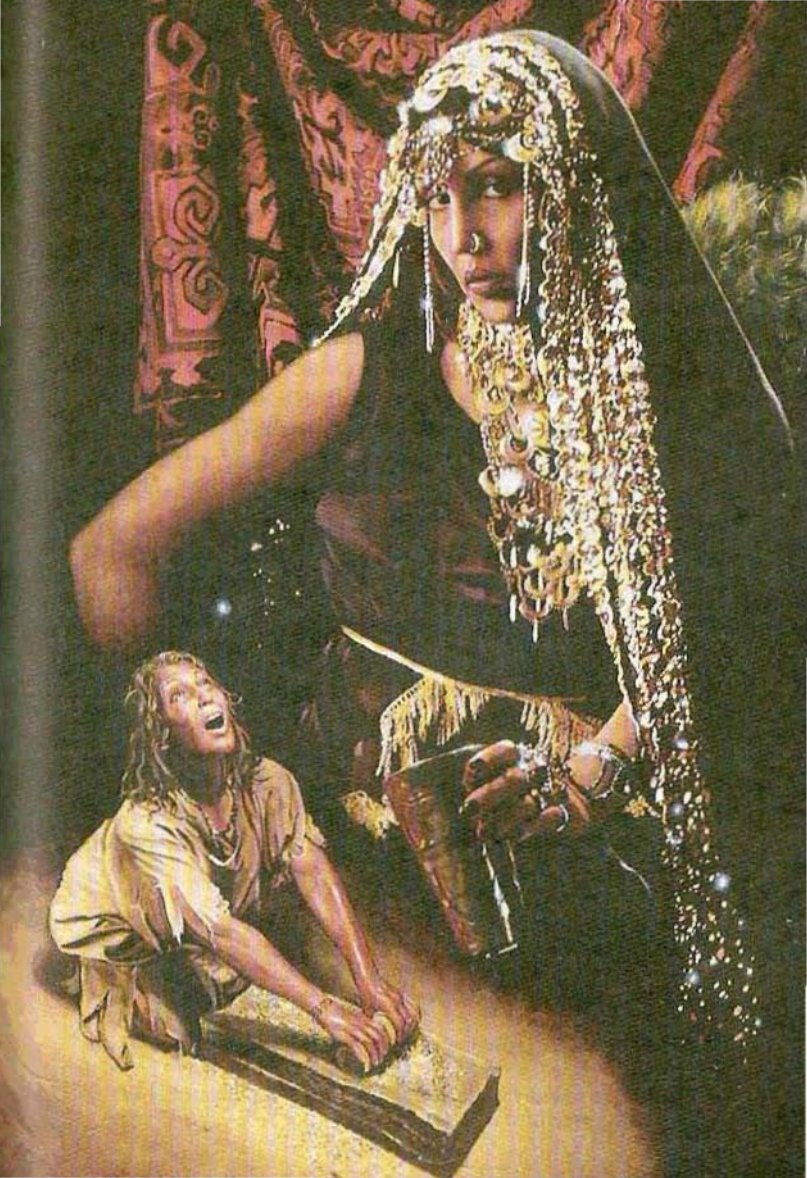
Babylon's Fall Foretold

12 Jehovah declares: ***"Now hear this, you pleasure-given woman, the one sitting in security, the one saying in her heart: 'I am, and there is nobody else. I shall not sit as a widow, and I shall not know the loss of children.'"*** **(*Isaiah 47:8*)** Babylon's reputation for pleasure-seeking is well-known. Fifth century B.C.E. historian Herodotus tells of a "most shameful custom" of the Babylonians, namely, that all women are required to prostitute themselves in homage to their goddess of love. Ancient historian Curtius likewise said: "No contamination can surpass the manners of the city; no systematic corruption can offer more stimulations and allurements to debauchery."

13 Babylon's penchant for pleasure-seeking will hasten her fall. On the eve of her fall, her king and his grandees will feast, drinking themselves into a stupor. Thus, they will pay no heed to the Medo-Persian armies invading the city. (Daniel 5:1-4) "Sitting in security," Babylon will imagine that her seemingly impregnable walls and moat will protect her from invasion. She tells herself that "there is nobody else" who could ever occupy her place of supremacy. She does not imagine that she could become "a widow," losing her imperial ruler as well as her "children," or populace. Still, no wall can protect her from the avenging arm of Jehovah God! Jehovah will later say: "Even if Babylon should ascend to the

12. Why is Babylon called a "pleasure-given woman"?
13. How will Babylon's penchant for pleasure-seeking hasten her fall?

Pleasure-seeking Babylon will be brought down to the dust



heavens and even if she should make the height of her strength unapproachable, from me the despoilers will come to her."—Jeremiah 51:53.

14 What will result to Babylon? Jehovah continues: ***"But to you these two things will come suddenly, in one day: loss of children and widowhood. In their complete measure they must come upon you, for the abundance of your sorceries, for the full might of your spells—exceedingly." (Isaiah 47:9)*** Yes, Babylon's supremacy as a world power will suddenly come to an end. In the ancient Eastern lands, becoming a widow and losing children were the most calamitous experiences that a woman could undergo. We do not know how many "children" Babylon loses on the night of her fall.* In due time, though, that city will be abandoned entirely. (Jeremiah 51:29) She will also suffer widowhood in that her kings will be dethroned.

15 Babylon's mistreatment of the Jews, however, is not the only reason for Jehovah's rage. 'The abundance of her sorceries' also incites him to anger. God's Law to Israel condemns the practice of spiritism; Babylon, though, avidly pursues the occult. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Ezekiel 21:21) The book *Social Life Among the Assyrians and Babylonians* says that the Babylonians' lives "were passed in perpetual fear of the multitudinous demons by which they believed themselves to be surrounded."

* The book *Nabonidus and Belshazzar,* by Raymond Philip Dougherty, notes that while the Nabonidus Chronicle claims that Babylon's invaders entered "without fighting," Greek historian Xenophon indicates that there may have been considerable bloodshed.

14. In what ways will Babylon suffer both "loss of children and widowhood"?

15. In addition to Babylon's cruelty to the Jews, for what further reason is Jehovah wrathful with her?

Trusting in Badness

16 Will Babylon's fortune-tellers save her? Jehovah answers: ***"You kept trusting in your badness. You have said: 'There is no one seeing me.' Your wisdom and your knowledge—this is what has led you away; and you keep saying in your heart: 'I am, and there is nobody else.'"*** **(*Isaiah 47:10*)** Babylon reckons that by means of her secular and religious wisdom, her military might, and her cunning ruthlessness, she can maintain her position as world power. She feels that no one can 'see' her, that is, hold her accountable for her wicked actions. Nor does she perceive a rival on the horizon. "I am, and there is nobody else," she tells herself.

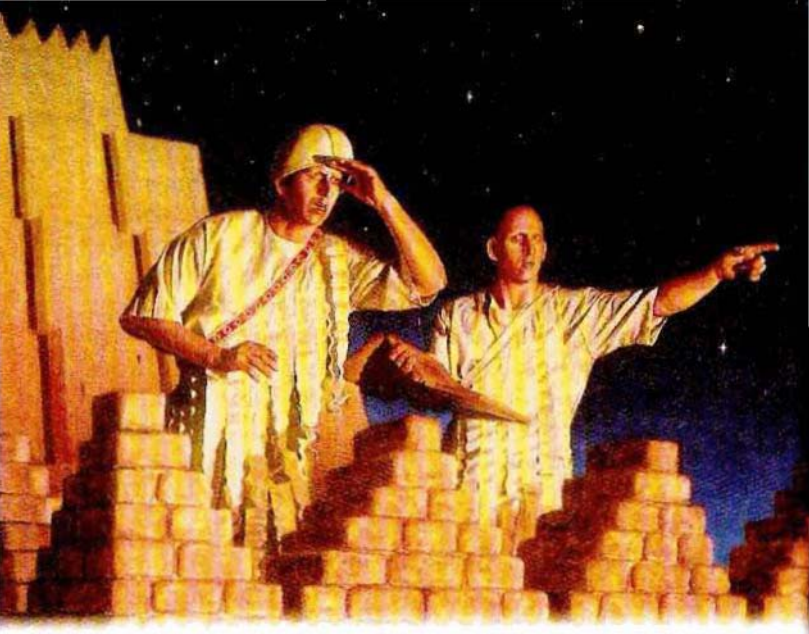
17 However, through another of his prophets, Jehovah warns: "Can any man be concealed in places of concealment and I myself not see him?" (Jeremiah 23:24; Hebrews 4:13) Jehovah therefore declares: ***"Upon you calamity must come; you will know no charming against it. And upon you adversity will fall; you will not be able to avert it. And upon you there will suddenly come a ruin that you are not accustomed to know."*** **(*Isaiah 47:11*)** Neither Babylon's gods nor the magical "charming" performed by her spiritistic practitioners can avert the coming calamity —one unlike anything that she has ever experienced!

Babylon's Counselors Fail

18 With stinging sarcasm, Jehovah commands: ***"Stand still, now, with your spells and with the abundance of your sorceries, in which you have toiled from your youth; that***

16, 17. (a) How does Babylon 'trust in her badness'? (b) Why can Babylon's end not be averted?

18, 19. How will Babylon's reliance on her counselors prove disastrous?



Babylon's astrologers will be unable to predict her fall

perhaps you might be able to benefit, that perhaps you might strike people with awe." (*Isaiah 47:12*) Babylon is challenged to "stand still," or persist unreformed, in her reliance on magic. After all, as a nation she has toiled in the development of the occult arts from her "youth."

19 But Jehovah mocks her, saying: *"You have grown weary with the multitude of your counselors. Let them stand up, now, and save you, the worshipers of the heavens, the lookers at the stars, those giving out knowledge at the new moons concerning the things that will come upon you."* (*Isaiah 47:13*)* Babylon will face the utter failure of

* Some render the Hebrew expression translated "worshipers of the heavens" as "dividers of the heavens." This would refer to the practice of partitioning the heavens into fields so as to cast horoscopes.

her counselors. True, centuries of astronomical observation will have gone into the development of Babylonian astrology. But on the night of her fall, the pitiful failure of her astrologers will expose divination as useless.—Daniel 5:7, 8.

20 Jehovah concludes this section of the prophecy by saying: ***"Look! They have become like stubble. A fire itself will certainly burn them up. They will not deliver their soul from the power of the flame. There will be no glow of charcoals for people to warm themselves, no firelight in front of which to sit down. Thus they will certainly become to you, with whom you have toiled as your charmers from your youth. They will actually wander, each one to his own region. There will be no one to save you."*** **(*Isaiah 47:14, 15*)** Yes, fiery times are about to come upon these false counselors. It will be, not a cozy fire around which people can warm themselves, but a destructive, consuming fire that will expose the false counselors as useless stubble. Little wonder, then, that Babylon's counselors will flee in panic! Babylon's last support gone, there will be no one to save her. She will receive the very fate that she will have inflicted upon Jerusalem.—Jeremiah 11:12.

21 In the year 539 B.C.E., these inspired words start to be fulfilled. The armies of the Medes and the Persians under the leadership of Cyrus capture the city, killing its resident king, Belshazzar. (Daniel 5:1-4, 30) In one night Babylon is toppled from her position of world dominance. Thus ends centuries of Semitic supremacy, and the world now falls under Aryan control. Babylon itself goes into a centuries-long period of decline. By the fourth

20. What will be the fate of Babylon's counselors?
21. How and when do Isaiah's prophetic words prove true?

century C.E., it is nothing more than "piles of stones." (Jeremiah 51:37) Isaiah's prophecy is thus completely fulfilled.

A Modern-Day Babylon

22 Isaiah's prophecy furnishes much food for thought. For one thing, it underscores the dangers of pride and haughtiness. Proud Babylon's fall illustrates the Bible proverb: "Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." (Proverbs 16:18) Pride sometimes dominates our imperfect natures, but being "puffed up with pride" can lead to coming "into reproach and a snare of the Devil." (1 Timothy 3:6, 7) We do well, then, to heed James' counsel: "Humble yourselves in the eyes of Jehovah, and he will exalt you."—James 4:10.

22. What lesson about pride does Babylon's fall teach us?

A Babylonian astrological calendar, first millennium B.C.E.

23 These prophetic words also help us to have confidence in Jehovah, who is more powerful than all his opposers. (Psalm 24:8; 34:7; 50:15; 91:14, 15) This is a comforting reminder in these difficult days. Confidence in Jehovah strengthens our determination to remain blameless in his eyes, knowing that "the future of [the blameless] man will be peaceful." (Psalm 37:37, 38) It is always wise to look to Jehovah and not rely on our own resources in the face of Satan's "crafty acts."—Ephesians 6:10-13, footnote.

24 Notably, we are warned against spiritistic practices, especially astrology. (Galatians 5:20, 21) When Babylon fell, astrology did not lose its hold on people. Interestingly, the book *Great Cities of the Ancient World* notes that the constellations mapped out by the Babylonians have "shifted" from their ancient positions, "making nonsense of the whole idea [of astrology]." Still, astrology continues to thrive, and many newspapers carry columns that make horoscopes readily available to their readers.

25 What makes people—many of them well educated—consult the stars or engage in other illogical, superstitious practices? *The World Book Encyclopedia* says: "Superstitions will probably have a part in life as long as people fear each other and have uncertainties about the future." Fear and uncertainty may drive people to become superstitious. Christians, however, shun superstition. They do not fear man—Jehovah is their support. (Psalm 6:4-10) And they are not uncertain about the future; they know Jehovah's revealed purposes and have no

23. Isaiah's prophecy helps us to have what confidence?

24, 25. (a) Why is astrology illogical, yet why do many turn to it? (b) What are some reasons why Christians shun superstition?

doubt that "to time indefinite the very counsel of Jehovah will stand." (Psalm 33:11) Bringing our lives into harmony with Jehovah's counsel ensures a happy, long-term future.

26 In recent years some have tried to discern the future in more "scientific" ways. There is even a discipline called futurology, defined as "a study that deals with future possibilities based on current trends." For example, back in 1972 a group of academics and businessmen known as the Club of Rome predicted that by 1992 all the world's reserves of gold, mercury, zinc, and petroleum would be exhausted. Well, the world has faced horrendous problems since 1972, but that prediction was wrong on all counts. The earth still has reserves of gold, mercury, zinc, and petroleum. Indeed, man has worn himself out trying to predict the future, but his guesses are always unreliable. Truly, "the reasonings of the wise men are futile"!—1 Corinthians 3:20.

The Coming End of Babylon the Great

27 Modern-day religions have perpetuated many of ancient Babylon's doctrines. Hence, the world empire of false religion is well named Babylon the Great. (Revelation 17:5) That international religious conglomerate has already suffered a fall similar to that of ancient Babylon in 539 B.C.E. (Revelation 14:8; 18:2) In 1919 the remnant of Christ's brothers came out of spiritual captivity and shook off the religious influence of Christendom, a dominant part of Babylon the Great. Since then Christendom

26. How have "the reasonings of the wise men" proved to be "futile"?

27. When and in what way did Babylon the Great undergo a fall like that of Babylon in 539 B.C.E.?

has lost considerable influence in many lands where it was formerly strong.

28 That fall, however, was just a precursor to the ultimate destruction of false religion. Interestingly, Revelation's prophecy of the destruction of Babylon the Great reminds us of the prophetic words recorded at Isaiah 47: 8, 9. Like ancient Babylon, modern-day Babylon the Great says: "I sit a queen, and I am no widow, and I shall never see mourning." But "in one day her plagues will come, death and mourning and famine, and she will be completely burned with fire, because Jehovah God, who judged her, is strong." So the prophetic words recorded in Isaiah chapter 47 stand as a warning to those who are still affiliated with false religion. If they are to avoid sharing in her destruction, let them heed the inspired command: "Get out of her"!—Revelation 18:4, 7, 8.

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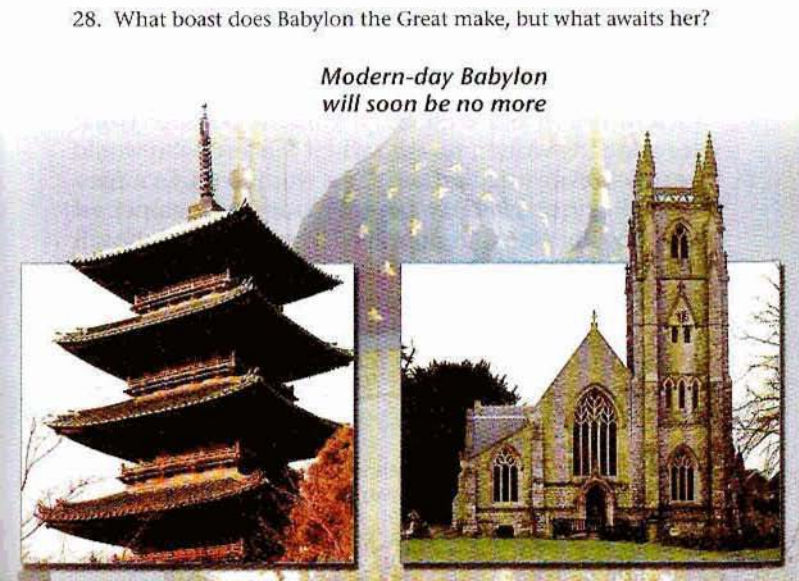
28. What boast does Babylon the Great make, but what awaits her?

Modern-day Babylon will soon be no more



Jehovah Teaches Us for Our Good

Isaiah 48:1-22

WHEN Jehovah speaks, those who are wise listen with great respect and respond to his words. Everything that Jehovah says is for our benefit, and he is keenly interested in our welfare. For example, how heartwarming it is to consider the way Jehovah addressed his ancient covenant people: "O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments!" (Isaiah 48:18) The proven value of God's teachings should move us to listen to him and follow his guidance. The record of fulfilled prophecy dispels any doubt about Jehovah's determination to fulfill his promises.

2 The words of the 48th chapter of the book of Isaiah were evidently written for the sake of the Jews who would be exiles in Babylon. Further, these words contain a message that Christians today cannot ignore. In Isaiah chapter 47, the Bible foretold the fall of Babylon. Now Jehovah describes what he has in mind for the Jewish exiles in that city. Jehovah is grieved by the hypocrisy of his chosen people and their stubborn disbelief in his promises. Still, he wants to instruct them for their good. He foresees a period of refinement leading to the restoration of a faithful remnant to their homeland.

1. How do wise ones respond to Jehovah's words?
2. For whom were the words of Isaiah 48 recorded, and who else can benefit from them?

3 How far Jehovah's people have deviated from pure worship! Isaiah's opening words are sobering: ***"Hear this, O house of Jacob, you who are calling yourselves by the name of Israel and who have come forth from the very waters of Judah, you who are swearing by the name of Jehovah and who make mention even of the God of Israel, not in truth and not in righteousness. For they have called themselves as being from the holy city, and upon the God of Israel they have supported themselves, Jehovah of armies being his name."*** **(*Isaiah 48:1, 2*)** How hypocritical! "Swearing by the name of Jehovah" is clearly no more than using God's name in a formalistic way. (Zephaniah 1:5) Before their exile in Babylon, the Jews worshiped Jehovah at "the holy city," Jerusalem. But their worship was insincere. Their hearts were far removed from God, and their acts of worship were "not in truth and not in righteousness." They did not have the faith of the patriarchs. —Malachi 3:7.

4 Jehovah's words remind us that worship should not be perfunctory. It must be heartfelt. Mere token service—perhaps performed just to please or impress others—does not constitute "deeds of godly devotion." (2 Peter 3:11) A person's calling himself a Christian does not in itself make his worship acceptable to God. (2 Timothy 3:5) Recognizing that Jehovah exists is vital, but it is only a beginning. Jehovah wants worship that is whole-souled and motivated by deep love and appreciation.—Colossians 3:23.

Foretelling New Things

5 Perhaps those Jews in Babylon need to have their memories refreshed. Hence, Jehovah once again reminds

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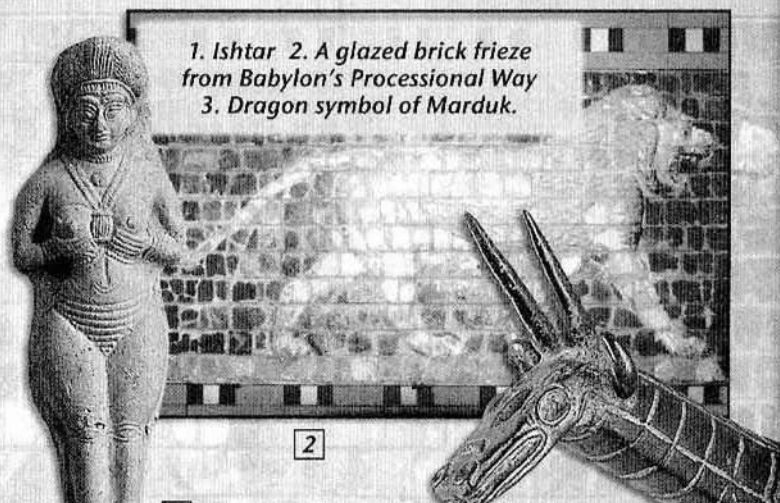
3. What was wrong with Judah's worship?
4. What kind of worship is pleasing to Jehovah?
5. What are some of "the first things" foretold by Jehovah?

them that he is the God of true prophecy: ***"The first things I have told even from that time, and out of my own mouth they went forth, and I kept making them heard. Suddenly I acted, and the things proceeded to come in." (Isaiah 48:3)*** "The first things" are things that God has already accomplished, such as liberating the Israelites from Egypt and giving them the Promised Land as an inheritance. (Genesis 13:14, 15; 15:13, 14) Such predictions go out from God's mouth; they are of divine origin. God causes men to hear his decrees, and what they hear should move them to be obedient. (Deuteronomy 28:15) He acts suddenly to perform what he has foretold. The fact that Jehovah is the Almighty ensures that his purpose is fulfilled.—Joshua 21:45; 23:14.

6 Jehovah's people have become "stubborn and rebellious." (Psalm 78:8) He frankly tells them: ***"You are hard and . . . your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead is copper." (Isaiah 48:4)*** Like metals, the Jews are hard to bend—unyielding. That is one reason why Jehovah reveals things before they occur. Otherwise, his people will say of the things Jehovah has done: ***"My own idol has done them, and my own carved image and my own molten image have commanded them." (Isaiah 48:5)*** Will what Jehovah is now saying have any effect on the unfaithful Jews? God says to them: ***"You have heard. Behold it all. As for you people, will you not tell it? I have made you hear new things from the present time, even things kept in reserve, that you have not known. At the present time they must be created, and not from that time, even***

6. To what extent have the Jews become "stubborn and rebellious"?

Isaiah's message of restoration provides a ray of hope for faithful Jews in exile



The Jews had a tendency to attribute Jehovah's acts to idols

things that before today you have not heard, that you may not say, 'Look! I have already known them.'"—Isaiah 48:6, 7.

7 Long in advance Isaiah recorded the prediction about the fall of Babylon. Now as exiles in Babylon, the Jews are prophetically commanded to contemplate the fulfillment of the prediction. Can they deny that Jehovah is the God of fulfilled prophecy? And since the inhabitants of Judah have seen and heard that Jehovah is a God of truth, must they not also declare this truth to others? Je-

7. What will the exiled Jews have to admit, and what can they expect?

hovah's revealed word foretells new things that have not yet come to pass, such as Cyrus' conquest of Babylon and the release of the Jews. (Isaiah 48:14-16) Such startling events seemingly come out of nowhere. No one could have foreseen them merely by considering the developing world conditions. They arrive as though created out of nothing. Who causes these events? Since Jehovah foretells them some 200 years in advance, the answer is obvious.

8 Moreover, Jehovah carries out his word according to his own timetable. Fulfilled prophecies prove his Godship not only to the Jews in ancient times but also to Christians today. The record of numerous prophecies that were fulfilled in the past—"the first things"—is an assurance that the new things promised by Jehovah —the coming "great tribulation," the survival of "a great crowd" through that tribulation, the "new earth," and much more—will come to pass. (Revelation 7:9, 14, 15; 21: 4, 5; 2 Peter 3:13) That assurance motivates righthearted ones today to speak about him zealously. They share the feelings of the psalmist, who said: "I have told the good news of righteousness in the big congregation. Look! My lips I do not restrain."—Psalm 40:9.

Jehovah Exercises Self-Control

9 The Jews' disbelieving response to Jehovah's prophecies has prevented them from heeding his warnings. That is why he goes on to say to them: ***"Moreover, you have not heard, neither have you known, nor from that time on has your ear been opened. For I well know that without***

8. What new things do Christians today hope for, and why do they have complete confidence in Jehovah's prophetic word?
9. How has the nation of Israel been a "transgressor from the belly"?

fail you kept dealing treacherously, and a 'transgressor from the belly' you have been called." (Isaiah 48:8) Judah's ear has been shut to Jehovah's glad tidings. (Isaiah 29:10) The way God's covenant people have acted shows the nation to be a "transgressor from the belly." From its birth and for its entire history, the nation of Israel has built up a record of rebellion. Transgression and treachery are inveterate faults of the people, not mere occasional sins.—Psalm 95:10; Malachi 2:11.

10 Is all hope lost? No. Even though Judah has been rebellious and treacherous, Jehovah is always true and faithful. For the honor of his own great name, he will limit the outpouring of his wrath. He says: ***"For the sake of my name I shall check my anger, and for my praise I shall restrain myself toward you that there may be no cutting you off." (Isaiah 48:9)*** What a contrast! Jehovah's people, both Israel and Judah, have been unfaithful to him. But Jehovah will sanctify his name, acting in a way to bring praise and honor to it. For this reason, he will not cut off his chosen people.—Joel 2:13, 14.

11 Righthearted individuals among the exiled Jews are awakened by God's reprimand and become determined to heed his teachings. To such ones the following declaration is most reassuring: ***"Look! I have refined you, but not in the form of silver. I have made choice of you in the smelting furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake I shall act, for how could one let oneself be profaned? And to no one else shall I give my own glory." (Isaiah 48:10, 11)*** The trialsome ordeals—as in the "furnace of affliction"—that Jehovah has allowed to come

10. Why will Jehovah restrain himself?
11. Why will God not allow his people to be utterly destroyed?

A "furnace of affliction" can reveal whether or not our motives for serving Jehovah are pure

upon his people have tested and refined them, revealing what is in their hearts. Something similar happened centuries earlier when Moses said to their ancestors: "Jehovah your God made you walk these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, to put you to the test so as to know what was in your heart." (Deuteronomy 8:2) Despite their rebellious attitude, Jehovah did not destroy the nation at that time, and he will not utterly destroy the nation now. Thus his name and honor will be upheld. If his people were to perish at the hands of the Babylonians, he would be untrue to his covenant and his name would be profaned. It would appear that the God of Israel is powerless to save his people.—Ezekiel 20:9.

12 In modern times too, Jehovah's people have needed

12. How were true Christians refined during the first world war?

True Christians have faced the most vicious forms of persecution

refining. Back in the early days of the 20th century, many of the small group of Bible Students served God out of a sincere desire to please him, but some had wrong motives, such as a desire for prominence. Before that small group could spearhead the worldwide preaching of the good news prophesied for the time of the end, they would need to be cleansed. (Matthew 24:14) The prophet Malachi prophesied that just such a refining work would be accomplished in connection with Jehovah's coming to his temple. (Malachi 3:1-4) His words were fulfilled in 1918. True Christians had gone through a period of fiery testing in the heat of the first world war and that testing culminated in the imprisonment of Joseph F. Rutherford, then president of the Watch Tower Society, and some of its leading officers. Those sincere Christians ben-

efited from the refining process. They came out of World War I more determined than ever to serve their great God in whatever way he indicated.

13 Since those days, Jehovah's Witnesses have time and again faced the most vicious forms of persecution. This has not made them doubt the word of their Creator. Rather, they have taken note of the words of the apostle Peter to persecuted Christians of his day: "You have been grieved by various trials, in order that the tested quality of your faith . . . may be found a cause for praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1: 6, 7) Fiery persecution does not destroy the integrity of true Christians. Instead, it reveals the purity of their motives. It adds to their faith a tested quality and shows the depth of their devotion and love.—Proverbs 17:3.

'I Am the First, I Am the Last'

14 Now Jehovah warmly appeals to his covenant people: ***"Listen to me, O Jacob, and you Israel my called one. I am the same One. I am the first. Moreover, I am the last. Moreover, my own hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my own right hand extended out the heavens. I am calling to them, that they may keep standing together." (Isaiah 48:12, 13)*** Unlike man, God is eternal and does not change. (Malachi 3:6) In Revelation, Jehovah declares: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Revelation 22:13) Before Jehovah there was no almighty God and after him there will be none. He is the Supreme and Eternal One,

13. How have Jehovah's people responded to persecution in the years since the first world war?

14. (a) In what way is Jehovah "the first" and "the last"? (b) What mighty works did Jehovah accomplish by means of his "hand"?

the Creator. His "hand"—his applied power—established the earth and stretched out the starry heavens. (Job 38:4; Psalm 102:25) When he calls his creations, they stand ready to serve him.—Psalm 147:4.

15 A solemn invitation is addressed to both Jews and non-Jews: ***"Be collected together, all you people, and hear. Who among them has told these things? Jehovah himself has loved him. He will do what is his delight upon Babylon, and his own arm will be upon the Chaldeans. I—I myself have spoken. Moreover, I have called him. I have brought him in, and there will be a making of his way successful."*** **(*Isaiah 48:14, 15*)** Jehovah alone is all-powerful and able to foretell events accurately. None among "them," the worthless idols, is able to tell these things. Jehovah, not the idols, has "loved him," Cyrus —that is, Jehovah has chosen him for a specific purpose. (Isaiah 41:2; 44:28; 45:1, 13; 46:11) He has foreseen Cyrus' appearance on the world stage and has singled him out as the future conqueror of Babylon.

16 In an inviting tone, Jehovah continues: ***"Come near to me, you people. Hear this. From the start I have spoken in no place of concealment at all. From the time of its occurring I have been there."*** **(*Isaiah 48:16a*)** Predictions from Jehovah have not been given in secrecy or made known only to a few initiates. Jehovah's prophets were forthright speakers on behalf of God. (Isaiah 61:1) They publicly declared the will of God. For example, events connected with Cyrus were not new to God or unforeseen by him. Some 200 years in advance, God openly foretold them through Isaiah.

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15. In what way and to what end has Jehovah "loved" Cyrus?
16, 17. (a) Why can it be said that God has not given his predictions in secrecy? (b) How has Jehovah publicized his purposes today?

17 In the same way today, Jehovah is not secretive about his purposes. Millions of people in hundreds of lands and islands of the sea proclaim from house to house, on the streets, and wherever else they can the warning of the coming end of this system of things and the good news of blessings to come under God's Kingdom. Truly, Jehovah is a God who communicates his purposes.

"Pay Attention to My Commandments!"

18 Empowered by Jehovah's spirit, the prophet declares: ***"The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself has sent me, even his spirit. This is what Jehovah has said, your Repurchaser, the Holy One of Israel: 'I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk.'"*** **(*Isaiah 48:16b, 17*)** This loving expression of Jehovah's care should reassure the nation of Israel that God is going to deliver them from Babylon. He is their Repurchaser. (Isaiah 54:5) Jehovah's heartfelt desire is that the Israelites restore their relationship with him and pay attention to his commandments. True worship is based upon obeying divine instructions. The Israelites are unable to walk in the right way unless they are taught 'the way in which to walk.'

19 Jehovah's desire that his people avoid calamity and enjoy life is beautifully expressed: ***"O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."*** **(*Isaiah 48:18*)** What a heartfelt appeal from the almighty Creator! (Deuteronomy 5:29; Psalm 81:13) Instead of going into captivity,

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18. What is Jehovah's desire for his people?
19. What heartfelt appeal does Jehovah make?

the Israelites can enjoy peace that will be as bountiful as the water flowing in a river. (Psalm 119:165) Their deeds of righteousness can be as innumerable as the waves of the sea. (Amos 5:24) As the one really interested in them, Jehovah appeals to the Israelites, lovingly showing them the way in which they should walk. Oh, if only they will listen!

20 What blessings would come if Israel would repent? Jehovah says: ***"Your offspring would become just like the sand, and the descendants from your inward parts like the grains of it. One's name would not be cut off or be annihilated from before me."*** **(*Isaiah 48:19*)** Jehovah reminds the people of his promise that Abraham's seed would become many, "like the stars of the heavens and like the grains of sand that are on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17; 32:12) However, these descendants of Abraham have been rebellious, and they do not have the right to receive the fulfillment of the promise. Really, their record has been so bad that by Jehovah's own Law, they deserve to have their name as a nation cut off. (Deuteronomy 28: 45) Still, Jehovah does not desire the annihilation of his people, and he does not want to forsake them utterly.

21 The principles embodied in this powerful passage apply to Jehovah's worshipers today. Jehovah is the Source of life, and he knows better than anyone how we should use our lives. (Psalm 36:9) He has given us guidelines, not to rob us of enjoyment, but to benefit us. True Christians

20. (a) What is God's desire for Israel despite their rebelliousness? (b) What do we learn about Jehovah from his dealings with his people? (See box on page 133.)

21. What blessings can we experience today if we seek Jehovah's instruction?

Almighty God Restrains Himself

"I shall check my anger . . . I shall restrain myself," Jehovah told the apostate Israelites. (Isaiah 48:9) Such statements help us see that God sets a perfect example in never abusing power. It is true that no one has greater power than God. That is why we refer to him as the all-powerful One, the omnipotent One. He rightly applies the title "Almighty" to himself. (Genesis 17:1) Not only does he have unlimited strength but he has all authority because of his position as the Sovereign Lord of the universe, which he created. That is why no one can presume to check his hand or say to him, "What have you been doing?"—Daniel 4:35.

God is slow to anger, however, even when there is a need to express his power against his enemies. (Nahum 1:3) Jehovah can 'check his anger' and is correctly described as being "slow to anger" because love—not anger—is his dominant quality. His anger, when expressed, is always righteous, always justified, always controlled.—Exodus 34:6; 1 John 4:8.

Why does Jehovah act this way? Because he balances his almighty power perfectly with his three other cardinal attributes—wisdom, justice, and love. His use of power is always consistent with these other qualities.

respond by seeking to be instructed by Jehovah. (Micah 4:2) His directives protect our spirituality and our relationship with him, and they shield us from Satan's corrupting influence. When we appreciate the principles behind God's laws, we see that Jehovah teaches us for our good. We realize that "his commandments are not burdensome." And we will not be cut off.—1 John 2:17; 5:3.

'Go Forth Out of Babylon!'

22 When Babylon falls, will any Jews manifest the right heart condition? Will they take advantage of God's deliverance, return to their homeland, and restore pure worship? Yes. Jehovah's next words show his confidence that this will happen. ***"Go forth, you people, out of Babylon! Run away from the Chaldeans. Tell forth even with the sound of a joyful cry, cause this to be heard. Make it to go forth to the extremity of the earth. Say: 'Jehovah has repurchased his servant Jacob. And they did not get thirsty when he was making them walk even through devastated places. Water out of the rock he caused to flow forth for them, and he proceeded to split a rock that the water might stream forth.'"*** **(*Isaiah 48:20, 21*)** Jehovah's people are prophetically urged to depart from Babylon without delay. (Jeremiah 50:8) Their redemption must be made known to the very ends of the earth. (Jeremiah 31:10) After the Exodus from Egypt, Jehovah provided for the needs of his people as they walked through the desert lands. Similarly, he will provide for his people as they make their way home from Babylon.—Deuteronomy 8: 15, 16.

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22. What are faithful Jews urged to do, and what assurances are they given?

23 There is another vital principle that the Jews must bear in mind regarding Jehovah's saving deeds. The righteously inclined may suffer because of their sins, but they will not be destroyed. It is different, though, for the unrighteous. ***"'There is no peace,' Jehovah has said, 'for the wicked ones.'"*** **(*Isaiah 48:22*)** Unrepentant sinners will not receive the peace that God has reserved for those who love him. Acts of salvation are not intended for the stubbornly wicked or the unbelieving. Such acts are only for those who have faith. (Titus 1:15, 16; Revelation 22:14, 15) Peace from God is not the possession of the wicked.

24 In 537 B.C.E., the opportunity to leave Babylon brought great joy to faithful Israelites. In 1919 the release of God's people from Babylonish captivity led to rejoicing on their part. (Revelation 11:11, 12) They were filled with hope, and they seized the opportunity to expand their activity. True, it required courage for that little band of Christians to take advantage of the new possibilities of preaching in a hostile world. But with Jehovah's help, they got down to the work of preaching the good news. History testifies that Jehovah blessed them.

25 This part of Isaiah's prophecy stresses that Jehovah teaches us for our good. It is very important to pay close attention to God's righteous decrees. (Revelation 15:2-4) If we remind ourselves of God's wisdom and love, it will help us to conform to what Jehovah says is right. All his commands are for our benefit.—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

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23. Who will not enjoy God-given peace?
24. What brought rejoicing to God's people in modern times?
25. Why is it important to pay close attention to God's righteous decrees?

"A Time of Goodwill"

Isaiah 49:1-26

ALL faithful humans have long enjoyed God's approval and protection. But Jehovah does not extend his goodwill indiscriminately. A person must qualify for such an incomparable blessing. Isaiah was one who did. He enjoyed God's favor and was used by Jehovah as an instrument to make known His will to others. An example of this is recorded in the first half of chapter 49 of Isaiah's prophecy.

2 These words are prophetically addressed to the seed of Abraham. In the initial fulfillment, that seed is the nation of Israel, which descended from Abraham. However, much of the language clearly applies to the long-hoped-for Seed of Abraham, the promised Messiah. The inspired words also apply to the spiritual brothers of the Messiah, who become part of the spiritual seed of Abraham and of "the Israel of God." (Galatians 3:7, 16, 29; 6:16) In particular, this portion of Isaiah's prophecy describes the special relationship that exists between Jehovah and his beloved Son, Jesus Christ.—Isaiah 49:26.

Appointed and Protected by Jehovah

3 The Messiah enjoys God's goodwill, or approval. Jehovah gives him the authority and credentials needed to ful-

1, 2. (a) What blessing did Isaiah enjoy? (b) Who are involved in the prophetic words recorded in the first half of Isaiah chapter 49?
3, 4. (a) What support does the Messiah have? (b) To whom is the Messiah speaking?

fill his mission. Appropriately, then, the future Messiah says: ***"Listen to me, O you islands, and pay attention, you national groups far away. Jehovah himself has called me even from the belly. From the inward parts of my mother he has made mention of my name."—Isaiah 49:1.***

4 Here the Messiah directs his remarks to peoples from "far away." Although the Messiah is promised to the Jewish people, his ministry will serve to bless all the nations. (Matthew 25:31-33) The "islands" and the "national groups," even though not in a covenant with Jehovah, should heed Israel's Messiah because he is sent to bring salvation to all humankind.

5 The prophecy says that Jehovah will name the Messiah before he is born as a human. (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31) Long before his birth, Jesus is named "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6) Immanuel, likely the name of a son of Isaiah, also turns out to be a prophetic name of the Messiah. (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:21-23) Even the given name by which the Messiah will come to be known—Jesus—is foretold before his birth. (Luke 1:30, 31) This name comes from the Hebrew word that means "Jehovah Is Salvation." Clearly, Jesus is not a self-appointed Christ.

6 The Messiah's prophetic words continue: ***"And he proceeded to make my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand he has hidden me. And he gradually made me a polished arrow. He concealed me in his own quiver." (Isaiah 49:2)*** When the time comes for Jehovah's Messiah to begin his earthly ministry in 29 C.E., Jesus' words and actions do indeed prove to be like sharp, polished

5. How is the Messiah named even before he is born as a human?
6. In what way is the Messiah's mouth like a sharp sword, and how is he hidden, or concealed?

weapons, able to penetrate the hearts of his listeners. (Luke 4:31, 32) His words and actions provoke the wrath of Jehovah's great enemy, Satan, and his agents. From the time of Jesus' birth, Satan tries to take His life, but Jesus is like an arrow concealed in Jehovah's own quiver.* He can confidently count on his Father's protection. (Psalm 91:1; Luke 1:35) At the appointed time, Jesus gives his life in behalf of mankind. But the time will come when he will go forth as a mighty heavenly warrior armed in a different sense, with a sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth. This time, the sharp sword represents Jesus' authority to pronounce and execute judgments against Jehovah's enemies.—Revelation 1:16.

The Labors of God's Servant Are Not in Vain

7 Now Jehovah speaks these prophetic words: ***"You are my servant, O Israel, you the one in whom I shall show my beauty." (Isaiah 49:3)*** Jehovah refers to the nation of Israel as his servant. (Isaiah 41:8) But Jesus Christ is God's preeminent Servant. (Acts 3:13) None of God's creatures can reflect Jehovah's "beauty" better than Jesus. Hence,

* "Satan, no doubt identifying Jesus as the Son of God and the one who was prophesied to bruise him in the head (Ge 3:15), did everything he could to destroy Jesus. But, when announcing the conception of Jesus to Mary, the angel Gabriel told her: 'Holy spirit will come upon you, and power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason also what is born will be called holy, God's Son.' (Lu 1:35) Jehovah safeguarded his Son. The efforts to destroy Jesus when an infant were unsuccessful."—*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, page 868, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

7. To whom are Jehovah's words at Isaiah 49:3 applied, and why?

The Messiah is like "a polished arrow" in Jehovah's quiver

while nominally addressed to Israel, these words have their real application to Jesus.—John 14:9; Colossians 1:15.

8 Is it not true, though, that Jesus is despised and rejected by most of his own people? Yes. By and large, the nation of Israel does not accept Jesus as God's anointed Servant. (John 1:11) All that Jesus accomplishes while on earth might seem to his contemporaries to be of little value, even insignificant. This apparent failure in his ministry is alluded to next by the Messiah: ***"It is for nothing that I have toiled. For unreality and vanity I have used up my own power."*** **(*Isaiah 49:4a*)** These statements are not made because the Messiah is discouraged. Consider what he says next: ***"Truly my judgment is with Jehovah, and my wages with my God."*** **(*Isaiah 49:4b*)** The Messiah's success is to be judged, not by men, but by God.

9 Jesus is principally interested in God's approval, or goodwill. In the prophecy, the Messiah says: ***"Now Jehovah, the One forming me from the belly as a servant belonging to him, has said for me to bring back Jacob to him, in order that to him Israel itself may be gathered. And I shall be glorified in the eyes of Jehovah, and my own God will have become my strength."*** **(*Isaiah 49:5*)** The Messiah comes to turn the hearts of the sons of Israel back to their heavenly Father. Most do not respond, but some do. However, his real wages are with Jehovah God. His success is measured, not in human terms, but

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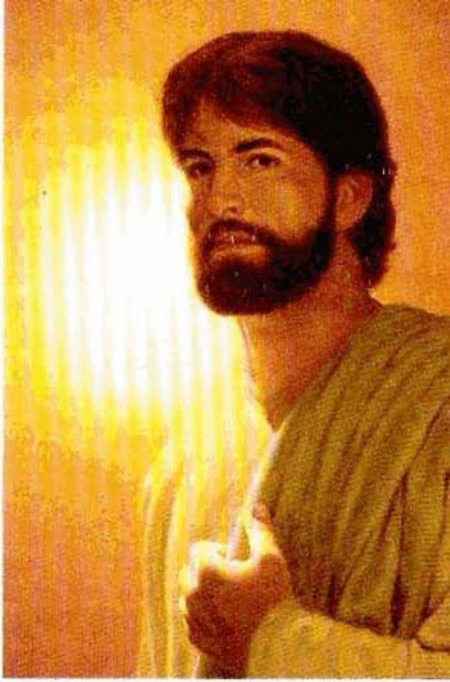
8. How do the Messiah's own people react to him, but to whom does the Messiah look to judge his success?

9, 10. (a) What is the Messiah's commission from Jehovah, and what results does he achieve? (b) How can Christians today be encouraged by the experiences of the Messiah?



The Messiah has been "a light of the nations"

according to Jehovah's own standards.

10 Today, Jesus' followers may at times feel as if they are toiling for nothing. In some places, the results of their ministry may seem insignificant when compared with the amount of work and effort expended. Still, they endure, encouraged by the example of Jesus. They are also strengthened by the words of the apostle Paul, who wrote: "Consequently, my beloved brothers, become steadfast, unmovable, always having plenty to do in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in connection with the Lord."—1 Corinthians 15:58.

"A Light of the Nations"

11 In Isaiah's prophecy, Jehovah encourages the Messiah by reminding him that being God's Servant is no *"trivial matter."* Jesus is *"to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back even the safeguarded ones of Israel."*

11, 12. How has the Messiah been "a light of the nations"?

Jehovah additionally explains: ***"I also have given you for a light of the nations, that my salvation may come to be to the extremity of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)*** How does Jesus enlighten peoples "to the extremity of the earth" when his earthly ministry is restricted to Israel?

12 The Bible record shows that God's "light of the nations" was not extinguished with Jesus' departure from the earthly scene. About 15 years after Jesus' death, the missionaries Paul and Barnabas quoted the prophecy of Isaiah 49:6 and applied it to Jesus' disciples, his spiritual brothers. They explained: "Jehovah has laid commandment upon us in these words, 'I have appointed you as a light of nations, for you to be a salvation to the extremity of the earth.'" (Acts 13:47) Before his own death, Paul saw the good news of salvation made available to not only the Jews but "all creation that is under heaven." (Colossians 1:6, 23) Today, the remaining ones of Christ's anointed brothers continue this work. Supported by "a great crowd" numbering into the millions, they serve as "a light of the nations" in more than 230 lands around the world.—Revelation 7:9.

13 Jehovah has indeed proved to be the strength behind his Servant the Messiah, the anointed brothers of the Messiah, and all those of the great crowd who, with them, continue the work of preaching the good news. True, like Jesus, his disciples have faced disdain and opposition. (John 15:20) But in his due time, Jehovah always causes a reversal of circumstances in order to rescue and reward his loyal servants. Regarding the Messiah,

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13, 14. (a) The Messiah and his followers have met up with what reaction to the preaching work? (b) What reversal of circumstances has taken place?

who is ***"despised in soul"*** and ***"detested by the nation,"*** Jehovah promises: ***"Kings themselves will see and certainly rise up, and princes, and they will bow down, by reason of Jehovah, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who chooses you."—Isaiah 49:7.***

14 Later the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Philippi about this foretold reversal of circumstances. He described Jesus as someone who had been humiliated on a torture stake but then was exalted by God. Jehovah gave his Servant "a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name, so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend." (Philippians 2:8-11) Christ's faithful followers have been warned that they too will be persecuted. But like the Messiah, they are assured of Jehovah's goodwill.—Matthew 5:10-12; 24:9-13; Mark 10:29, 30.

"The Especially Acceptable Time"

15 Isaiah's prophecy continues with a statement of great significance. Jehovah tells the Messiah: ***"In a time of goodwill I have answered you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you; and I kept safeguarding you that I might give you as a covenant for the people." (Isaiah 49:8a)*** A similar prophecy is recorded at Psalm 69:13-18. The psalmist refers to "a time of goodwill," using the expression "an acceptable time." These terms imply that Jehovah's goodwill and protection are extended in a special manner but only during a specific and temporary period.

16 When was that time of goodwill? In the original setting, the words were part of a restoration prophecy and

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15. What special "time" is mentioned in Isaiah's prophecy, and what is implied by this?
16. What was Jehovah's time of goodwill for ancient Israel?

foretold the Jews' return from exile. The nation of Israel experienced a time of goodwill when they were able to ***"rehabilitate the land"*** and repossess their ***"desolated hereditary possessions."*** **(*Isaiah 49:8b*)** They were no longer ***"prisoners"*** in Babylon. During their journey home, Jehovah made sure that they did not go ***"hungry"*** or ***"thirsty,"*** nor did any ***"parching heat or sun strike them."*** Scattered Israelites flocked back to their homeland ***"from far away . . . , from the north and from the west."*** **(*Isaiah 49:9-12*)** Notwithstanding this initial dramatic fulfillment, the Bible shows that there are extended applications of this prophecy.

17 First, on the occasion of Jesus' birth, the angels proclaimed peace and God's goodwill, or favor, toward men. (Luke 2:13, 14) This goodwill was offered, not to men in general, but only to those who exercised faith in Jesus. Later Jesus publicly read the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1, 2 and applied it to himself as the proclaimer of "Jehovah's acceptable year." (Luke 4:17-21) The apostle Paul spoke of Christ as receiving Jehovah's special protection during the days of his flesh. (Hebrews 5:7-9) So this time of goodwill applies to God's favor upon Jesus during his lifetime as a human.

18 However, there is a further application of this prophecy. After quoting the words of Isaiah regarding the time of goodwill, Paul went on to say: "Look! Now is the especially acceptable time. Look! Now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2) Paul wrote these words 22 years after Jesus' death. Evidently, with the birth of the Christian congregation at Pentecost of 33 C.E., Jehovah ex-

17, 18. What time of goodwill did Jehovah appoint during the first century?

tended his year of goodwill so as to include Christ's anointed followers.

19 What about Jesus' followers today who are not anointed as heirs of God's heavenly kingdom? Can those with an earthly hope benefit from this acceptable time? Yes. The Bible book of Revelation shows that this is a time of goodwill on the part of Jehovah toward the great crowd that will come "out of the great tribulation" to enjoy life on a paradise earth. (Revelation 7:13-17) Hence, all Christians can take advantage of this limited period during which Jehovah offers his goodwill to imperfect humans.

20 The apostle Paul preceded the proclamation of Jehovah's acceptable time with a warning. He entreated Christians "not to accept the undeserved kindness of God and miss its purpose." (2 Corinthians 6:1) Accordingly, Christians make use of every opportunity to please God and do his will. (Ephesians 5:15, 16) They do well to follow Paul's admonition: "Beware, brothers, for fear there should ever develop in any one of you a wicked heart lacking faith by drawing away from the living God; but keep on exhorting one another each day, as long as it may be called 'Today,' for fear any one of you should become hardened by the deceptive power of sin."—Hebrews 3:12, 13.

21 As the prophetic expressions between Jehovah and his Messiah come to an end, Isaiah utters a joyful statement: ***"Give a glad cry, you heavens, and be joyful, you***

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19. How can Christians today benefit from Jehovah's time of goodwill?
20. In what way can Christians avoid missing the purpose of Jehovah's undeserved kindness?
21. What joyful statement concludes the first part of Isaiah chapter 49?

earth. Let the mountains become cheerful with a glad outcry. For Jehovah has comforted his people, and he shows pity upon his own afflicted ones." **(*Isaiah 49:13*)** What beautiful words of comfort for the Israelites of old and for Jehovah's great Servant, Jesus Christ, as well as for Jehovah's anointed servants and their "other sheep" companions today!—John 10:16.

Jehovah Does Not Forget His People

22 Isaiah now continues to report Jehovah's pronouncements. He foretells that the exiled Israelites will tend to tire out and lose hope. Isaiah says: ***"Zion kept saying: 'Jehovah has left me, and Jehovah himself has forgotten me.'"*** **(*Isaiah 49:14*)** Is this true? Has Jehovah abandoned his people and forgotten them? Acting as Jehovah's spokesman, Isaiah continues: ***"Can a wife forget her suckling so that she should not pity the son of her belly? Even these women can forget, yet I myself shall not forget you."*** **(*Isaiah 49:15*)** What a loving response from Jehovah! God's love for his people is greater than that of a mother for her child. He is constantly thinking of his loyal ones. He remembers them as if their names were engraved on his hands: ***"Look! Upon my palms I have engraved you. Your walls are in front of me constantly."—Isaiah 49:16.***

23 In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul exhorted Christians: "Let us not give up in doing what is fine, for in due season we shall reap if we do not tire out." (Galatians 6:9) To the Hebrews he wrote the encouraging words: "God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name." (Hebrews 6:10)

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22. How does Jehovah emphasize that he will never forget his people?
23. How did Paul encourage Christians to trust Jehovah not to forget them?

God's love for his people is greater than that of a mother for her child

Never should we feel that Jehovah has forgotten his people. Like ancient Zion, Christians have good reason to rejoice and patiently wait on Jehovah. He holds firm to his covenant terms and promises.

24 Jehovah, through Isaiah, offers additional comfort. Those ***"tearing [Zion] down,"*** either the Babylonians or the apostate Jews, are no longer a threat. Zion's ***"sons,"*** exiled Jews that remain loyal to Jehovah, ***"have hurried up."*** They will be ***"collected together."*** Having hastened back to Jerusalem, the repatriated Jews will be adornments to their capital city, just as ***"a bride"*** is clothed with ***"ornaments."*** **(*Isaiah 49:17, 18*)** Zion's places have been ***"devastated."*** Imagine her surprise when she

24. In what way will Zion be restored, and what questions will she ask?

suddenly has so many inhabitants that her dwelling place seems cramped. (***Read Isaiah 49:19, 20.***) Naturally, she asks where all these children come from: ***"You will for certain say in your heart, 'Who has become father to these for me, since I am a woman bereaved of children and sterile, gone into exile and taken prisoner? As for these, who has brought them up? Look! I myself had been left behind alone. These—where have they been?'"*** (***Isaiah 49:21***) What a happy situation for previously barren Zion!

25 These words have a modern fulfillment. In the difficult years of the first world war, spiritual Israel experienced a period of desolation and captivity. But she was restored and came to be in a spiritual paradise. (Isaiah 35:1-10) Like the once devastated city described by Isaiah, she was delighted—as it were—to find herself teeming with joyful, active worshipers of Jehovah.

"A Signal for the Peoples"

26 In a prophetic way, Jehovah now takes Isaiah to the time when His people will be released from Babylon. Will they receive any divine direction? Jehovah answers: ***"Look! I shall raise up my hand even to the nations, and to the peoples I shall lift up my signal. And they will bring your sons in the bosom, and upon the shoulder they will carry your own daughters."*** (***Isaiah 49:22***) In the original fulfillment, Jerusalem, formerly the seat of government and the location of Jehovah's temple, becomes Jehovah's "signal." Even prominent and powerful people of other nations, such as ***"kings"*** and ***"princesses,"*** assist the Isra-

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25. In modern times, what restoration did spiritual Israel experience?

26. What direction does Jehovah provide for his liberated people?

elites in their journey back there. (*Isaiah 49:23a*) Persian kings Cyrus and Artaxerxes Longimanus and their households prove to be among these helpers. (Ezra 5:13; 7:11-26) And Isaiah's words have a further application.

27 Isaiah 11:10 speaks of "a signal for the peoples." The apostle Paul applied these words to Christ Jesus. (Romans 15:8-12) Hence, in the greater fulfillment, Jesus and his spirit-anointed corulers are Jehovah's "signal" to which the peoples flock. (Revelation 14:1) In due time all the peoples of the earth—even today's ruling classes—will have to bow to the Messiah's rulership. (Psalm 2:10, 11; Daniel 2:44) The result? Jehovah says: ***"You will have to know that I am Jehovah, of whom those hoping in me will not be ashamed."—Isaiah 49:23b.***

"Now Our Salvation Is Nearer"

28 Some of those in exile in Babylon may wonder, 'Is it really possible that Israel will be released?' Jehovah takes that question into account by asking: ***"Can those already taken be taken from a mighty man himself, or can the body of captives of the tyrant make their escape?"*** (*Isaiah 49:24*) The reply is yes. Jehovah assures them: ***"Even the body of captives of the mighty man will be taken away, and those already taken by the tyrant himself will make their escape."*** (*Isaiah 49:25a*) What comforting assurance! Moreover, Jehovah's goodwill toward his people comes with a firm commitment to protect them. In no uncertain terms, he says: ***"Against anyone contending***

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27. (a) In the greater fulfillment, to what "signal" will the peoples flock? (b) What will result when all nations are forced to bow to the Messiah's rulership?

28. (a) With what words does Jehovah once again assure his people that they will be released? (b) What commitment does Jehovah still have with regard to his people?

against you I myself shall contend, and your own sons I myself shall save." (Isaiah 49:25b) That commitment still stands. As recorded at Zechariah 2:8, Jehovah says to his people: "He that is touching you is touching my eyeball." True, we now enjoy a period of goodwill during which peoples throughout the earth have opportunity to flock to spiritual Zion. However, that period of goodwill will come to an end.

29 What will happen to those who stubbornly refuse to obey Jehovah and who even persecute his worshipers? He says: ***"I will make those maltreating you eat their own flesh; and as with the sweet wine they will become drunk with their own blood." (Isaiah 49:26a)*** A grim prospect! Such stubborn opponents have no long-term future. They will be destroyed. Thus, both by saving his people and by destroying their enemies, Jehovah will be seen as a Savior. ***"All flesh will have to know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior and your Repurchaser, the Powerful One of Jacob."—Isaiah 49:26b.***

30 Those words first applied when Jehovah used Cyrus to free His people from Babylonian bondage. They applied equally in 1919 when Jehovah used his enthroned Son, Jesus Christ, to release His people from spiritual enslavement. Hence, the Bible speaks of both Jehovah and Jesus as saviors. (Titus 2:11-13; 3:4-6) Jehovah is our Savior, and Jesus, the Messiah, is his "Chief Agent." (Acts 5:31) Indeed, God's saving acts through Jesus Christ are wonderful. By means of the good news, Jehovah frees righthearted ones from bondage to false religion. Through the ransom sacrifice, he delivers them

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29. What grim prospect awaits those who refuse to obey Jehovah?
30. What saving acts has Jehovah performed in behalf of his people, and what will he yet do?

from bondage to sin and death. In 1919 he delivered Jesus' brothers from spiritual bondage. And in the fast-approaching war of Armageddon, he will deliver a great crowd of faithful humans from the destruction that will come upon sinners.

31 What a privilege, then, to be recipients of God's goodwill! May all of us use this acceptable time wisely. And may we act in harmony with the urgency of our times, paying heed to Paul's words to the Romans: "You people know the season, that it is already the hour for you to awake from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than at the time when we became believers. The night is well along; the day has drawn near. Let us therefore put off the works belonging to darkness and let us put on the weapons of the light. As in the daytime let us walk decently, not in revelries and drunken bouts, not in illicit intercourse and loose conduct, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not be planning ahead for the desires of the flesh."—Romans 13:11-14.

32 Jehovah will continue to favor those who heed his counsel. He will provide them with the strength and abilities needed to carry out the preaching of the good news. (2 Corinthians 4:7) Jehovah will use his servants as he uses their Leader, Jesus. He will make their mouth "like a sharp sword" so that they will reach the hearts of the meek with the message of the good news. (Matthew 28: 19, 20) He will protect his people "in the shadow of his hand." Like "a polished arrow," they will be concealed "in his own quiver." Indeed, Jehovah will not forsake his people!—Psalm 94:14; Isaiah 49:2, 15.

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31. How should Christians react to being recipients of God's goodwill?

32. What assurances do God's people have?

"Do Not Put Your Trust in Nobles"

Isaiah 50:1-11

"DO NOT put your trust in nobles, nor in the son of earthling man, to whom no salvation belongs. . . . Happy is the one who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in Jehovah his God, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 146:3-6) If only the Jews living in Isaiah's day would do as the psalmist counseled! If only they would place their confidence, not in Egypt or in any other pagan nation, but in "the God of Jacob"! Then, when Judah's enemies come up against her, Jehovah would act to protect her. However, Judah has refused to turn to Jehovah for help. As a result, Jehovah will allow Jerusalem to be destroyed and the inhabitants of Judah to be taken into captivity in Babylon.

2 Judah has no one to blame but herself. She cannot rightfully claim that her destruction comes about because Jehovah has dealt treacherously with her or has neglected his covenant with the nation. The Creator is no covenant breaker. (Jeremiah 31:32; Daniel 9:27; Revelation 15:4) Underscoring this fact, Jehovah asks the Jews: ***"Where, then, is the divorce certificate of the mother of you people, whom I sent away?"*** **(*Isaiah 50:1a*)** Under the Mosaic Law, a man who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of

1, 2. (a) What inspired counsel do the Jews fail to heed, and with what result? (b) Why does Jehovah ask: 'Where is the divorce certificate?'

divorce. She is then free to become another man's. (Deuteronomy 24:1, 2) In a figurative sense, Jehovah has issued such a certificate to Judah's sister kingdom, Israel, but he has not done so to Judah.* He is still her "husbandly owner." (Jeremiah 3:8, 14) Judah is certainly not free to consort with pagan nations. Jehovah's relationship with her will continue "until Shiloh [the Messiah] comes."—Genesis 49:10.

3 Jehovah also asks Judah: ***"Which one of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you people?" (Isaiah 50:1b)*** The Jews will not be sent into Babylonian captivity to cover some supposed debt that Jehovah has incurred. Jehovah is not like a poor Israelite who must sell his children to a creditor in order to settle accounts. (Exodus 21:7) Rather, Jehovah points to the real reason that his people will be enslaved: ***"Look! Because of your own errors you have been sold, and because of your own transgressions your mother has been sent away." (Isaiah 50:1c)*** It is the Jews who have forsaken Jehovah; he has not forsaken them.

4 Jehovah's next question clearly highlights his love for his people: ***"Why is it that, when I came in, there was no one? When I called, there was nobody answering?" (Isaiah 50:2a)*** Through his servants the prophets, Jehovah has come in, as it were, to his people's home to plead with them to return to him with all their hearts. But the answer is silence. The Jews prefer to look to earthling man for support, at times even turning to Egypt.—Isaiah 30:2; 31:1-3; Jeremiah 37:5-7.

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*In the first three verses of Isaiah chapter 50, Jehovah describes the nation of Judah as a whole as his wife and its individual inhabitants as her children.

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3. For what reason does Jehovah 'sell' his people?
4, 5. How does Jehovah show his love for his people, but how does Judah respond?

5 Is Egypt a more reliable savior than Jehovah? Those unfaithful Jews have apparently forgotten the events that led up to the birth of their nation centuries earlier. Jehovah asks them: ***"Has my hand become in fact so short that it cannot redeem, or is there in me no power to deliver? Look! With my rebuke I dry up the sea; I make rivers a wilderness. Their fish stink due to there being no water, and they die because of thirst. I clothe the heavens with obscurity, and I make sackcloth itself their covering."—Isaiah 50:2b, 3.***

6 In 1513 B.C.E., Egypt was the oppressor—not the hoped-for deliverer—of God's people. The Israelites were slaves in that pagan land. But Jehovah delivered them, and what a thrilling deliverance that was! First he brought Ten Plagues upon the land. Following the particularly devastating tenth plague, Egypt's Pharaoh urged the Israelites to leave the country. (Exodus 7:14–12:31) However, soon after they did so, Pharaoh had a change of heart. He mustered his troops and set out to force the Israelites to return to Egypt. (Exodus 14:5-9) With a host of Egyptian soldiers behind them and the Red Sea ahead of them, the Israelites were trapped! But Jehovah was there to fight for them.

7 Jehovah stopped the Egyptians in their tracks by positioning a pillar of cloud between them and the Israelites. On the Egyptians' side of the cloud-mass, there was obscurity; on the Israelites' side, there was light. (Exodus 14: 20) Then, with the Egyptian armies held at bay, Jehovah "began making the sea go back by a strong east wind all night long and converting the sea basin into dry ground." (Exodus 14:21) Once the waters were parted, all the people —men, women, and children—were able to cross the

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6, 7. How did Jehovah show his saving power in the face of the Egyptian threat?

Red Sea to safety. When his people were well on their way to the opposite shore, Jehovah lifted the cloud. In hot pursuit, the Egyptians dashed headlong into the seabed. When his people were safely on the shore, Jehovah released the waters, drowning Pharaoh and his armies. Thus Jehovah fought for his people. What an encouragement that is for Christians today!—Exodus 14:23-28.

8 By Isaiah's time, seven hundred years have passed since that divine victory. Judah is now a nation in her own right. At times, she enters into diplomatic negotiations with foreign governments, such as Assyria and Egypt. But the leaders of these pagan nations cannot be trusted. They will al-

8. For ignoring what warnings do the inhabitants of Judah finally go into exile?

ways put self-interest ahead of any covenants they make with Judah. Speaking in the name of Jehovah, the prophets warn the people not to put their trust in such men, but the prophets' words fall on deaf ears. Finally, the Jews will be exiled to Babylon to spend 70 years in servitude. (Jeremiah 25:11) However, Jehovah will not forget his people, nor will he cast them off indefinitely. At the appointed time, he will remember them, and he will open the way for their return to their homeland to restore pure worship. To what end? To prepare for the coming of Shiloh, the one to whom the obedience of all the people will belong!

Shiloh Comes

9 Centuries pass. "The full limit of the time" arrives, and the one called Shiloh, the Lord Jesus Christ, appears on the earthly scene. (Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 1: 1, 2) The fact that Jehovah has designated his closest companion as his Spokesman to the Jews shows how much Jehovah loves his people. What kind of spokesman does

9. Who is Shiloh, and what kind of teacher is he?

At the Red Sea, Jehovah protected his people by putting a pillar of cloud between them and the Egyptians

Jesus turn out to be? One of the highest order! Jesus is more than a spokesman, he is a teacher—a Master Teacher. That is not surprising, for he has a marvelous Instructor—Jehovah God himself. (John 5:30; 6:45; 7:15, 16, 46; 8:26) This is confirmed by what Jesus prophetically says through Isaiah: ***"The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself has given me the tongue of the taught ones, that I may know how to answer the tired one with a word. He awakens morning by morning; he awakens my ear to hear like the taught ones."—Isaiah 50:4.****

10 Before coming to earth, Jesus worked at his Father's side in heaven. The warm relationship between Father and Son is poetically described at Proverbs 8:30: "I came to be beside [Jehovah] as a master worker, . . . being glad before him all the time." Listening to his Father brought Jesus great joy. He shared his Father's love for "the sons of men." (Proverbs 8:31) When he comes to earth, Jesus answers "the tired one with a word." He begins his ministry by reading a comforting passage from Isaiah's prophecy: "Jehovah's spirit is upon me, because he anointed me to declare good news to the poor, . . . to send the crushed ones away with a release." (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1) Good news for the poor! Refreshment for the weary! What joy that announcement should bring to the people! Some do rejoice—but not all. In the end, many refuse to accept Jesus' credentials as one taught by Jehovah.

11 However, some want to hear more. They respond glad-

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* From verse 4 to the end of the chapter, the writer appears to speak about himself. Isaiah may have experienced some of the trials that he mentions in these verses. However, in the fullest sense, the prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

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10. How does Jesus reflect Jehovah's love for His people, and what response does Jesus receive?
11. Who get under the yoke with Jesus, and what do they experience?

ly to Jesus' heartwarming invitation: "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls." (Matthew 11:28, 29) Among those who draw near to Jesus are the men who become his apostles. They know that to get under the yoke with Jesus means hard work for them. This work involves, among other things, preaching the good news of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth. (Matthew 24:14) As the apostles and other disciples get involved in this work, they find that it does indeed bring refreshment to their souls. The same work is being carried out by faithful Christians today, and sharing in it brings them similar joys.

He Is Not Rebellious

12 Jesus never loses sight of his purpose in coming to earth—to do God's will. His view of matters is foretold: ***"The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself has opened my ear, and I, for my part, was not rebellious. I did not turn in the opposite direction."*** **(*Isaiah 50:5*)** Jesus is always obedient to God. Indeed, he goes so far as to say: "The Son cannot do a single thing of his own initiative, but only what he beholds the Father doing." (John 5:19) In his prehuman existence, Jesus likely worked alongside his Father for millions, even billions, of years. After coming to earth, he continues to follow Jehovah's instructions. How much more should we, Christ's imperfect followers, take care to do as Jehovah directs!

13 Some of those who reject Jehovah's only-begotten Son

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12. In what ways does Jesus show his obedience to his heavenly Father?

13. What lies ahead for Jesus, yet how does he show himself courageous?

persecute him, and this too is foretold: ***"My back I gave to the strikers, and my cheeks to those plucking off the hair. My face I did not conceal from humiliating things and spit."*** **(*Isaiah 50:6*)** According to the prophecy, the Messiah will suffer pain and humiliation at the hands of opposers. Jesus knows this. And he knows how far this persecution will go. Yet, as his time on earth draws to a close, he shows no fear. With flintlike determination he sets out for Jerusalem, where his human life will come to an end. On the way there, Jesus tells his disciples: "Here we are, advancing up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and will deliver him to men of the nations, and they will make fun of him and will spit upon him and scourge him and kill him, but three days later he will rise." (Mark 10:33, 34) All this wicked mistreatment will be at the instigation of men who should know better —the chief priests and the scribes.

14 On the night of Nisan 14, 33 C.E., Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane with some of his followers. He is praying. Suddenly, a mob appears and takes him into custody. But he is not afraid. He knows that Jehovah is with him. Jesus assures his terrified apostles that if he wanted to, he could appeal to his Father to send more than twelve legions of angels to rescue him, but he adds: "In that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?"—Matthew 26:36, 47, 53, 54.

15 Everything foretold concerning the trials and the death of the Messiah comes to pass. After a rigged trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus is examined by Pontius Pilate, who has him whipped. Roman soldiers "hit him on the head with a reed and spit upon him." Thus Isaiah's words

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14, 15. How are Isaiah's words that Jesus would be struck and humiliated fulfilled?

are fulfilled. (Mark 14:65; 15:19; Matthew 26:67, 68) Although the Bible does not state that some of the hair of Jesus' beard is literally pulled out—a gesture of extreme contempt—this no doubt occurs, just as Isaiah foretold.* —Nehemiah 13:25.

16 When Jesus stands before Pilate, he does not beg for his life to be spared but maintains quiet dignity, knowing that he must die in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled. When the Roman governor points out that he has the power to condemn Jesus to death or to release him, Jesus fearlessly replies: "You would have no authority at all against me unless it had been granted to you from above." (John 19:11) Pilate's soldiers subject Jesus to inhuman treatment, but they fail to shame him. Why should he feel ashamed? He is not being justly punished for some transgression. Rather, he is being persecuted for righteousness' sake. In this respect, Isaiah's further prophetic words are fulfilled: ***"The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself will help me. That is why I shall not have to feel humiliated. That is why I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed."—Isaiah 50:7.***

17 Jesus' courage is rooted in his complete confidence in Jehovah. His comportment shows him to be in full harmony with the words of Isaiah: ***"The One declaring me righteous is near. Who can contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my judicial antagonist? Let him approach me. Look! The Sovereign Lord Jehovah himself will help me. Who is there that can pronounce me wicked?***

* Interestingly, in the *Septuagint,* Isaiah 50:6 reads: "I gave my back to scourges, and my cheeks to blows."

16. In the face of immense pressure, what is Jesus' demeanor, and why does he not feel ashamed?
17. In what ways has Jehovah stood beside Jesus all through his ministry?

Look! All of them, like a garment, will wear out. A mere moth will eat them up." (Isaiah 50:8, 9) On the day of Jesus' baptism, Jehovah declares him righteous as a spiritual son of God. In fact, God's own voice is heard on that occasion, saying: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved." (Matthew 3:17) Near the end of his earthly life, as Jesus kneels in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, 'an angel from heaven appears to him and strengthens him.' (Luke 22:41-43) So Jesus knows that his Father approves of his life course. This perfect Son of God has committed no sin. (1 Peter 2:22) His enemies falsely accuse him of being a Sabbath breaker, a drunkard, and a demonized person, but Jesus is not dishonored by their lies. God is with him, so who can be against him?—Luke 7:34; John 5:18; 7:20; Romans 8:31; Hebrews 12:3.

18 Jesus warns his disciples: "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:20) Events soon prove this true. At Pentecost 33 C.E., holy spirit comes upon Jesus' faithful disciples, and the Christian congregation is born. Almost immediately religious leaders try to suppress the preaching work of these faithful men and women who are now associated with Jesus as part of "Abraham's seed" and adopted as spiritual sons of God. (Galatians 3:26, 29; 4:5, 6) From the first century until now, anointed Christians, while taking a firm stand for righteousness, have had to contend with lying propaganda and bitter persecution from Jesus' enemies.

19 Still, they remember Jesus' encouraging words: "Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you and lyingly say every sort of wicked thing against you for my sake. Rejoice and leap for joy, since your reward is great in the heavens." (Matthew 5:11, 12) Hence, even under

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18, 19. What experiences similar to those of Jesus have anointed Christians had?

the most bitter of attacks, anointed Christians hold their heads high. Whatever their opponents might say, they know that they have been declared righteous by God. In his sight they are "unblemished and open to no accusation."—Colossians 1:21, 22.

20 In modern times anointed Christians are supported by "a great crowd" of "other sheep." These too take a stand for righteousness. Consequently, they have suffered along with their anointed brothers and have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Jehovah has declared them righteous with a view to survival of "the great tribulation." (Revelation 7:9, 14, 15; John 10:16; James 2:23) Even if their opponents seem strong right now, Isaiah's prophecy says that in God's due time, those opponents will prove to be like a moth-eaten garment, fit only to be discarded. Meanwhile, both anointed Christians and "other sheep" keep strong through regular prayer, study of God's Word, and attendance at meetings for worship. Thus they are taught by Jehovah and learn to speak with the tongue of the taught ones.

Trust in the Name of Jehovah

21 Now note a striking contrast: ***"Who among you people is in fear of Jehovah, listening to the voice of his servant, who has walked in continual darkness and for whom there has been no brightness? Let him trust in the name of Jehovah and support himself upon his God." (Isaiah 50:10)*** Those who listen to the voice of God's Servant, Jesus Christ, walk in the light. (John 3:21) Not only

20. (a) Who support anointed Christians, and what have they experienced? (b) How do anointed Christians and "other sheep" come to have the tongue of the taught ones?

21. (a) Who are those who walk in the light, and what outcome is there for them? (b) What happens to those who walk in darkness?

do they use the divine name, Jehovah, but they also put their trust in the one who bears that name. Even if at one time they walked in darkness, now they do not fear men. They support themselves on God. However, those who persist in walking in darkness are gripped by the fear of man. Such is the case with Pontius Pilate. Although he knows that Jesus is innocent of the false charges that have been brought against him, fear prevents that Roman official from releasing Jesus. Roman soldiers kill the Son of God, but Jehovah resurrects him and crowns him with glory and honor. What of Pilate? According to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, a mere four years after Jesus' death, Pilate was replaced as Roman governor and ordered to return to Rome to answer charges of serious wrongdoing. What of the Jews who brought about Jesus' death? Less than four decades later, the armies of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and caused her inhabitants to be slain or taken into slavery. There is no bright light for those who prefer the darkness!—John 3:19.

22 To look to men for salvation is the height of folly. Isaiah's prophecy explains why: ***"Look! All you who are igniting a fire, making sparks light up, walk in the light of your fire, and amid the sparks that you have set ablaze. From my hand you will certainly come to have this: In sheer pain you will lie down."*** **(*Isaiah 50:11*)** Human leaders come and go. A charismatic individual may capture the imagination of the people for a while. But even the most sincere human is limited in what he can accomplish. Instead of lighting a roaring fire, as his supporters expect, he may succeed only in igniting a few "sparks," which give off a small measure of light and heat but soon die out. On the other hand, those who put their trust in Shiloh, God's promised Messiah, will never be disappointed.

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22. Why is it the height of folly to look to men for salvation?

Comfort for God's People

Isaiah 51:1-23

SEVENTY years—a normal human life span—that is how long the nation of Judah will be captive in Babylon. (Psalm 90:10; Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10) Most Israelites taken captive will grow old and die in Babylon. Think how humiliated they will be by the taunts and jeers of their enemies. Think, too, of the reproach that will be heaped upon their God, Jehovah, when the city on which he placed his name lies desolate for so long. (Nehemiah 1:9; Psalm 132:13; 137:1-3) The beloved temple, which was filled with God's glory when it was dedicated by Solomon, will be no more. (2 Chronicles 7:1-3) What bleak prospects! But Jehovah, through Isaiah, prophesies a restoration. (Isaiah 43:14; 44:26-28) In chapter 51 of the book of Isaiah, we find further prophecies on this theme of comfort and reassurance.

2 To those in Judah who incline their hearts toward him, Jehovah says: ***"Listen to me, you people who are pursuing after righteousness, you who are seeking to find Jehovah."*** **(*Isaiah 51:1a*)** "Pursuing after righteousness" implies action. Those 'pursuing righteousness' will

1. What bleak prospects lie ahead for Jerusalem and her inhabitants, yet what hope is there?

2. (a) To whom does Jehovah, through Isaiah, address his message of comfort? (b) How do faithful Jews 'pursue after righteousness'?

not merely claim to be God's people. They will zealously strive to be righteous and to live in harmony with God's will. (Psalm 34:15; Proverbs 21:21) They will look to Jehovah as the only Source of righteousness, and they will 'seek to find Jehovah.' (Psalm 11:7; 145:17) It is not that they will not already know who Jehovah is or how to approach him in prayer. Rather, they will endeavor to draw closer to him, worshiping him, praying to him, and seeking his direction in all they do.

3 However, those who truly pursue righteousness are comparatively few in Judah, and this may cause them to be fainthearted and despondent. So using the illustration of a quarry, Jehovah encourages them: ***"Look to the rock from which you were hewn out, and to the hollow of the pit from which you were dug out. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gradually brought you forth with childbirth pains. For he was one when I called him, and I proceeded to bless him and to make him many."*** ***(Isaiah 51:1b, 2)*** "The rock" from which the Jews were hewn is Abraham, a historical figure in whom the nation of Israel takes much pride. (Matthew 3:9; John 8:33, 39) He is the progenitor, the human source, of the nation. "The hollow of the pit" is Sarah, from whose womb came Israel's ancestor Isaac.

4 Abraham and Sarah were beyond their procreative years and were childless. Yet, Jehovah promised to bless Abraham and "to make him many." (Genesis 17:1-6, 15-17) By divine restoration of their procreative powers, Abraham and Sarah brought forth a child in their old

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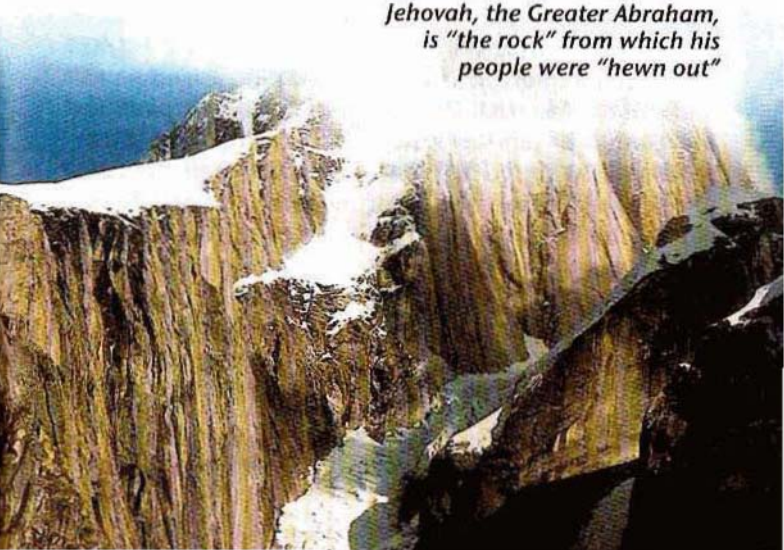
3, 4. (a) Who is "the rock" from which the Jews were hewn, and who is "the hollow of the pit" from which they were dug out? (b) Why will remembering their roots bring comfort to the Jews?

age, and from him God's covenant nation sprang. Thus Jehovah made that one man father of a great nation whose number turned out to be as uncountable as the stars in the heavens. (Genesis 15:5; Acts 7:5) If Jehovah could thus take Abraham from a distant land and form him into a mighty nation, he can certainly carry out his promise to free a faithful remnant from bondage in Babylon, restore them to their homeland, and once again form them into a great nation. God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled; his promise to those captive Jews will also be carried out.

5 The symbolic quarrying of Isaiah 51:1, 2 likely has a further application. Deuteronomy 32:18 calls Jehovah

5. (a) Whom do Abraham and Sarah picture? Explain. (b) In the final fulfillment, who trace their origin to "the rock"?



Jehovah, the Greater Abraham, is "the rock" from which his people were "hewn out"

"the Rock" who fathered Israel and "the One bringing [Israel] forth with childbirth pains." In the latter expression, the same Hebrew verb is used as that which appears at Isaiah 51:2 with regard to Sarah giving birth to Israel. Hence, Abraham stands as a prophetic type of Jehovah, the Greater Abraham. Abraham's wife, Sarah, well pictures Jehovah's universal heavenly organization of spirit creatures, represented in the Holy Scriptures as God's wife, or woman. (Genesis 3:15; Revelation 12:1, 5) In the final fulfillment of these words of Isaiah's prophecy, the nation that springs from "the rock" is "the Israel of God," the congregation of spirit-anointed Christians, which was born at Pentecost 33 C.E. As discussed in previous chapters of this book, that nation underwent Babylonish captivity in 1918 but was restored in 1919 to a state of spiritual prosperity.—Galatians 3:26-29; 4:28; 6:16.

6 Jehovah's comfort for Zion, or Jerusalem, includes more than just a promise to produce a populous nation. We read: ***"Jehovah will certainly comfort Zion. He will for certain comfort all her devastated places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden and her desert plain like the garden of Jehovah. Exultation and rejoicing themselves will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of melody." (Isaiah 51:3)*** During the 70 years of desolation, the land of Judah will revert to a wilderness, overrun with thornbushes, brambles, and other wild vegetation. (Isaiah 64:10; Jeremiah 4:26; 9:10-12) So in addition to the resettling of Judah, the restoration will have to include the restoring of the land, which will be converted into an Edenic garden with well-watered produc-

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6. (a) What lies ahead for the land of Judah, and what restoration will be called for? (b) Isaiah 51:3 reminds us of what modern-day restoration?

tive fields and fruitful orchards. The ground will appear to rejoice. Compared with its desolate condition during the exile, the land will be paradisaic. The anointed remnant of the Israel of God entered just such a paradise in a spiritual sense in 1919.—Isaiah 11:6-9; 35:1-7.

Reasons for Confidence in Jehovah

7 Calling for renewed attentiveness, Jehovah says: ***"Pay attention to me, O my people; and you national group of mine, to me give ear. For from me a law itself will go forth, and my judicial decision I shall cause to repose even as a light to the peoples. My righteousness is near. My salvation will certainly go forth, and my own arms will judge even the peoples. In me the islands themselves will hope, and for my arm they will wait."—Isaiah 51:4, 5.***

8 Jehovah's call to give ear to him means more than just hearing his message. It means paying attention with a view to acting on what is heard. (Psalm 49:1; 78:1) The nation must appreciate that Jehovah is the Source of instruction, justice, and salvation. He alone is the Source of spiritual enlightenment. (2 Corinthians 4:6) He is the ultimate Judge of mankind. The laws and judicial decisions that emanate from Jehovah are a light to those who allow themselves to be guided by them.—Psalm 43:3; 119:105; Proverbs 6:23.

9 All of this is to be true with regard not only to God's covenant people but also to rightly disposed people everywhere, even on the most distant isles of the sea. Their confidence in God and in his ability to act in behalf of

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7, 8. (a) What does Jehovah's call to give ear to him mean? (b) Why is it important that Judah pay heed to Jehovah?

9. Besides God's covenant people, who will benefit from Jehovah's saving acts?

Opponents of God's people will disappear, like a garment eaten by moths

his faithful servants and to save them will not be disappointed. His might, or power, represented by his arm, is sure; it cannot be stayed by anyone. (Isaiah 40:10; Luke 1:51, 52) Similarly today, the zealous preaching work of the remaining members of the Israel of God has led millions, many from remote islands of the sea, to turn to Jehovah and put faith in him.

10 Jehovah next refers to a truth that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon will have to learn. Nothing in heaven or on earth can stop Jehovah from carrying out his will. (Daniel 4:34, 35) We read: ***"Raise your eyes to the heavens themselves, and look at the earth beneath. For the very heavens must be dispersed in fragments just like smoke, and like a garment the earth itself will wear out, and its inhabitants themselves will die like a mere gnat. But as for my salvation, it will prove to be even to time indefinite, and my own righteousness will not be shattered."*** **(*Isaiah 51:6*)** Although it is against the policy of the Babylonian monarchs to allow captives to return home, Jehovah's saving of his people will not be thwarted. (Isaiah 14:16, 17) The Babylonian "heavens," or ruling powers, will be broken in defeat. The Babylonian "earth," the subjects of those rul-

10. (a) What truth will King Nebuchadnezzar be forced to learn? (b) What "heavens" and "earth" will be brought to an end?

ing powers, will gradually come to an end. Yes, even the greatest power of the day cannot stand against Jehovah's might or prevent his acts of salvation.

11 How encouraging it is for Christians today to know that these prophetic words were completely fulfilled! Why? Because the apostle Peter used similar expressions regarding a yet future event. He spoke of the rapidly approaching day of Jehovah, "through which the heavens being on fire will be dissolved and the elements being intensely hot will melt!" Then he said: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:12, 13; Isaiah 34:4; Revelation 6:12-14) Although the mighty nations and their lofty starlike rulers may stand in defiance of Jehovah, in his due time they will be brought to nothing—crushed as easily as a mere gnat. (Psalm 2:1-9) Only God's righteous government will rule forever, over a righteous human society.—Daniel 2:44; Revelation 21:1-4.

12 Speaking to the "people who are pursuing after righteousness," Jehovah now says: ***"Listen to me, you the ones knowing righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law. Do not be afraid of the reproach of mortal men, and do not be struck with terror just because of their abusive words. For the moth will eat them up just as if a garment, and the clothes moth will eat them up just as if wool. But as for my righteousness, it will prove to be even to time indefinite, and my salvation to unnumbered generations."*** (***Isaiah 51:7, 8***) Those trusting in Jehovah will be vilified

11. Why is the complete fulfillment of the prophecy that the Babylonian "heavens" and "earth" would be brought to an end encouraging to Christians today?

12. Why should God's servants not be fearful when they are vilified by human opponents?

and reproached for their courageous stand, but this is not something to be feared. The reproachers are mere mortals who will be 'eaten up,' just as a woolen garment is consumed by a moth.* Like faithful Jews of old, true Christians today have no reason to fear any who oppose them. Jehovah, the eternal God, is their salvation. (Psalm 37:1, 2) Reproach from God's enemies stands as evidence that Jehovah's people have his spirit.—Matthew 5:11, 12; 10:24-31.

13 As if calling Jehovah to action in behalf of His captive people, Isaiah says: ***"Awake, awake, clothe yourself with strength, O arm of Jehovah! Awake as in the days of long ago, as during the generations of times long past. Are you not the one that broke Rahab to pieces, that pierced the sea monster? Are you not the one that dried up the sea, the waters of the vast deep? The one that made the depths of the sea a way for the repurchased ones to go across?"—Isaiah 51:9, 10.***

14 The historical examples of which Isaiah speaks are well chosen. Every Israelite knows of the nation's deliverance from Egypt and passage through the Red Sea. (Exodus 12:24-27; 14:26-31) The expressions "Rahab" and "the sea monster" refer to Egypt under her Pharaoh who opposed Israel's Exodus from Egypt. (Psalm 74:13; 87:4; Isaiah 30:7) With its head at the Nile Delta and its elongated body stretching hundreds of miles up the fertile Nile Valley, ancient Egypt resembled a monstrous serpent. (Ezekiel 29:3) But this monster was cut to pieces

* The moth referred to here is evidently the webbing clothes moth, particularly in its destructive larval stage.

13, 14. What is pictured by the expressions "Rahab" and "the sea monster," and how is it 'broken in pieces' and "pierced"?

when Jehovah poured out the Ten Plagues upon it. It was pierced, sorely wounded, and enfeebled when its army was destroyed in the waters of the Red Sea. Yes, Jehovah showed the power of his arm in his dealings with Egypt. Will he be any less ready to fight for his people exiled in Babylon?

15 Now looking ahead to Israel's deliverance from Babylon, the prophecy continues: ***"Then the redeemed ones of Jehovah themselves will return and must come to Zion with a joyful outcry, and rejoicing to time indefinite will be upon their head. To exultation and rejoicing they will attain. Grief and sighing will certainly flee away."*** **(*Isaiah 51:11*)** However sad their situation may be in Babylon, those who seek Jehovah's righteousness have glorious prospects. The time will come when grief and sighing will be no more. A joyful outcry, rejoicing, exultation —these will be heard from the lips of the redeemed, or ransomed, ones. In the modern fulfillment of those prophetic words, the Israel of God was released from Babylonish captivity in 1919. They returned to their spiritual estate with great rejoicing—rejoicing that has continued down until today.

16 What will be the price of the redemption of the Jews? Isaiah's prophecy has already revealed that Jehovah gives "Egypt as a ransom for you, Ethiopia and Seba in place of you." (Isaiah 43:1-4) This will take place later. After conquering Babylon and releasing the Jewish captives, the Persian Empire will conquer Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba. Those will be given in place of the Israelites' souls.

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15. (a) When and how will the grief and sighing of Zion flee away? (b) When did grief and sighing flee away for the Israel of God in modern times?

16. What price is paid in order to redeem the Jews?

This is in harmony with the principle stated at Proverbs 21:18: "The wicked is a ransom for the righteous one; and the one dealing treacherously takes the place of the upright ones."

Further Reassurance

17 Jehovah further reassures his people: ***"I—I myself am the One that is comforting you people. Who are you that you should be afraid of a mortal man that will die, and of a son of mankind that will be rendered as mere green grass? And that you should forget Jehovah your Maker, the One stretching out the heavens and laying the foundation of the earth, so that you were in dread constantly the whole day long on account of the rage of the one hemming you in, as though he was all set to bring you to ruin? And where is the rage of the one hemming you in?" (Isaiah 51:12, 13)*** Years of exile lie ahead. Still, there is no reason to fear the rage of Babylon. Although that nation, the third world power of Bible record, will conquer God's people and seek to 'hem them in,' or block their way of escape, faithful Jews know that Jehovah has foretold the fall of Babylon at the hand of Cyrus. (Isaiah 44:8, 24-28) In contrast to the Creator—the everlasting God, Jehovah—the inhabitants of Babylon will perish as grass that withers under the sun's intense rays during the dry season. Then where will their threats and rage be? How unwise it is to fear man and forget Jehovah, the one who made heaven and earth!

18 Although Jehovah's people will be captive for a while, "stooping in chains," as it were, their release will be sud-

17. Why is there no need for the Jews to fear the rage of Babylon?
18. Although his people will be prisoners for a time, what assurances does Jehovah give them?

den. They will not be exterminated in Babylon or die of starvation as prisoners—rendered lifeless in Sheol, the pit. (Psalm 30:3; 88:3-5) Jehovah assures them: ***"The one stooping in chains will certainly be loosened speedily, that he may not go in death to the pit and that his bread may not be lacking."—Isaiah 51:14.***

19 Still comforting Zion, Jehovah continues: ***"But I, Jehovah, am your God, the One stirring up the sea that its waves may be boisterous. Jehovah of armies is his name. And I shall put my words in your mouth, and with the shadow of my hand I shall certainly cover you, in order to plant the heavens and lay the foundation of the earth and say to Zion, 'You are my people.'"*** ***(Isaiah 51:15, 16)*** The Bible repeatedly mentions God's ability to extend his power over the sea and to control it. (Job 26:12; Psalm 89:9; Jeremiah 31:35) He has total control over the forces of nature, as he displayed when he delivered his people from Egypt. Who can be compared, even in the smallest way, to "Jehovah of armies"?—Psalm 24:10.

20 The Jews remain God's covenant people, and Jehovah assures them that they will return to their homeland, to live once more under his Law. There they will rebuild Jerusalem and the temple and resume their responsibilities under the covenant that he made with them through Moses. When the land begins to be repopulated with the repatriated Israelites and their domestic animals, "a new earth" will come into existence. Over it will be placed "new heavens," a new governmental system. (Isaiah

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19. Why can faithful Jews have complete confidence in Jehovah's words?

20. What "heavens" and "earth" will come into existence when Jehovah restores Zion, and what comforting words will he utter?

65:17-19; Haggai 1:1, 14) Jehovah will again say to Zion: "You are my people."

A Call to Action

21 Having reassured Zion, Jehovah issues a call to action. Speaking as if she had already reached the end of her sufferings, he says: ***"Rouse yourself, rouse yourself, rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of Jehovah his cup of rage. The goblet, the cup causing reeling, you have drunk, you have drained out."*** **(*Isaiah 51:17*)** Yes, Jerusalem must rise up from her calamitous condition and recover her former position and splendor. The time will come when she will have drained the symbolic cup of divine retribution. There will be nothing left of God's anger toward her.

22 Nevertheless, while Jerusalem is being punished,

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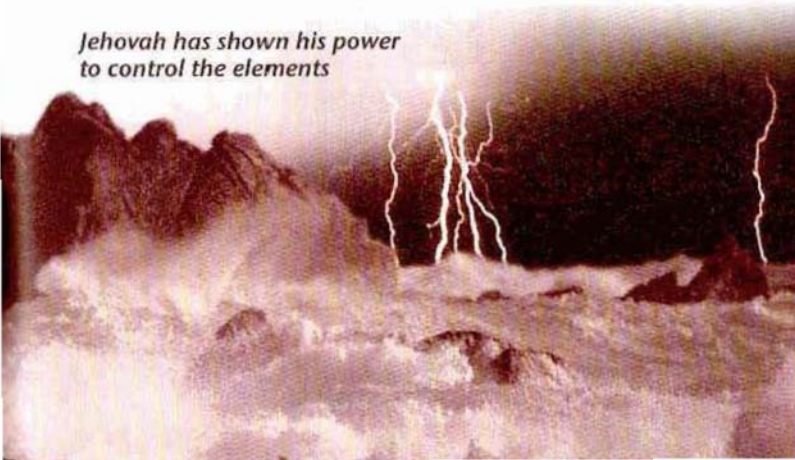
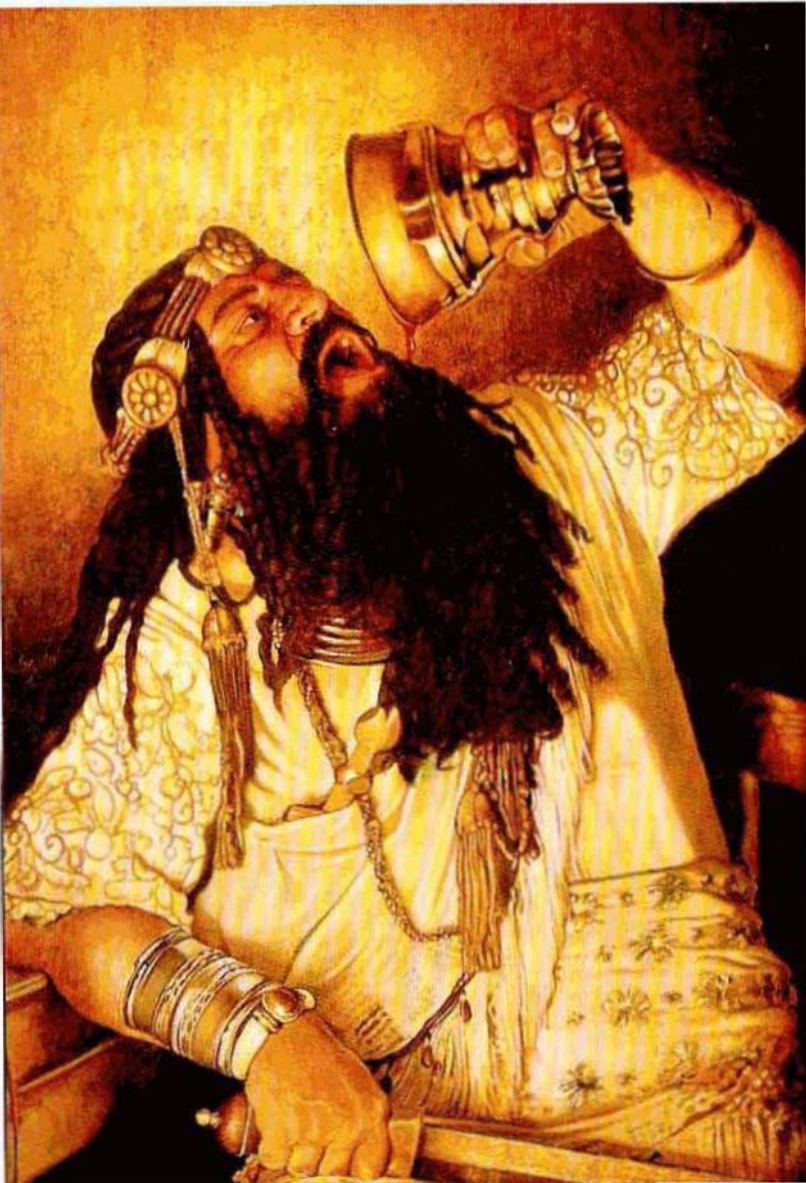
21. What call to action does Jehovah issue?
22, 23. What will Jerusalem experience when she drinks the cup of Jehovah's anger?

none of her inhabitants, her "sons," will be able to prevent what is happening. (Isaiah 43:5-7; Jeremiah 3:14) The prophecy says: ***"There was none of all the sons that she brought to birth conducting her, and there was none of all the sons that she brought up taking hold of her hand." (Isaiah 51:18)*** How she will suffer at the hands of the Babylonians! ***"Those two things were befalling you. Who will sympathize with you? Despoiling and breakdown, and hunger and sword! Who will comfort you? Your own sons have swooned away. They have lain down at the head of all the streets like the wild sheep in the net, as those who are full of the rage of Jehovah, the rebuke of your God."—Isaiah 51:19, 20.***

23 Poor Jerusalem! She will endure "despoiling and breakdown" as well as "hunger and sword." Unable to guide her and keep her on her feet, her "sons" will stand by helpless, emaciated, not strong enough to repel the Babylonian invaders. Conspicuously, at the head, or corner, of the streets, they will lie faint, weak, and



Jehovah has shown his power to control the elements



exhausted. (Lamentations 2:19; 4:1, 2) They will have drunk the cup of God's rage and will be as powerless as animals caught in a net.

24 But this sad situation will come to an end. Isaiah comfortingly says: ***"Therefore listen to this, please, O woman afflicted and drunk, but not with wine. This is what your Lord, Jehovah, even your God, who contends for his people, has said: 'Look! I will take away from your hand the cup causing reeling. The goblet, my cup of rage —you will not repeat the drinking of it anymore. And I will put it in the hand of the ones irritating you, who have said to your soul, "Bow down that we may cross over," so that you used to make your back just like the earth, and like the street for those crossing over.'"*** **(*Isaiah 51:21-23*)** After disciplining Jerusalem, Jehovah is ready to act with pity and to show a forgiving spirit toward her.

25 Jehovah will now turn his anger away from Jerusalem and direct it toward Babylon. Babylon will have razed Jerusalem and humiliated her. (Psalm 137:7-9) But Jerusalem will not have to drink from such a cup again at the hands of Babylon or her allies. Instead, the cup will be taken out of Jerusalem's hand and given to those who rejoiced at her disgrace. (Lamentations 4:21, 22) Babylon will go down, dead drunk. (Jeremiah 51:6-8) Meanwhile, Zion will rise! What a reversal! Truly, Zion can be comforted by such a prospect. And Jehovah's servants can be assured that his name will be sanctified through his saving acts.

24, 25. (a) What will not be repeated for Jerusalem? (b) After Jerusalem, who will be next in line to drink the cup of Jehovah's anger?

The cup from which Jerusalem will have drunk is to be passed to Babylon and her allies

"Cry Out Joyfully in Unison"!

Isaiah 52:1-12

LIBERATION! Can there be a more joyful prospect for a captive people? Since a major theme in the book of Isaiah is liberation and restoration, it is not surprising that aside from the Psalms, this Bible book contains more expressions of joy than any other. Isaiah chapter 52 especially gives reason for God's people to rejoice. Its prophetic words are fulfilled upon Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. And they have a greater fulfillment involving "Jerusalem above," Jehovah's heavenly organization of spirit creatures, which is sometimes described as a mother and a wife.—Galatians 4:26; Revelation 12:1.

"Put On Your Strength, O Zion!"

2 Jehovah, through Isaiah, calls out to His beloved city, Zion: ***"Wake up, wake up, put on your strength, O Zion! Put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For no more will there come again into you the uncircumcised and unclean one. Shake yourself free from the dust, rise up, take a seat, O Jerusalem. Loosen for yourself the bands on your neck, O captive daughter of Zion."*** ***(Isaiah 52:1, 2)*** Because her inhabitants have provoked Jehovah's anger, Jerusalem has lain desolate for 70 years.

1. Why are the prophetic words of Isaiah chapter 52 a source of joy, and what two fulfillments do they have?
2. When does Zion wake up, and how does this happen?

(2 Kings 24:4; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 25:8-11; Daniel 9:2) Now it is time for her to wake up from her long period of inactivity and don the beautiful garments of liberty. Jehovah has moved the heart of Cyrus to free the "captive daughter of Zion" so that the former inhabitants of Jerusalem and their offspring can leave Babylon, return to Jerusalem, and restore true worship. No uncircumcised and unclean ones must be found in Jerusalem. —Ezra 1:1-4.

3 These words of Isaiah also have a fulfillment on the Christian congregation. The congregation of anointed Christians can be described as the modern-day "daughter of Zion," since "Jerusalem above" is their mother.* Set free from pagan teachings and apostate doctrines, the anointed must maintain a clean standing before Jehovah, no, not by being circumcised in the flesh, but by being circumcised in their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 2:25-29) This includes maintaining spiritual, mental, and moral cleanness before Jehovah.—1 Corinthians 7:19; Ephesians 2:3.

4 True, "Jerusalem above" has never disobeyed Jehovah. During the first world war, however, her representatives on earth—anointed Christians—unwittingly broke Jehovah's law because they did not properly understand true Christian neutrality. Losing divine favor, they came into spiritual captivity to "Babylon the Great," the world

* See Chapter 15 of this book for a more extensive discussion of the relationship between "Jerusalem above" and her earthly, anointed children.

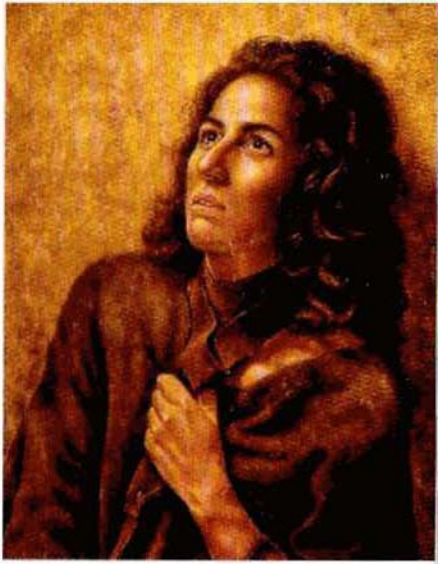
3. Why can the congregation of anointed Christians be called the "daughter of Zion," and in what sense are they liberated?
4. Although "Jerusalem above" has never disobeyed Jehovah, what experiences of her representatives on earth mirror those of the ancient inhabitants of Jerusalem?

empire of false religion. (Revelation 17:5) Their condition of being in slavery climaxed in June 1918 when eight staff members of the Watch Tower Society were imprisoned on false charges, including conspiracy. At that point the organized preaching of the good news virtually stopped. In 1919, however, a clarion call to spiritual wakefulness was sounded forth. Anointed Christians began to separate themselves more completely from the moral and spiritual uncleanness of Babylon the Great. They rose from the dust of captivity, and "Jerusalem above" came to have the splendor of a "holy city" where spiritual uncleanness is not allowed.

5 Both in 537 B.C.E. and in 1919 C.E., Jehovah had a perfect right to liberate his people. Isaiah explains: ***"This is what Jehovah has said: 'It was for nothing that you people were sold, and it will be without money that you will be repurchased.'"*** **(*Isaiah 52:3*)** Neither ancient Babylon nor Babylon the Great paid anything when they took possession of God's covenant people as slaves. Since no transaction involving money took place, Jehovah was still the legal Owner of his people. Should he have felt indebted to anybody? Of course not. In both cases, Jehovah could rightly repurchase his worshipers without giving any compensation to their captors.—Isaiah 45:13.

6 Jehovah's enemies had not learned any lessons from history. We read: ***"This is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah has said: 'It was to Egypt that my people went down in the first instance to reside there as aliens; and without cause Assyria, for its part, oppressed them.'"*** **(*Isaiah 52:4*)** Pharaoh of Egypt enslaved the Israelites,

5. Why does Jehovah have a perfect right to repurchase his people without giving compensation to their captors?
6. What lessons from history did Jehovah's enemies fail to heed?



Zion will be freed from captivity

who had been invited to his land to reside as guests. But Jehovah drowned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. (Exodus 1:11-14; 14:27, 28) When King Sennacherib of Assyria threatened Jerusalem, Jehovah's angel struck down 185,000 of the king's soldiers. (Isaiah 37:33-37) Similarly, neither ancient Babylon nor Babylon the Great can escape the consequences of oppressing God's people.

"My People Will Know My Name"

7 The captive condition of Jehovah's people has an effect on his name, as the prophecy shows: *"'Now, what interest do I have here?' is the utterance of Jehovah. 'For my people were taken for nothing. The very ones ruling over them kept howling,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and constantly, all day long, my name was being treated with disrespect. For that reason my people will know my name, even for that reason in that day, because I am the One that is speaking. Look! It is I.'"* (*Isaiah 52:5, 6*) What interest does Jehovah have in the situation? What concern of his is it that Israel is enslaved in Babylon?

7. What effect has the captivity of Jehovah's people had on his name?

Jehovah must act because Babylon has taken his people captive and has howled over them in triumph. Such bragging has led to Babylon's treating Jehovah's name disrespectfully. (Ezekiel 36:20, 21) She has failed to recognize that the desolate condition of Jerusalem is on account of Jehovah's displeasure toward his people. Rather, Babylon has viewed the enslavement of the Jews as evidence of the weakness of their God. The Babylonian coregent Belshazzar even mocks Jehovah by using vessels from His temple during a feast in honor of Babylonian gods.—Daniel 5:1-4.

8 How does all of this apply to "Jerusalem above"? Ever since apostasy took root among professed Christians, it could be said that "the name of God is being blasphemed on account of [those] people among the nations." (Romans 2:24; Acts 20:29, 30) For that matter, because of superstition the Jews eventually started to avoid using the divine name. Soon after the death of the apostles, apostate Christians followed suit and ceased to use God's personal name. The apostasy resulted in the development of Christendom, a major part of Babylon the Great. (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 7; Revelation 17:5) Christendom's wanton immorality and brazen bloodguilt have reflected badly on Jehovah's name.—2 Peter 2:1, 2.

9 When the Greater Cyrus, Jesus Christ, freed God's covenant people from captivity to Babylon the Great in 1919, they came to a better understanding of Jehovah's requirements. They had already cleansed themselves of many teachings of Christendom that have their roots in pre-Christian paganism, such as the Trinity, immortality of

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8. How has Jehovah's name been treated since the death of the apostles?

9, 10. What deeper understanding of Jehovah's standards and his name have God's covenant people of modern times come to have?

the soul, and eternal torment in a fiery hell. Now they set out to rid themselves of all traces of Babylonish influence. They also came to realize the importance of maintaining strict neutrality regarding this world's partisan affairs. They even wanted to purify themselves of whatever bloodguilt some might have incurred.

10 The modern-day servants of God also came to have a deeper understanding of the importance of Jehovah's name. In 1931 they adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses, thus publicly announcing that they supported Jehovah and his name. Moreover, through the publication of the *New World Translation* since 1950, Jehovah's Witnesses have restored the divine name to its proper place in the Bible. Yes, they have come to appreciate Jehovah's name and are making it known to the ends of the earth.

"The One Bringing Good News"

11 Now our attention is turned back to Zion when she is still in her desolate state. A messenger approaches bearing good news: ***"How comely upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news, the one publishing peace, the one bringing good news of something better, the one publishing salvation, the one saying to Zion: 'Your God has become king!'"*** **(*Isaiah 52:7*)** In 537 B.C.E., how can it be said that Zion's God has become King? Has not Jehovah always been King? Indeed, he is the "King of eternity"! (Revelation 15:3) But the exclamation "Your God has become king!" is appropriate because Babylon's fall and the royal proclamation to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and restore pure worship there constitute a new expression of Jehovah's kingship.—Psalm 97:1.

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11. Why is the exclamation "Your God has become king!" appropriate with regard to events in 537 B.C.E.?

Starting in 1919, 'comely feet' have once again appeared on "the mountains"

12 In Isaiah's day, no individual or group of individuals was identified as "the one bringing good news." Today, though, the identity of the bearer of good news is known. Jesus Christ is Jehovah's greatest messenger of peace. While on earth, he preached the good news that there would be a release from all the effects of sin inherited from Adam, including sickness and death. (Matthew 9:35) Jesus set a zealous example in publishing this good news of something better, seizing every opportunity to teach people about the Kingdom of God. (Matthew 5:1, 2; Mark 6:34; Luke 19:1-10; John 4:5-26) And his disciples followed his example.

13 In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul quotes

12. Who took the lead in "bringing good news," and how?
13. (a) How does the apostle Paul expand on the meaning of the expression "How comely upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news"? (b) Why can it be said that the feet of the messengers are "comely"?

Isaiah 52:7 to highlight the importance of the work of preaching the good news. He poses a series of thought-provoking questions, including 'How will people hear without someone to preach?' He then says: "Just as it is written: 'How comely are the feet of those who declare good news of good things!'" (Romans 10:14, 15) Paul thus expands the application of Isaiah 52:7, using the plural form "those" instead of the singular "one," which appears in the original text of Isaiah. Imitating Jesus Christ, all Christians are messengers of the good news of peace. How are their feet "comely"? Isaiah speaks as if the herald is approaching Jerusalem from the nearby mountains of Judah. From afar, it is impossible to see the messenger's feet. Rather, the focus here is on the messenger, the feet standing for the messenger himself. Just as Jesus and his disciples were a beautiful sight to meek ones in the first century, present-day Witnesses are a welcome sight to humble ones who heed the lifesaving message of good news.

14 Since when in modern times has the cry "Your God has become king!" been heard? Since 1919. In that year at a convention in Cedar Point, Ohio, J. F. Rutherford, then president of the Watch Tower Society, stirred his listeners with a talk entitled "Address to Co-laborers." The talk, based on Isaiah 52:7 and Revelation 15:2, encouraged all present to take up the preaching work. Thus, 'comely feet' began to appear on "the mountains." First anointed Christians and later their companions of the "other sheep" zealously went forth to preach the good news that Jehovah had become King. (John 10:16) How

14. How has Jehovah become King in modern times, and since when has this been announced to mankind?

had Jehovah become King? He expressed his kingship anew in 1914 when he installed his Son, Jesus Christ, as King in the newly established heavenly Kingdom. And Jehovah made yet another expression of his kingship in 1919 when he liberated "the Israel of God" from Babylon the Great.—Galatians 6:16; Psalm 47:8; Revelation 11:15, 17; 19:6.

"Your Own Watchmen Have Raised Their Voice"

15 Does the cry "Your God has become king!" elicit a response? Yes. Isaiah records: ***"Listen! Your own watchmen have raised their voice. In unison they keep crying out joyfully; for it will be eye into eye that they will see when Jehovah gathers back Zion."*** **(*Isaiah 52:8*)** No literal watchmen take their positions in Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. to welcome back the first returning exiles. The city has lain desolate for 70 years. (Jeremiah 25:11, 12) So the "watchmen" who raise their voice must be those Israelites who get the news in advance regarding Zion's restoration and who become responsible for passing the news on to the rest of Zion's children. Upon seeing Jehovah give Babylon into the hands of Cyrus in 539 B.C.E., the watchmen have no doubt in their minds that Jehovah is liberating his people. Together with those who respond to their call, the watchmen keep crying out joyfully, in unison, letting others hear the good news.

16 The alert watchmen establish a close, personal relationship with Jehovah, seeing him "eye into eye," or face-to-face, as it were. (Numbers 14:14) Their close contact with Jehovah and with one another highlights their

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15. Who are the "watchmen" who raise their voice in 537 B.C.E.?
16. Whom do the watchmen see "eye into eye," and in what sense?

unity and the joyful nature of their message.—1 Corinthians 1:10.

17 In the modern-day fulfillment, the watchman class, "the faithful and discreet slave," raises its voice not just to the ones who are already in God's visible organization but also to outsiders. (Matthew 24:45-47) A call went out to gather in the remaining ones of the anointed in 1919, and in 1922 the call was intensified at the Cedar Point, Ohio, convention with the appeal to "advertise,

17, 18. (a) How has the modern-day watchman class raised its voice? (b) In what sense has the watchman class called out in unison?

Jehovah's Witnesses speak in unison

advertise, advertise, the King and his kingdom." Since 1935, attention has been turned to gathering in a great crowd of sheeplike ones. (Revelation 7:9, 10) In recent years the announcement of Jehovah's kingship has intensified. How? In the year 2000, some six million were sharing in telling of Jehovah's kingship in more than 230 lands and territories. Further, *The Watchtower,* the foremost instrument of the watchman class, sounds out the joyful message in more than 130 languages.

18 To share in such a unifying work takes humility and brotherly love. For the call to be effective, all involved must preach the same message, featuring Jehovah's name, his ransom provision, his wisdom, his love, and his Kingdom. As Christians all around the world work shoulder to shoulder, their personal bond with Jehovah is strengthened to sound out the glad tidings in unison.

19 With God's people shouting in joy, even the place in which they dwell looks cheerful. The prophecy continues: ***"Become cheerful, cry out joyfully in unison, you devastated places of Jerusalem, for Jehovah has comforted his people; he has repurchased Jerusalem. Jehovah has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth must see the salvation of our God." (Isaiah 52:9, 10)*** With the arrival of the returnees from Babylon, the mournful-looking places of desolated Jerusalem have a cheerful appearance because Jehovah's pure worship can now be restored. (Isaiah 35:1, 2) Clearly, Jehovah has his hand in this. He has "bared his holy arm," as if rolling up his sleeves in order to apply himself to the task of saving his people.—Ezra 1:2, 3.

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19. (a) How do the "devastated places of Jerusalem" become cheerful? (b) In what sense has Jehovah "bared his holy arm"?

20 In these "last days," Jehovah has bared his holy arm in order to revive the anointed remnant, the "two witnesses" of the book of Revelation. (2 Timothy 3:1; Revelation 11:3, 7-13) Since 1919, these have been brought into a spiritual paradise, the spiritual estate that they now share with millions of their associates, the other sheep. Eventually, Jehovah will bare his holy arm to bring salvation to his people at "Har-Magedon." (Revelation 16:14, 16) Then, "all the ends of the earth must see the salvation of our God."

An Urgent Requirement

21 Those who get out of Babylon to return to Jerusalem have a requirement to meet. Isaiah writes: ***"Turn away, turn away, get out of there, touch nothing unclean; get out from the midst of her, keep yourselves clean, you who are carrying the utensils of Jehovah. For you people will get out in no panic, and you will go in no flight. For Jehovah will be going even before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard."*** (***Isaiah 52:11, 12***) The departing Israelites must leave behind them in Babylon anything having a taint of Babylon's false worship. Since they carry the utensils of Jehovah that came from the temple in Jerusalem, they have to be clean, not merely in an outward, ceremonial way, but primarily in their hearts. (2 Kings 24:11-13; Ezra 1:7) Further, Jehovah is going before them, so they do not have to panic, nor do they have to run frantically, as though bloodthirsty pursuers were hard on their heels. The God of Israel is their rear guard. —Ezra 8:21-23.

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20. What has resulted and will yet result from Jehovah's baring his holy arm in modern times?

21. (a) What is required of those "carrying the utensils of Jehovah"? (b) Why is there no reason for Jews departing from Babylon to panic?

22 Isaiah's words about keeping clean have a major fulfillment on the offspring of "Jerusalem above." When Paul admonished the Corinthian Christians not to become unevenly yoked with unbelievers, he quoted the words of Isaiah 52:11: "'Therefore get out from among

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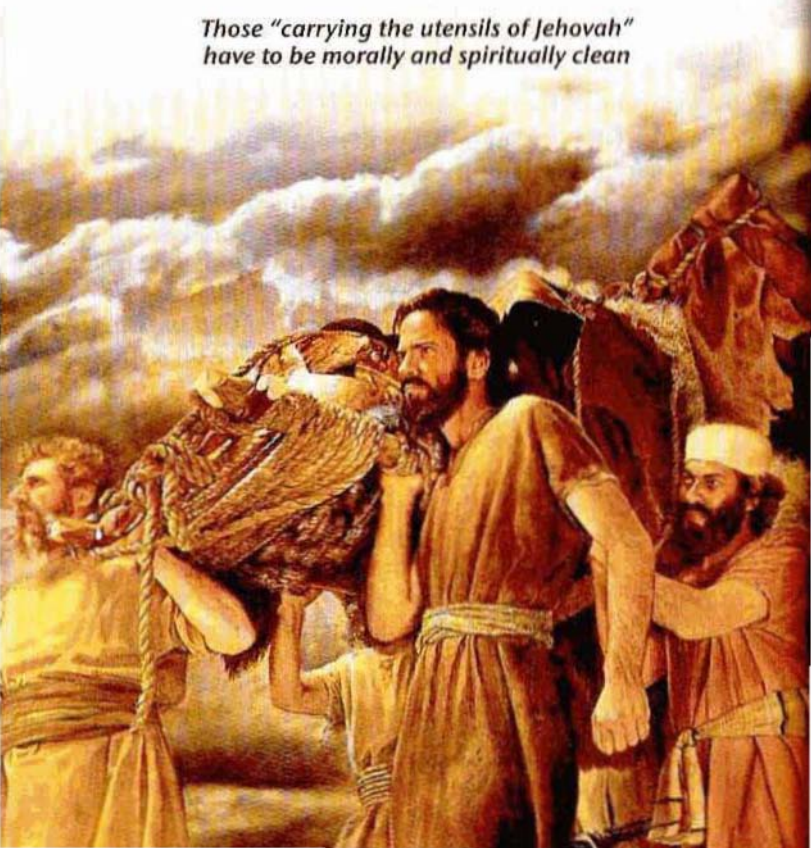
22. How does Paul stress the need for cleanness among anointed Christians?

Those "carrying the utensils of Jehovah" have to be morally and spiritually clean



them, and separate yourselves,' says Jehovah, 'and quit touching the unclean thing.'" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17) Just like the Israelites heading home from Babylon, Christians have to steer clear of Babylonish false worship.

23 This was particularly true of those anointed followers of Jesus Christ who fled Babylon the Great in 1919. They progressively cleansed themselves of all traces of false worship. (Isaiah 8:19, 20; Romans 15:4) They also became increasingly aware of the importance of moral cleanness. Although Jehovah's Witnesses have always upheld high moral standards, *The Watchtower* carried articles in 1952 emphasizing the need to discipline immoral ones so as to keep the congregation clean. Such disciplinary action also helps the wrongdoer himself to realize the need for sincere repentance.—1 Corinthians 5:6, 7, 9-13; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10; 2 John 10, 11.

24 Anointed Christians together with the great crowd of other sheep are determined to touch nothing that is spiritually unclean. Their purified, cleansed condition qualifies them to be bearers of "the utensils of Jehovah"—the precious provisions that God makes for sacred service in the house-to-house and Bible study ministry and other forms of Christian activity. By maintaining a clean standing, God's people today can be confident that Jehovah will continue to go before them as well as be their rear guard. As God's clean people, they have an abundance of reasons to "cry out joyfully in unison"!

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23. In what ways do servants of Jehovah today endeavor to keep themselves clean?

24. (a) In modern times, what are "the utensils of Jehovah"? (b) Why are Christians today confident that Jehovah will continue to go before them as well as be their rear guard?

Jehovah Exalts His Messianic Servant

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

IMAGINE that you are to meet with an important dignitary. The time and the place of your meeting are set. But there is a problem: You do not know what he looks like, and he will be traveling discreetly, without fanfare. How will you recognize him? It would help if you had a detailed description of him.

2 In the early part of the first century C.E., many Jews faced a situation like this. They were expecting the Messiah—the most important man who would ever live. (Daniel 9:24-27; Luke 3:15) But how were faithful Jews to recognize him? Jehovah, by means of the Hebrew prophets, had painted a detailed written portrait of events surrounding the Messiah that would enable discerning ones to identify him unmistakably.

3 Among the Hebrew prophecies of the Messiah, perhaps none provide a clearer picture than that recorded at Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Over 700 years in advance, Isaiah described, not the physical appearance of the Messiah, but details that were more significant—the purpose and man-

1, 2. (a) Illustrate the situation faced by many Jews in the early part of the first century C.E. (b) What provision had Jehovah made to help faithful Jews recognize the Messiah?

3. What description of the Messiah is provided at Isaiah 52:13–53:12?

ner of his suffering and specifics about his death, burial, and exaltation. A consideration of this prophecy and its fulfillment will warm our hearts and strengthen our faith.

"My Servant"—Who Is He?

4 Isaiah has just told of the release of the Jews from exile in Babylon. Now looking ahead to a far greater event, he records Jehovah's words: ***"Look! My servant will act with insight. He will be in high station and will certainly be elevated and exalted very much." (Isaiah 52:13)*** Just who is this "servant"? Over the centuries, Jewish scholars offered various opinions. Some claimed that he represented the whole nation of Israel during its Babylonian exile. But such an explanation does not match the prophecy. God's Servant suffers voluntarily. Although innocent, he suffers for the sins of others. This hardly describes the Jewish nation, which went into exile because of its sinful ways. (2 Kings 21:11-15; Jeremiah 25:8-11) Others claimed that the Servant represented the pious elite in Israel and that these suffered in behalf of sinful Israelites. However, during times of affliction in Israel, no one specific group suffered for another.

5 Before the advent of Christianity and to some extent during the early centuries of the Common Era, a few Jewish scholars did apply this prophecy to the Messiah. That this is the correct application is seen in the Christian Greek Scriptures. The book of Acts reports that when the

4. What opinions as to the identity of the "servant" have some Jewish scholars offered, but why do these not match Isaiah's prophecy?

5. (a) Some Jewish scholars have made what application of Isaiah's prophecy? (See footnote.) (b) What clear identification of the Servant is given in the Bible book of Acts?

Ethiopian eunuch said that he did not know the identity of the Servant of Isaiah's prophecy, Philip "declared to him the good news about Jesus." (Acts 8:26-40; Isaiah 53: 7, 8) Other Bible books likewise identify Jesus Christ as the Messianic Servant of Isaiah's prophecy.* As we discuss this prophecy, we will see the undeniable parallels between the one whom Jehovah calls "my servant" and Jesus of Nazareth.

6 The prophecy begins by describing the ultimate success of the Messiah in carrying out the divine will. The word "servant" indicates that he will submit to God's will, as a servant does to that of his master. In so doing, he "will act with insight." Insight is the ability to see into a situation. To act with insight is to act discreetly. Regarding the Hebrew verb here used, one reference work says: "At its heart is the thought of prudent and wise dealing. He who deals wisely will obtain success." That the Messiah will indeed be successful is seen in that the prophecy says he will "be elevated and exalted very much."

7 Jesus did "act with insight," showing understanding of the Bible prophecies that applied to him and being guided by them to do the will of his Father. (John 17:4; 19:30) With what result? Following Jesus' resurrection

* In its rendering of Isaiah 52:13, the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel (first century C.E.), as translated by J. F. Stenning, states: "Behold, my servant, the Anointed One (or, *the Messiah*), shall prosper." Similarly, the Babylonian Talmud (c. third century C.E.) says: "The Messiah —what is his name? . . . [; those] of the house of Rabbi [say, The sick one], as it is said, 'Surely he hath borne our sicknesses.' "—Sanhedrin 98b; Isaiah 53:4.

6. How does Isaiah's prophecy indicate that the Messiah will successfully carry out the divine will?

7. How did Jesus Christ "act with insight," and how has he been "elevated and exalted very much"?

and ascension to heaven, "God exalted him to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name." (Philippians 2:9; Acts 2:34-36) Then, in 1914 the glorified Jesus was elevated even further. Jehovah exalted him to the throne of the Messianic Kingdom. (Revelation 12:1-5) Yes, he was "elevated and exalted very much."

'Staring at Him in Amazement'

8 How will the nations and their rulers react to the exalted Messiah? If we momentarily skip the parenthetical comment in the second part of verse 14, the prophecy reads: ***"To the extent that many have stared at him in amazement . . . he will likewise startle many nations. At him kings will shut their mouth, because what had not been recounted to them they will actually see, and to what they had not heard they must turn their consideration." (Isaiah 52:14a, 15)*** With these words Isaiah describes, not the Messiah's initial appearance, but his final confrontation with earthly rulers.

9 When the exalted Jesus comes to execute judgment on this ungodly system of things, earthly rulers will 'stare at him in amazement.' True, human rulers will not literally see the glorified Jesus. But they will see the visible evidences of his power as a heavenly Fighter for Jehovah. (Matthew 24:30) They will be forced to turn their consideration to what they have not heard recounted by religious leaders—that Jesus is the Executioner of God's judgments! The exalted Servant whom they will encounter will act in a way that they do not expect.

8, 9. When the exalted Jesus comes to execute judgment, how will earthly rulers react, and why?

10 According to the parenthetical comment in verse 14, Isaiah says: ***"So much was the disfigurement as respects his appearance more than that of any other man and as respects his stately form more than that of the sons of mankind." (Isaiah 52:14b)*** Was Jesus physically disfigured in some way? No. Although the Bible does not give details about what Jesus looked like, the perfect Son of God no doubt had a pleasing appearance and countenance. Evidently, Isaiah's words refer to the humiliation that Jesus experienced. He boldly exposed the religious leaders of his day as hypocrites, liars, and murderers; and they responded by reviling him. (1 Peter 2:22, 23) They accused him of being a lawbreaker, a blasphemer, a deceiver, a seditionist against Rome. Thus, these false accusers painted an utterly disfigured picture of Jesus.

11 Today the misrepresentation of Jesus continues. Most people picture Jesus as a babe in a manger or as a tragic figure nailed to a cross, with his face distorted in agony under a crown of thorns. Christendom's clergy have encouraged such views. They have failed to present Jesus as the mighty heavenly King with whom nations will have an accounting. When human rulers confront the exalted Jesus in the near future, they will have to deal with a Messiah who has 'all authority in heaven and on the earth'! —Matthew 28:18.

Who Will Put Faith in This Good News?

12 After describing the amazing transformation of the Messiah—from 'disfigured' to "exalted very much"—Isaiah asks: ***"Who has put faith in the thing heard by us? And as for the arm of Jehovah, to whom has it been revealed?"***

10, 11. In what way can it be said that Jesus was disfigured in the first century, and how has this been done today?
12. What intriguing questions do the words at Isaiah 53:1 raise?

(Isaiah 53:1) These words of Isaiah raise intriguing questions: Will this prophecy be fulfilled? Will "the arm of Jehovah," representing his ability to exert power, reveal itself and make these words come true?

13 The answer is unquestionably yes! In his letter to the Romans, Paul quotes Isaiah's words to show that the prophecy heard and recorded by Isaiah came true in Jesus. The glorification of Jesus after his sufferings on earth was good news. "Nevertheless," says Paul with reference to the unbelieving Jews, "they did not all obey the good news. For Isaiah says: 'Jehovah, who put faith in the thing heard from us?' So faith follows the thing heard. In turn the thing heard is through the word about Christ." (Romans 10:16, 17) Sadly, though, few in Paul's day put faith in the good news about God's Servant. Why?

14 The prophecy next explains to the Israelites the reasons for the questions recorded in verse 1, and in so doing, sheds light on why many will not accept the Messiah: ***"He will come up like a twig before [an observer], and like a root out of waterless land. No stately form does he have, nor any splendor; and when we shall see him, there is not the appearance so that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:2)*** Here we see the backdrop against which the Messiah is to enter the earthly scene. He is to have a lowly start, and to observers he will appear unlikely to amount to anything. Moreover, he is to be like a mere twig, a tender sapling, that grows on the trunk or branch of a tree. He is also to be like a water-dependent root in dry, unpromising soil. And he is not to come with regal pomp and splendor—no robes of royalty nor any

13. How did Paul show that Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, and what response was there?
14, 15. Against what backdrop is the Messiah to enter the earthly scene?

sparkling diadems. Instead, his start is to be humble and unpretentious.

15 How well that describes Jesus' lowly beginning as a human! The virgin Jewess Mary gave birth to him in a stable in a little town known as Bethlehem.* (Luke 2:7; John 7:42) Mary and her husband, Joseph, were poor. About 40 days after Jesus' birth, they brought the sin offering permitted in the case of the poor, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." (Luke 2:24; Leviticus 12:6-8) In time, Mary and Joseph settled in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up in a large family, likely in modest circumstances.—Matthew 13:55, 56.

16 It seemed that as a human, Jesus did not have his roots in the right soil. (John 1:46; 7:41, 52) Although he was a perfect man and a descendant of King David, his humble circumstances did not impart to him any "stately form" or "splendor"—at least not in the eyes of those who were expecting the Messiah to come from a more impressive background. Spurred on by the Jewish religious leaders, many were led to overlook and even despise him. In the end the crowds saw nothing desirable in the perfect Son of God.—Matthew 27:11-26.

'Despised and Avoided by Men'

17 Isaiah now begins to describe in detail how the Messiah will be viewed and treated: ***"He was despised and was***

* The prophet Micah referred to Bethlehem as "the one too little to get to be among the thousands of Judah." (Micah 5:2) Yet, small Bethlehem had the singular honor of being the town in which the Messiah was born.

16. How is it true that Jesus had no "stately form" or "splendor"?
17. (a) What does Isaiah begin to describe, and why does he write in the past tense? (b) Who was it that "despised" and "avoided" Jesus, and how did they do so?

***avoided by men, a man meant for pains and for having acquaintance with sickness. And there was as if the concealing of one's face from us. He was despised, and we held him as of no account."* (*Isaiah 53:3*)** Certain that his words will come true, Isaiah writes in the past tense, as if they had already been fulfilled. Was Jesus Christ really despised and avoided by men? Indeed, he was! Self-righteous religious leaders and their followers viewed him as the vilest of humans. They called him a friend of tax collectors and harlots. (Luke 7:34, 37-39) They spit in his face. They hit him with their fists and reviled him. They sneered and jeered at him. (Matthew 26:67) Influenced by these enemies of truth, Jesus' "own people did not take him in."—John 1:10, 11.

18 As a perfect man, Jesus did not get sick. Yet, he was "a man meant for pains and for having acquaintance with sickness." Such pains and sicknesses were not his own. Jesus came from heaven into a sick world. He lived amid suffering and pain, but he did not shun those who were ailing, either physically or spiritually. Like a caring physician, he became intimately acquainted with the suffering of those around him. Moreover, he was able to do what no ordinary human physician can do.—Luke 5:27-32.

19 Nevertheless, Jesus' enemies viewed *him* as the ailing one and refused to look upon him with favor. His face was 'concealed' from view but not because he hid his face from others. In rendering Isaiah 53:3, *The New English Bible* uses the phrase "a thing from which men turn away their eyes." Jesus' opposers found him so revolting

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18. Since Jesus was never sick, how was he "a man meant for pains and for having acquaintance with sickness"?
19. Whose face was 'concealed,' and how did Jesus' enemies demonstrate that they "held him as of no account"?

that they, in effect, turned away from him as if he were too loathsome to look upon. They reckoned his worth at no more than the price of a slave. (Exodus 21:32; Matthew 26:14-16) They had less esteem for him than for the murderer Barabbas. (Luke 23:18-25) What more could they have done to demonstrate their low opinion of Jesus?

20 Jehovah's servants today can derive much comfort from Isaiah's words. At times, opposers may disdain faithful worshipers of Jehovah or treat them as if they were of no account. Yet, as was true with Jesus, what really matters is how Jehovah God values us. After all, even though men 'held Jesus as of no account,' this certainly did not change his great value in God's eyes!

"Pierced for Our Transgression"

21 Why did the Messiah have to suffer and die? Isaiah explains: *"Truly our sicknesses were what he himself carried; and as for our pains, he bore them. But we ourselves accounted him as plagued, stricken by God and afflicted. But he was being pierced for our transgression; he was being crushed for our errors. The chastisement meant for our peace was upon him, and because of his wounds there has been a healing for us. Like sheep we have all of us wandered about; it was each one to his own way that we have turned; and Jehovah himself has caused the error of us all to meet up with that one."—Isaiah 53:4-6.*

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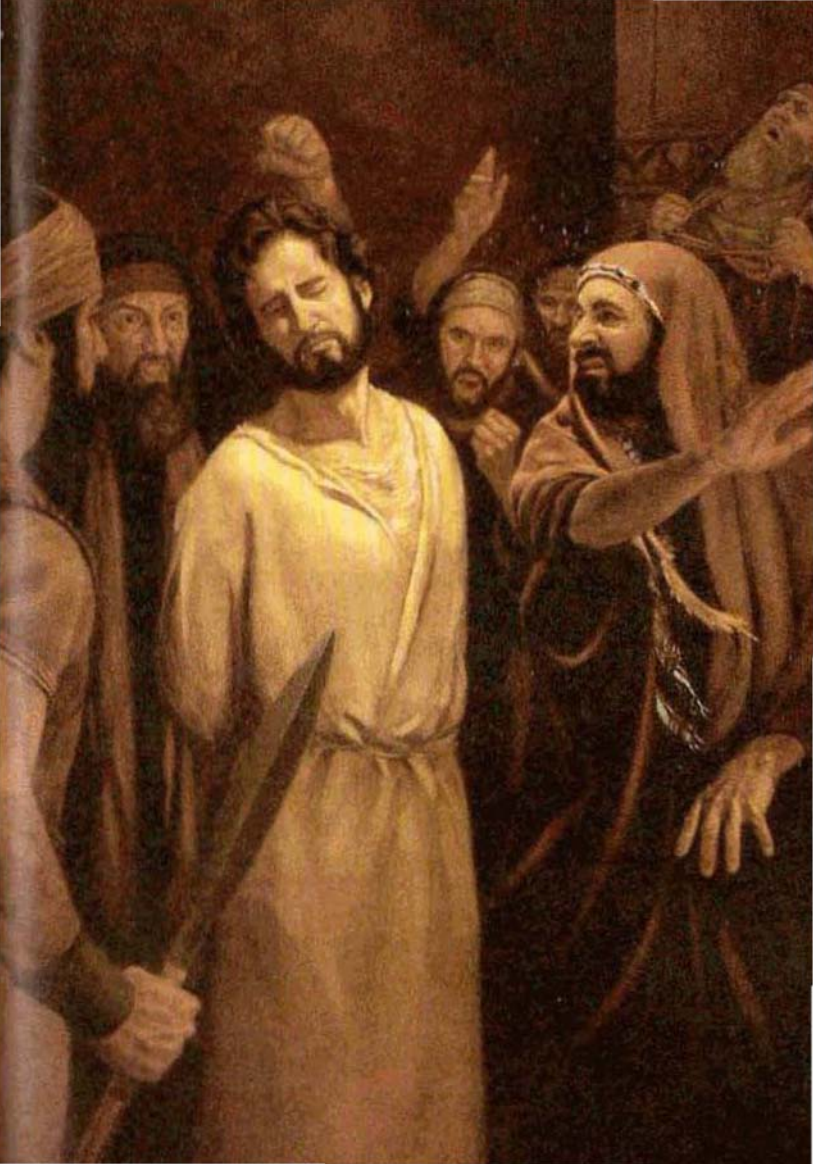
20. Isaiah's words offer what comfort to Jehovah's people today?

21, 22. (a) What did the Messiah carry and bear in behalf of others? (b) How did many regard the Messiah, and in what did his suffering culminate?



22 The Messiah carried the sicknesses of others and bore their pains. He lifted up their burdens, so to speak, placed them on his own shoulders, and carried them. And since sickness and pain are consequences of mankind's sinful state, the Messiah carried the *sins* of others. Many did not understand the reason for his suffering and believed that God was punishing him, plaguing him with a loathsome disease.* The Messiah's suffering culminated in his being pierced, crushed, and wounded—strong words that denote a violent and painful death. But his death has atoning power; it provides the basis for recovering those who wander about in error and sin, helping them to find peace with God.

23 How did Jesus bear the suffering of others? The Gospel of Matthew, quoting Isaiah 53:4, says: "People brought him many demon-possessed persons; and he expelled the spirits with a word, and he cured all who were faring badly; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He himself took our sicknesses and carried our diseases.'" (Matthew 8:16, 17) By curing those who came to him with various diseases, Jesus, in effect, took their suffering upon himself. And such healings drew on his vitality. (Luke 8:43-48) His ability to heal all kinds of ailments—physical and spiritual—proved that he was empowered to cleanse people from sin.—Matthew 9:2-8.

* The Hebrew word rendered "plagued" is also used in regard to leprosy. (2 Kings 15:5) According to certain scholars, some Jews derived from Isaiah 53:4 the idea that the Messiah would be a leper. The Babylonian Talmud applies this verse to the Messiah, calling him "the leper scholar." The Catholic *Douay Version,* reflecting the Latin *Vulgate,* renders this verse: "We have thought him as it were a leper."

23. In what way did Jesus bear the suffering of others?

24 Yet, to many it seemed that Jesus was "plagued" by God. After all, he suffered at the instigation of respected religious leaders. Remember, though, that he did not suffer on account of any sins of his own. "Christ suffered for you," says Peter, "leaving you a model for you to follow his steps closely. He committed no sin, nor was deception found in his mouth. He himself bore our sins in his own body upon the stake, in order that we might be done with sins and live to righteousness. And 'by his stripes you were healed.' " (1 Peter 2:21, 22, 24) We were all at one time lost in sin, "like sheep, going astray." (1 Peter 2:25) Through Jesus, however, Jehovah provided redemption from our sinful state. He caused our error to "meet up with" Jesus, to rest upon him. The sinless Jesus willingly suffered the penalty for our sins. By undeservedly suffering a shameful death on a stake, he made it possible for us to be reconciled to God.

'He Let Himself Be Afflicted'

25 Was the Messiah willing to suffer and die? Isaiah says: ***"He was hard pressed, and he was letting himself be afflicted; yet he would not open his mouth. He was being brought just like a sheep to the slaughtering; and like a ewe that before her shearers has become mute, he also would not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)*** On the final night of his life, Jesus could have summoned "more than twelve legions of angels" to come to his aid. But he said: "In that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must take place this way?" (Matthew 26:53,

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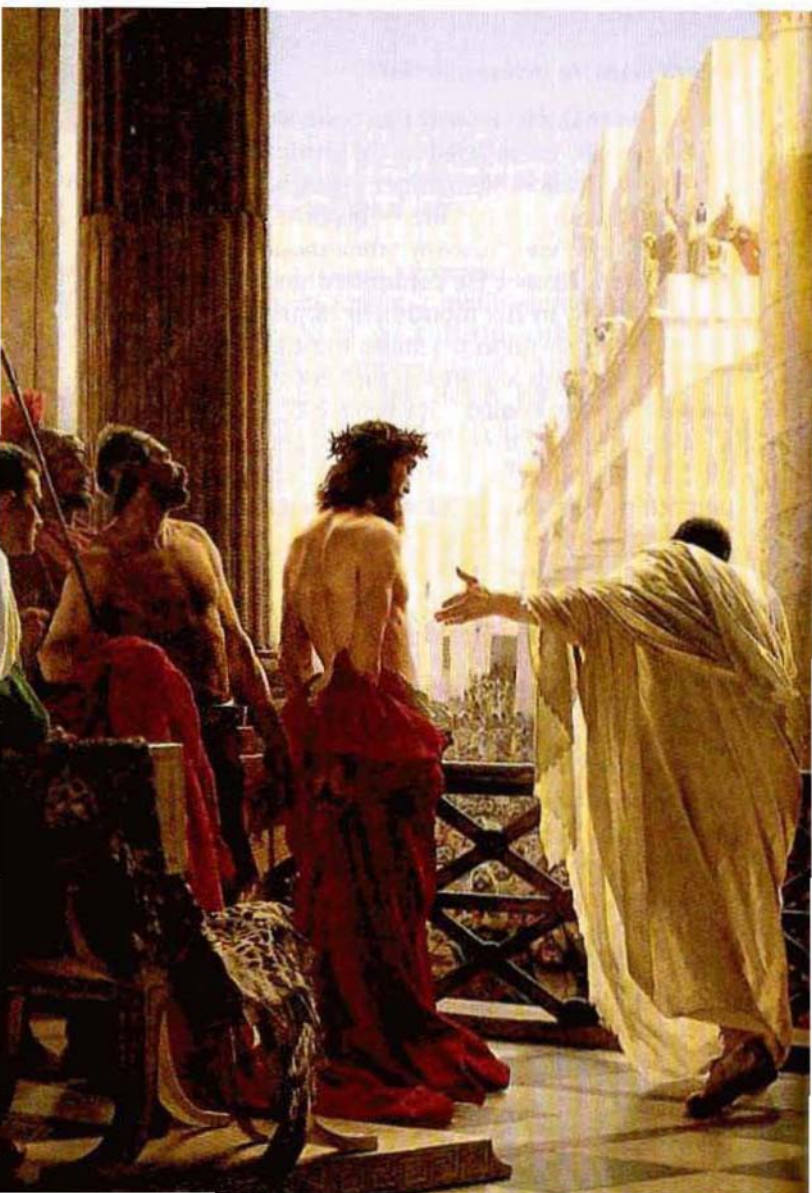
24. (a) Why did it seem to many that Jesus was "plagued" by God? (b) Why did Jesus suffer and die?

25. How do we know that the Messiah suffered and died willingly?



54) Instead, "the Lamb of God" offered no resistance. (John 1:29) When the chief priests and the older men falsely accused him before Pilate, Jesus "made no answer." (Matthew 27:11-14) He did not want to say anything that might interfere with the carrying out of God's will for him. Jesus was willing to die as a sacrificial Lamb, knowing full well that his death would redeem obedient mankind from sin, sickness, and death.

26 Isaiah now gives more details of the Messiah's suffering and humiliation. The prophet writes: ***"Because of restraint and of judgment he was taken away; and who will concern himself even with the details of his generation? For he was severed from the land of the living ones. Because of the transgression of my people he had the stroke." (Isaiah 53:8)*** When Jesus was finally taken by his enemies, these religious opposers applied "restraint" in the way they dealt with him. It was not that they held back from expressing their hatred but that they restrained, or withheld, justice. In its rendering of Isaiah 53:8, the Greek *Septuagint* says "humiliation" instead of "restraint." Jesus' enemies humiliated him by withholding the fair treatment to which even a common criminal was entitled. The trial of Jesus made a mockery of justice. How so?

27 In their determination to get rid of Jesus, the Jewish religious leaders broke their own rules. According to

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26. In what way was "restraint" applied by Jesus' opposers?
27. When the Jewish religious leaders were conducting Jesus' trial, what rules did they ignore, and in what ways did they break God's Law?

"He would not open his mouth"
Detail from "Ecce Homo" by Antonio Ciseri

tradition, the Sanhedrin could try a capital case only in the hall of hewn stones in the temple precincts, not in the high priest's house. Such a trial had to be held during the day, not after sundown. And in a capital case, a guilty verdict had to be announced the day following the conclusion of the hearing. Hence, no trials could be held on the eve of a Sabbath or a festival. These rules were all ignored in the case of Jesus' trial. (Matthew 26:57-68) Even worse, the religious leaders flagrantly broke God's Law as they handled the case. For example, they resorted to bribery to entrap Jesus. (Deuteronomy 16:19; Luke 22:2-6) They gave heed to bearers of false witness. (Exodus 20:16; Mark 14:55, 56) And they conspired to release a murderer, thereby bringing blood-guilt upon themselves and their land. (Numbers 35:31-34; Deuteronomy 19:11-13; Luke 23:16-25) Hence, there was no "judgment," no fair trial resulting in a correct, impartial ruling.

28 Did Jesus' enemies investigate to see who the man on trial before them really was? Isaiah asks a similar question: "Who will concern himself even with the details of his generation?" The word "generation" may refer to one's descent, or background. When Jesus was on trial before the Sanhedrin, its members did not take into account his background—that he fulfilled the requirements for the promised Messiah. Instead, they accused him of blasphemy and held him liable to death. (Mark 14:64) Later, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate yielded to pressure and sentenced Jesus to be impaled. (Luke 23:13-25) Thus Jesus, at just 33 1/2 years of age, "was severed," or cut off, in the midst of his life.

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28. What did Jesus' enemies fail to take into account?

29 Concerning the Messiah's death and burial, Isaiah next writes: ***"He will make his burial place even with the wicked ones, and with the rich class in his death, despite the fact that he had done no violence and there was no deception in his mouth." (Isaiah 53:9)*** How, in his death and burial, was Jesus with the wicked as well as with the rich? On Nisan 14, 33 C.E., he died on the execution stake outside the walls of Jerusalem. Since he was impaled between two evildoers, in a sense his burial place was with the wicked ones. (Luke 23:33) However, after Jesus died, Joseph, a wealthy man from Arimathea, mustered up the courage to ask Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body and bury it. Along with Nicodemus, Joseph prepared the body for burial and then placed it in a newly excavated tomb that belonged to him. (Matthew 27:57-60; John 19:38-42) So Jesus' burial place was also with the rich class.

'Jehovah Took Delight in Crushing Him'

30 Next Isaiah says something startling: ***"Jehovah himself took delight in crushing him; he made him sick. If you will set his soul as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring, he will prolong his days, and in his hand what is the delight of Jehovah will succeed. Because of the trouble of his soul he will see, he will be satisfied. By means of his knowledge the righteous one, my servant, will bring a righteous standing to many people; and their errors he himself will bear." (Isaiah 53:10, 11)*** How could Jehovah possibly take delight in seeing this faithful servant

29. How was it that Jesus' burial was "with the wicked ones" and "with the rich class"?

30. In what sense did Jehovah take delight in crushing Jesus?

crushed? Clearly, Jehovah did not personally inflict suffering upon his dear Son. Jesus' enemies were fully responsible for what they did to him. But Jehovah permitted them to act cruelly. (John 19:11) For what reason? Surely the God of empathy and tender compassion was pained to see his innocent Son suffer. (Isaiah 63:9; Luke 1:77, 78) Jehovah was certainly not displeased in any way with Jesus. Even so, Jehovah took delight in his Son's willingness to suffer because of all the blessings that would result from it.

31 For one thing, Jehovah set Jesus' soul as "a guilt offering." Hence, when Jesus ascended back to heaven, he entered Jehovah's presence bearing the merit of his sacrificed human life as a guilt offering, and Jehovah was pleased to accept it in behalf of all mankind. (Hebrews 9:24; 10:5-14) By means of his guilt offering, Jesus acquired "offspring." As "Eternal Father," he is able to give life—eternal life—to those who exercise faith in his shed blood. (Isaiah 9:6) After all the trouble that Jesus went through as a human soul, how satisfying it must be for him to have the prospect of delivering mankind from sin and death! Of course, it must be even more satisfying for him to know that his integrity provided his heavenly Father with an answer to the taunts of His Adversary, Satan the Devil.—Proverbs 27:11.

32 Another blessing that results from Jesus' death is that he brings "a righteous standing to many," even now. He does so, says Isaiah, "by means of his knowledge." Evi-

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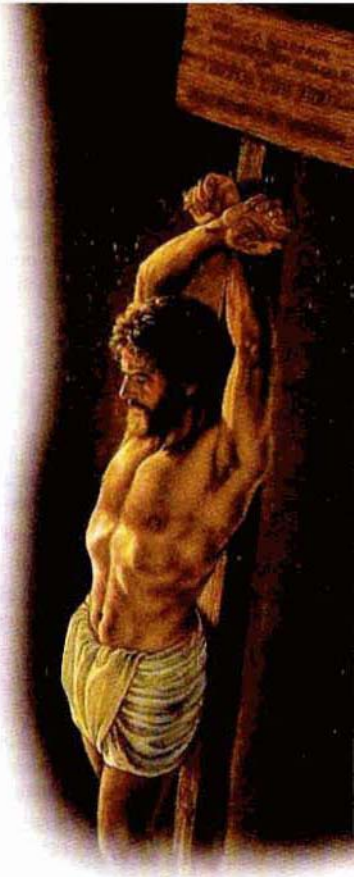
31. (a) In what way did Jehovah set Jesus' soul as "a guilt offering"? (b) After all the trouble that Jesus experienced as a human, what must be particularly satisfying for him?

32. By means of what "knowledge" does Jesus bring "a righteous standing to many," and to whom does this standing come?

dently, this is knowledge that Jesus acquired by becoming a man and suffering unjustly for his obedience to God. (Hebrews 4:15) Having suffered to the point of death, Jesus was able to provide the sacrifice needed to help others acquire a righteous standing. To whom does this righteous standing come? First, to his anointed followers. Because they exercise faith in Jesus' sacrifice, Jehovah declares them righteous with a view to adopting them as sons and making them joint heirs with Jesus. (Romans 5: 19; 8:16, 17) Then, "a great crowd" of "other sheep" exercise faith in Jesus' shed blood and enjoy a righteous standing with a view to being friends of God and survivors of Armageddon.—Revelation 7:9; 16:14, 16; John 10:16; James 2:23, 25.



"He poured out his soul to the very death"

33 Finally, Isaiah describes the triumphs of the Messiah: ***"For that reason I shall deal him a portion among the many, and it will be with***

33, 34. (a) What do we learn about Jehovah that warms our hearts? (b) Who are "the many" among whom the Messianic Servant receives "a portion"?

JEHOVAH'S SERVANT
How Jesus Fulfilled the Role

PROPHECY	EVENT	FULFILLMENT
Isa. 52:13	Elevated and exalted	Acts 2:34-36; Phil. 2:8-11; 1 Pet. 3:22
Isa. 52:14	Misrepresented and discredited	Matt. 11:19; 27:39-44,63, 64; John 8:48; 10:20
Isa. 52:15	Startled many nations	Matt. 24:30; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 1:7
Isa. 53:1	Not believed in	John 12:37, 38; Rom. 10:11, 16, 17
Isa. 53:2	Human beginning humble and unpretentious	Luke 2:7; John 1:46
Isa. 53:3	Despised and rejected	Matt. 26:67; Luke 23: 18-25; John 1:10, 11
Isa. 53:4	Carried our sicknesses	Matt. 8:16, 17; Luke 8:43-48
Isa. 53:5	Pierced	John 19:34
Isa. 53:6	Suffered for the errors of others	1 Pet. 2:21-25
Isa. 53:7	Quiet and uncomplaining before accusers	Matt. 27:11-14; Mark 14:60, 61; Acts 8:32, 35
Isa. 53:8	Unjustly tried and condemned	Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1, 2, 11-26; John 18:12-14, 19-24, 28-40
Isa. 53:9	Buried with the rich	Matt. 27:57-60; John 19:38-42
Isa. 53:10	Soul set as a guilt offering	Heb. 9:24; 10:5-14
Isa. 53:11	Opened the way for many to acquire a righteous standing	Rom. 5:18, 19; 1 Pet. 2:24; Rev. 7:14
Isa. 53:12	Reckoned with sinners	Matt. 26:55, 56; 27:38; Luke 22:36, 37

the mighty ones that he will apportion the spoil, due to the fact that he poured out his soul to the very death, and it was with the transgressors that he was counted in; and he himself carried the very sin of many people, and for the transgressors he proceeded to interpose."* —*Isaiah 53:12.

34 The closing words of this part of Isaiah's prophecy teach something heartwarming about Jehovah: He values those who remain loyal to him. This is indicated by the promise that he will "deal" the Messianic Servant "a portion among the many." These words are apparently derived from the custom of dividing spoils of war. Jehovah appreciates the loyalty of "the many" faithful ones of ancient times, including Noah, Abraham, and Job, and he has reserved "a portion" for them in his coming new world. (Hebrews 11:13-16) Similarly, he will deal out a portion to his Messianic Servant. Indeed, Jehovah will not let his integrity go unrewarded. We too can rest assured that Jehovah will not 'forget our work and the love we show for his name.'—Hebrews 6:10.

35 God's Servant will also gain spoils of war by victory over his enemies. He will share these spoils with "the mighty ones." In the fulfillment, who are "the mighty ones"? They are the first disciples of Jesus to conquer the world as he did—the 144,000 citizens of "the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:16; John 16:33; Revelation 3:21; 14:1) What, then, are the spoils? Evidently, these include the "gifts in men," whom Jesus wrenches from Satan's control, as it were, and gives to the Christian congregation. (Ephesians 4:8-12) The 144,000 "mighty ones" are

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35. Who are "the mighty ones" with whom Jesus shares the spoils, and what are the spoils?

also given a portion of another spoil. By reason of their victory over the world, they wrest from Satan any basis for taunting God. Their unbreakable devotion to Jehovah exalts him, making his heart rejoice.

36 Jesus was aware that he was fulfilling the prophecy about God's Servant. On the night of his arrest, he quoted the words recorded at Isaiah 53:12 and applied them to himself: "I tell you that this which is written must be accomplished in me, namely, 'And he was reckoned with lawless ones.' For that which concerns me is having an accomplishment." (Luke 22:36, 37) Sadly, Jesus was indeed treated like a lawless one. He was executed as a lawbreaker, impaled between two robbers. (Mark 15:27) Yet, he willingly bore this reproach, knowing full well that he was interceding for us. He stood, in effect, between sinners and the stroke of the death penalty, and he received the blow himself.

37 The historical record of Jesus' life and death enables us to make an unmistakable identification: Jesus Christ is the Messianic Servant of Isaiah's prophecy. How thankful we should be that Jehovah was willing to let his dear Son fulfill the prophetic role of the Servant, suffering and dying that we might be redeemed from sin and death! Jehovah thus showed great love for us. Romans 5:8 says: "God recommends his own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." How grateful we should also be to Jesus Christ, the exalted Servant, who willingly poured out his soul to the very death!

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36. Was Jesus aware that he was fulfilling the prophecy about God's Servant? Explain.

37. (a) The historical record of Jesus' life and death enables us to make what identification? (b) Why should we be thankful to Jehovah God and to his exalted Servant, Jesus Christ?

The Barren Woman Rejoices

Isaiah 54:1-17

SARAH longed to bear children. Sadly, she was barren, and that pained her greatly. In her day, barrenness was viewed as a reproach, but there was more to Sarah's pain than that. She yearned to see God's promise to her husband fulfilled. Abraham was to father a seed that would be a blessing to all families of the earth. (Genesis 12:1-3) However, decades after God had made that promise, there was still no child. Sarah grew old and remained childless. At times, she may have wondered if her hopes had been in vain. One day, though, her despair turned to joy!

2 Sarah's plight helps us to understand the prophecy recorded in Isaiah chapter 54. There Jerusalem is addressed as if she were a barren woman who comes to know the great joy of having many children. By picturing his ancient people collectively as his wife, Jehovah shows his tender feelings toward them. Moreover, this chapter of Isaiah helps us to unravel a crucial aspect of what the Bible calls a "sacred secret." (Romans 16:25, 26) The identity of the "woman" and her experiences foretold in this prophecy shed important light on pure worship today.

1. Why did Sarah long to bear children, and what was her experience in this regard?
2. Why should the prophecy recorded in Isaiah chapter 54 interest us?

The "Woman" Identified

3 Chapter 54 opens on a happy note: ***"'Cry out joyfully, you barren woman that did not give birth! Become cheerful with a joyful outcry and cry shrilly, you that had no childbirth pains, for the sons of the desolated one are more numerous than the sons of the woman with a husbandly owner,' Jehovah has said." (Isaiah 54:1)*** How thrilled Isaiah must be to speak these words! And what comfort their fulfillment will bring to the Jews exiled in Babylon! At that time Jerusalem will still be lying desolate. From a human standpoint, there will seem to be no hope that she will ever again be populated, just as a barren woman could not normally hope to bear children in her old age. But this "woman" has a great blessing in her future—she will become fertile. Jerusalem will be beside herself with joy. She will again teem with "sons," or inhabitants.

4 Isaiah may not know it, but his prophecy will have more than one fulfillment. The apostle Paul quotes from Isaiah chapter 54 and explains that the "woman" signifies something far more important than the earthly city of Jerusalem. He writes: "The Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother." (Galatians 4:26) What is this "Jerusalem above"? Clearly not the city of Jerusalem in the Promised Land. That city is earthly, not "above" in the heavenly realm. "Jerusalem above" is God's heavenly "woman," his organization of mighty spirit creatures.

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3. Why will the barren "woman" have reason to rejoice?

4. (a) How does the apostle Paul help us see that Isaiah chapter 54 must have a fulfillment greater than that in 537 B.C.E.? (b) What is "Jerusalem above"?

5 How, though, can Jehovah have two symbolic women—one heavenly and the other earthly? Is there some inconsistency here? Not at all. The apostle Paul shows that the answer lies in the prophetic picture provided by Abraham's family. (Galatians 4:22-31; see "The Family of Abraham—A Prophetic Picture," on page 218.) Sarah, "the free woman" and Abraham's wife, pictures Jehovah's wifelike organization of spirit creatures. Hagar, a slave girl and Abraham's secondary wife, or concubine, pictures earthly Jerusalem.

6 With that background, we begin to see the profound significance of Isaiah 54:1. After decades of barrenness, Sarah bore Isaac when she was 90 years old. Similarly, Jehovah's heavenly organization went through a long period of barrenness. Way back in Eden, Jehovah promised that his "woman" would produce the "seed." (Genesis 3:15) Over 2,000 years later, Jehovah made his covenant with Abraham regarding the Seed of promise. But God's heavenly "woman" had to wait many, many more centuries before producing that Seed. Still, the time came when the children of this once "barren woman" were more numerous than those of fleshly Israel. The illustration of the barren woman helps us to see why the angels were so eager to witness the arrival of the foretold Seed. (1 Peter 1:12) When did that finally happen?

7 Jesus' birth as a human child was certainly an occasion for rejoicing among the angels. (Luke 2:9-14) But that was not the event foretold at Isaiah 54:1. Only

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5. In the symbolic drama outlined at Galatians 4:22-31, who is pictured by (a) Abraham? (b) Sarah? (c) Isaac? (d) Hagar? (e) Ishmael?
6. In what sense did God's heavenly organization undergo a long period of barrenness?
7. When did "Jerusalem above" have occasion to rejoice, as foretold at Isaiah 54:1, and why do you so answer?

The Family of Abraham —A Prophetic Picture

The apostle Paul explained that the family of Abraham serves as a symbolic drama, a prophetic picture of Jehovah's relationship with his heavenly organization and with the earthly nation of Israel under the Mosaic Law covenant.—Galatians 4:22-31.

Abraham, as family head, represents Jehovah God. Abraham's willingness to offer up his dear son Isaac as a sacrifice foreshadows Jehovah's willingness to offer up his own beloved Son as a sacrifice for mankind's sins.—Genesis 22:1-13; John 3:16.

Sarah pictures God's heavenly "wife," his organization of spirit beings. That heavenly organization is aptly described as Jehovah's wife, for she is intimately associated with Jehovah, is subservient to his headship, and is fully cooperative in fulfilling his purposes. She is also called "Jerusalem above." (Galatians 4:26) The same "woman" is mentioned at Genesis 3:15, and she is depicted in vision at Revelation 12:1-6, 13-17.

when Jesus was begotten with holy spirit in 29 C.E. did he become a spiritual son of "Jerusalem above," publicly acknowledged by God himself as his "Son, the beloved." (Mark 1:10, 11; Hebrews 1:5; 5:4, 5) It was then that God's heavenly "woman" had cause for rejoicing, in fulfillment of Isaiah 54:1. At last she had produced the promised Seed, the Messiah! Her centuries of barrenness were over. That, however, was not the end of her rejoicing.

Isaac typifies the spiritual Seed of God's woman. Primarily, this is Jesus Christ. However, the seed also came to include Christ's anointed brothers, who are adopted as spiritual sons and become joint heirs with Christ.—Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 3: 16, 29.

Hagar, Abraham's secondary wife, or concubine, was a slave. She aptly pictures earthly Jerusalem, where the Mosaic Law code held sway, exposing all of its adherents as slaves to sin and death. Paul said that "Hagar means Sinai, a mountain in Arabia," because the Law covenant was established there.—Galatians 3:10, 13; 4:25.

Ishmael, Hagar's son, pictures the first-century Jews, the sons of Jerusalem still enslaved to the Mosaic Law. As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so those Jews persecuted the Christians, who were anointed sons of the figurative Sarah, the "Jerusalem above." And just as Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away, Jehovah ultimately cast off Jerusalem and her rebellious sons.—Matthew 23:37, 38.

Numerous Sons for the Barren Woman

8 After Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection, God's heavenly "woman" rejoiced to receive this favored Son back as "the firstborn from the dead." (Colossians 1:18) Then she began to produce more spiritual sons.

8. Why did God's heavenly "woman" have reason to rejoice after producing the promised Seed?

At Pentecost 33 C.E., about 120 of Jesus' followers were anointed with holy spirit, thereby being adopted as Christ's joint heirs. Later that day a further 3,000 were added. (John 1:12; Acts 1:13-15; 2:1-4, 41; Romans 8:14-16) This body of sons continued to grow. During the early centuries of Christendom's apostasy, the growth slowed to a trickle. However, that was to change in the 20th century.

9 Isaiah goes on to prophesy about a period of remarkable growth: ***"Make the place of your tent more spacious. And let them stretch out the tent cloths of your grand tabernacle. Do not hold back. Lengthen out your tent cords, and make those tent pins of yours strong. For to the right and to the left you will break forth, and your own offspring will take possession even of nations, and they will inhabit even the desolated cities. Do not be afraid, for you will not be put to shame; and do not feel humiliated, for you will not be disappointed. For you will forget even the shame of your time of youth, and the reproach of your continuous widowhood you will remember no more." —Isaiah 54:2-4.***

10 Here Jerusalem is addressed as if she were a wife and mother dwelling in tents, just like Sarah. When blessed with a growing family, it is time for such a mother to see to the expansion of her home. She needs to put up longer tent cloths and cords and secure the tent pins in their new positions. This is happy work for her, and at such a busy

9, 10. What would the instruction to 'make the place of the tent more spacious' mean to a tent-dwelling woman in ancient times, and why is this a time of joy for such a woman?

After his baptism, Jesus was anointed with holy spirit, and Isaiah 54:1 began to have its most important fulfillment

time, she may easily forget the years she spent wondering anxiously whether she would ever bear children to carry on the family line.

11 Earthly Jerusalem was blessed with such a time of renewal after the Babylonian exile. "Jerusalem above" has been even more blessed.* Particularly since 1919, her anointed "offspring" have flourished in their newly restored spiritual condition. (Isaiah 61:4; 66:8) They 'took possession of nations' in that they spread abroad into many lands to seek out all those who would join their spiritual family. As a result, explosive growth occurred in the gathering of the anointed sons. Their final number of 144,000 appeared to be filled sometime in the mid-1930's. (Revelation 14:3) At that time the focus of the preaching work ceased to be the gathering of the anointed. Still, expansion did not stop with the anointed.

12 Jesus himself foretold that besides his "little flock" of anointed brothers, he would have "other sheep" that must be brought into the sheepfold of true Christians. (Luke 12:32; John 10:16) Though not among the anointed sons of "Jerusalem above," these faithful companions of the anointed fill an important and long-prophesied role. (Zechariah 8:23) From the 1930's until today, a

* According to Revelation 12:1-17, God's "woman" was greatly blessed by giving birth to a most important "offspring"—not an individual spirit son, but the Messianic Kingdom in heaven. This birth occurred in 1914. (See *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, pages 177-86.) Isaiah's prophecy focuses on the joy she feels as a result of God's blessing on her anointed sons on earth.

11. (a) How was God's heavenly "woman" blessed in 1914? (See footnote.) (b) From 1919 onward, what blessing have the anointed on earth experienced?

12. In addition to the anointed, who have been gathered into the Christian congregation since the 1930's?

"great crowd" of them have been gathered, resulting in unprecedented expansion of the Christian congregation. (Revelation 7:9, 10) Today that great crowd numbers well into the millions. All this expansion has created an urgent need for more Kingdom Halls, Assembly Halls, and branch complexes. Isaiah's words seem ever more apt. What a privilege to be part of that foretold expansion!

A Mother Who Cares for Her Offspring

13 We have seen that in the greater fulfillment, the "woman" of the prophecy represents Jehovah's heavenly organization. But after reading Isaiah 54:4, we may wonder how that organization of spirit creatures has ever suffered shame or reproach. The ensuing verses say that God's "woman" will be rejected, afflicted, and subjected to attack. She will even provoke God's indignation. How can such things apply to an organization of perfect spirit creatures who have never sinned? The answer lies in the nature of family.

14 Jehovah uses family relationships—husband and wife, mother and children—to convey profound spiritual truths because such symbols are meaningful to humans. Regardless of the extent or quality of our own family experiences, we likely have an idea of what a good marriage or a good parent-child relationship ought to be. How vividly, then, Jehovah teaches us that he has a warm, intimate, and trusting relationship with his vast throngs of spirit servants! And how impressively he teaches us that his heavenly organization cares for its spirit-anointed offspring on earth! When the human servants suffer, the

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13, 14. (a) What apparent difficulty is seen in connection with some of the expressions directed to God's heavenly "woman"? (b) What insights can we gain from God's illustrative use of family relationships?

faithful heavenly servants, "Jerusalem above," suffer. Similarly, Jesus said: "To the extent that you did it to one of the least of these my [spirit-anointed] brothers, you did it to me."—Matthew 25:40.

15 Not surprisingly, then, much of what is said to Jehovah's heavenly "woman" reflects the experiences of her children on earth. Consider these words: ***"'Your Grand Maker is your husbandly owner, Jehovah of armies being his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Repurchaser. The God of the whole earth he will be called. For Jehovah called you as if you were a wife left entirely and hurt in spirit, and as a wife of the time of youth who was then rejected,' your God has said."—Isaiah 54:5, 6.***

16 Who is the wife here addressed? In the initial fulfillment, it is Jerusalem, representing God's people. During their 70-year exile in Babylon, they will feel as if Jehovah has rejected them and left them entirely. In the greater fulfillment, the words refer to "Jerusalem above" and her experience of finally producing the "seed" in fulfillment of Genesis 3:15.

Momentary Discipline, Eternal Blessings

17 The prophecy continues: ***"'For a little moment I left you entirely, but with great mercies I shall collect you together. With a flood of indignation I concealed my face from you for but a moment, but with loving-kindness to time indefinite I will have mercy upon you,' your Repurchaser, Jehovah, has said." (Isaiah 54:7, 8)*** Earthly Jerusalem is inundated by "a flood" of God's indignation when

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15, 16. What is the initial fulfillment of Isaiah 54:5, 6, and what is the greater fulfillment?

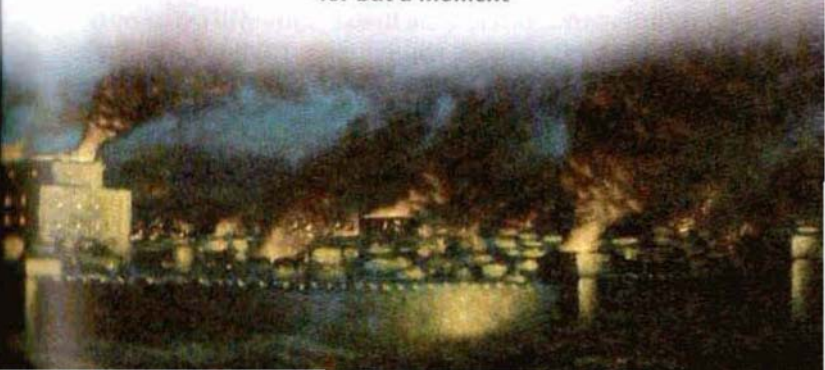
17. (a) How will earthly Jerusalem experience "a flood" of divine indignation? (b) What "flood" did the sons of "Jerusalem above" experience?

the Babylonian forces attack in 607 B.C.E. Her 70 years in exile might seem a long time. Still, such trials last "for but a moment" when compared with the eternal blessings in store for those who respond well to the discipline. Similarly, the anointed sons of "Jerusalem above" felt as if they had been overwhelmed by "a flood" of divine wrath when Jehovah allowed them to come under attack by political elements at the instigation of Babylon the Great. But how brief that disciplinary measure later seemed, in contrast with the era of spiritual blessings that have followed since 1919!

18 These verses express another great truth—God's wrath is fleeting, but his mercy lasts forever. His anger blazes against wrongdoing, but it is always controlled, always purposeful. And if we accept Jehovah's discipline, his anger lasts "for but a moment," then subsides. It is replaced by his "great mercies"—his forgiveness and his loving-kindness. These last "to time indefinite." When we

18. What important principle can be discerned regarding Jehovah's wrath against his people, and how might this affect us personally?

Jehovah concealed his face from Jerusalem "for but a moment"



commit a sin, then, we should never hesitate to repent and seek to make amends with God. If the sin is of a serious nature, we should approach the congregation elders immediately. (James 5:14) True, discipline may be needed, and that can be hard to take. (Hebrews 12:11) But it will be brief when compared with the eternal blessings that flow from receiving the forgiveness of Jehovah God!

19 Jehovah now offers his people comforting reassurance: ***"'This is just as the days of Noah to me. Just as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more pass over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not become indignant toward you nor rebuke you. For the mountains themselves may be removed, and the very hills may stagger, but my loving-kindness itself will not be removed from you, nor will my covenant of peace itself stagger,' Jehovah, the One having mercy upon you, has said."*** **(*Isaiah 54:9, 10*)** After the Deluge, God made a covenant—sometimes known as the rainbow covenant—with Noah and every other living soul. Jehovah promised that no more would he bring destruction upon the earth by means of a global flood. (Genesis 9:8-17) What does that mean to Isaiah and his people?

20 It is comforting to know that the punishment they must suffer—the 70-year exile in Babylon—will occur only once. When it is over, it will happen no more. Thereafter, God's "covenant of peace" will be in effect. The Hebrew word for "peace" conveys not just the absence of war but also well-being of every kind. On God's part this covenant is permanent. Sooner will the hills and mountains vanish than his loving-kindness toward his faithful

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19, 20. (a) What is the rainbow covenant, and how is it relevant to the exiles in Babylon? (b) The "covenant of peace" affords what assurance to anointed Christians today?

people end. Sadly, his earthly nation will ultimately fail to live up to their side of the covenant and will shatter their own peace by rejecting the Messiah. The sons of "Jerusalem above," however, fared much better. Once their difficult period of discipline was over, they were assured of divine protection.

The Spiritual Security of God's People

21 Jehovah goes on to foretell security for his faithful people: ***"O woman afflicted, tempest-tossed, uncomforted, here I am laying with hard mortar your stones, and I will lay your foundation with sapphires. And I will make your battlements of rubies, and your gates of fiery glowing stones, and all your boundaries of delightsome stones. And all your sons will be persons taught by Jehovah, and the peace of your sons will be abundant. You will prove to be firmly established in righteousness itself. You will be far away from oppression—for you will fear none—and from anything terrifying, for it will not come near you. If anyone should at all make an attack, it will not be at my orders. Whoever is making an attack upon you will fall even on account of you."—Isaiah 54:11-15.***

22 Of course, Jehovah's "woman" in the spirit realm has never been directly afflicted or tempest-tossed. But she suffered when her anointed "offspring" on earth suffered, especially when they were in spiritual captivity during the 1918-19 period. Conversely, when the heavenly "woman" is exalted, this reflects a similar state prevailing among her offspring. Consider, then, the glowing description of "Jerusalem above." The precious stones on the gates,

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21, 22. (a) Why is "Jerusalem above" said to be afflicted and tempest-tossed? (b) What would the blessed condition of God's heavenly "woman" signify regarding her "offspring" on earth?

the costly "hard mortar," the foundations, and even the boundaries suggest, as one reference work notes, "beauty, magnificence, purity, strength, and solidity." What would lead anointed Christians to such a secure and blessed condition?

23 Verse 13 of Isaiah chapter 54 provides the key—all will be "taught by Jehovah." Jesus himself applied the words of this verse to his anointed followers. (John 6:45) The prophet Daniel foretold that during this "time of the end," the anointed would be blessed with an abundance of true knowledge and spiritual insight. (Daniel 12:3, 4) Such insight has enabled them to spearhead the greatest educational campaign in history, spreading divine teaching in all the earth. (Matthew 24:14) At the same time, such insight has helped them to see the difference between true religion and false. Isaiah 54:12 mentions "boundaries of delightsome stones." Since 1919, Jehovah has given the anointed an ever clearer understanding of the boundaries—the lines of spiritual demarcation—setting them apart from false religion and ungodly elements of the world. (Ezekiel 44:23; John 17:14; James 1:27) They are thus set apart as God's own people.—1 Peter 2:9.

24 Thus, each of us does well to ask himself, 'Am I being taught by Jehovah?' We do not receive such teaching automatically. We must put forth effort. If we read God's Word regularly and meditate upon it and if we take in instruction by reading the Bible-based literature published by "the faithful and discreet slave" and by preparing for and attending Christian meetings, we will indeed

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23. (a) Being "taught by Jehovah" has had what effect upon anointed Christians in the last days? (b) In what sense have God's people been blessed with "boundaries of delightsome stones"?

24. How may we ensure that we are taught by Jehovah?

be taught by Jehovah. (Matthew 24:45-47) If we endeavor to apply what we learn and remain spiritually awake and watchful, divine teaching will set us apart as different from those in this godless world. (1 Peter 5:8, 9) Better still, it will help us "draw close to God."—James 1:22-25; 4:8.

25 Isaiah's prophecy also shows that the anointed are blessed with abundant peace. Does this mean that they are never under attack? No, but God gives the assurance that he will neither order such attacks nor allow them to succeed. We read: ***"'Look! I myself have created the craftsman, the one blowing upon the fire of charcoal and bringing forth a weapon as his workmanship. I myself, too, have created the ruinous man for wrecking work. 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. This is the hereditary possession of the servants of Jehovah, and their righteousness is from me,' is the utterance of Jehovah."*** ***—Isaiah 54:16, 17.***

26 For the second time in this chapter of Isaiah, Jehovah reminds his servants that he is the Creator. Earlier, he tells his symbolic wife that he is her "Grand Maker." Now he says that he is the Creator of all mankind. Verse 16 describes a metalworker blowing on the coals of his forge as he creates his weapons of destruction and a warrior, a "ruinous man for wrecking work." Such men might present a frightening picture to fellow humans, but how can they possibly hope to prevail against their own Creator?

25. What does God's promise of peace mean for his people in modern times?

26. Why is it reassuring to know that Jehovah is the Creator of all mankind?

So today, even when the most powerful forces of this world attack Jehovah's people, they will have no chance of ultimate success. How can that be?

27 The time for ruinous attack against God's people and their worship with spirit and truth has passed. (John 4: 23, 24) Jehovah allowed Babylon the Great to make one attack that proved temporarily successful. For a brief moment, "Jerusalem above" saw her offspring brought to near silence as the preaching work on earth ground to a virtual halt. Never again! Now she exults over her sons, for they are, in a spiritual sense, unconquerable. (John 16: 33; 1 John 5:4) Oh, there have been weapons of attack formed against them, and there will be more. (Revelation 12:17) But these have not and will not succeed. Satan possesses no weapon that can quell the faith and burning zeal of the anointed and their companions. This spiritual peace is "the hereditary possession of the servants of Jehovah," so no one can forcibly take it away from them. —Psalm 118:6; Romans 8:38, 39.

28 No, nothing that Satan's world can do will ever put a stop to the work and enduring clean worship of God by his dedicated servants. The anointed offspring of "Jerusalem above" have taken great comfort in that assurance. Members of the great crowd do the same. The more we come to know about Jehovah's heavenly organization and its dealings with his worshipers on earth, the stronger our faith will be. As long as our faith is strong, Satan's weapons will prove to be futile in the fight against us!

27, 28. Of what can we be sure during these troubled times, and why do we know that Satan's attacks against us will prove ineffective?

Can the warrior and the metalworker prevail against their Creator?

A Message of Hope for Downhearted Captives

Isaiah 55:1-13

IT WAS a dark period in Judah's history. God's covenant people had been forcibly taken from their homeland and now were languishing in captivity in Babylon. Granted, they were allowed a measure of freedom to carry on their daily affairs. (Jeremiah 29:4-7) Some acquired professional skills or engaged in commercial enterprises.* (Nehemiah 3:8, 31, 32) Nevertheless, life for the Jewish captives was not easy. They were in bondage, both physically and spiritually. Let us see how.

2 When the Babylonian armies destroyed Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E., they did more than devastate a nation; they also dealt a blow to true worship. They stripped Jehovah's temple and destroyed it, crippling the priesthood arrangement by taking some of the tribe of Levi captive and putting others to death. With no house of worship, no altar, and no organized priesthood, it was impossible for the Jews to offer sacrifices to the true God as prescribed by the Law.

3 Faithful Jews could still preserve their religious identity

* Many Jewish names have been found in ancient Babylonian business records.

1. Describe the situation of the Jewish exiles in Babylon.
2, 3. How did the exile affect the Jews' worship of Jehovah?

by practicing circumcision and following the Law to the extent possible. For example, they could abstain from forbidden foods and observe the Sabbath. But in doing so, they risked the ridicule of their captors, for the Babylonians viewed the religious rituals of the Jews as foolish. The downhearted condition of the exiles can be seen in the psalmist's words: "By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down. We also wept when we remembered Zion. Upon the poplar trees in the midst of her we hung our harps. For there those holding us captive asked us for the words of a song, and those mocking us—for rejoicing: 'Sing for us one of the songs of Zion.' "—Psalm 137:1-3.

4 To whom, then, could the Jewish captives turn for comfort? From where would come their salvation? Certainly not from any of the surrounding nations! All of those were powerless against Babylon's armies, and many were hostile to the Jews. But the situation was not hopeless. Jehovah, against whom they had rebelled when they were a free people, graciously extended a heartening invitation to them, even though they were in exile.

"Come to the Water"

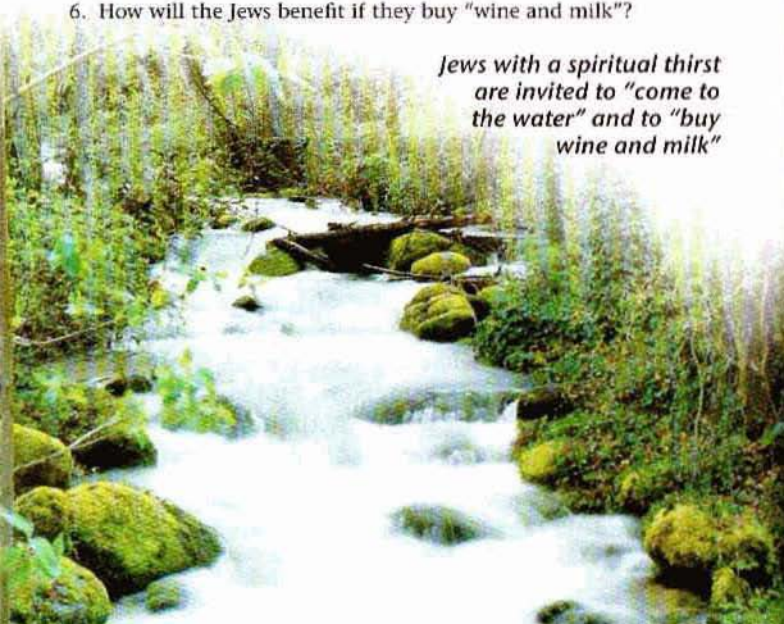
5 Through Isaiah, Jehovah speaks prophetically to the Jewish captives in Babylon: ***"Hey there, all you thirsty ones! Come to the water. And the ones that have no money! Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk even without money and without price."*** **(*Isaiah 55:1*)** These words are rich in symbolism. For example, consider the invitation: "Come to the water." Without water, life is impossible. Without that precious liquid, we humans can

4. Why would it be futile for the Jews to look to other nations for deliverance, but to whom could they turn for help?
5. What is the significance of the words "come to the water"?

survive only for about a week. Hence, it is fitting that Jehovah uses water as a metaphor for the effect that his words will have upon the Jewish captives. His message will refresh them, like a cold drink on a hot day. It will lift them out of their despondent state of mind, quenching their thirst for truth and righteousness. And it will infuse them with hope of freedom from captivity. Still, to benefit, the Jewish exiles will have to drink in God's message, pay attention to it, and act upon it.

6 Jehovah also offers "wine and milk." Milk strengthens young bodies and helps children to grow. Similarly, Jehovah's words will strengthen his people spiritually and enable them to fortify their relationship with him. What, though, of wine? Wine is often used on festive occasions.

6. How will the Jews benefit if they buy "wine and milk"?



Jews with a spiritual thirst are invited to "come to the water" and to "buy wine and milk"

In the Bible, it is associated with prosperity and rejoicing. (Psalm 104:15) By telling his people to "buy wine," Jehovah is assuring them that a wholehearted return to true worship will make them "nothing but joyful."—Deuteronomy 16:15; Psalm 19:8; Proverbs 10:22.

7 How merciful of Jehovah to offer such spiritual refreshment to the exiled Jews! His compassion is all the more remarkable when we remember the Jews' history of waywardness and rebellion. It is not that they are deserving of Jehovah's approval. However, the psalmist David wrote centuries earlier: "Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness. He will not for all time keep finding fault, neither will he to time indefinite keep resentful." (Psalm 103:8, 9) Far from cutting off his people, Jehovah is taking the first step toward reconciliation. Truly, he is a God "delighting in loving-kindness." —Micah 7:18.

Misplaced Trust

8 Up until now many Jews have not put their full trust in Jehovah for salvation. Before Jerusalem's fall, for example, her rulers looked to powerful nations for support, prostituting themselves, as it were, both to Egypt and to Babylon. (Ezekiel 16:26-29; 23:14) With good reason, Jeremiah warned them: "Cursed is the able-bodied man who puts his trust in earthling man and actually makes flesh his arm, and whose heart turns away from Jehovah himself." (Jeremiah 17:5) Yet, that is precisely what God's people did!

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7. Why is Jehovah's compassion toward the exiles remarkable, and what does it teach us about him?

8. Where have many of the Jews put their trust, despite what warning?

9 Now they are enslaved to one of the nations in which they had put their trust. Have they learned their lesson? It may be that many have not, for Jehovah asks: ***"Why do you people keep paying out money for what is not bread, and why is your toil for what results in no satisfaction?" (Isaiah 55:2a)*** If the captive Jews are trusting in anyone other than Jehovah, they are "paying out money for what is not bread." They will certainly get no release from Babylon with its policy of never allowing captives to return home. In truth, Babylon, with her imperialism, commercialism, and false worship, has nothing to offer the exiled Jews.

10 Jehovah implores his people: ***"Listen intently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul find its exquisite delight in fatness itself. Incline your ear and come to me. Listen, and your soul will keep alive, and I shall readily conclude with you people an indefinitely lasting covenant respecting the loving-kindnesses to David that are faithful." (Isaiah 55:2b, 3)*** The only hope for these spiritually malnourished people rests with Jehovah, who is now prophetically speaking to them through Isaiah. Their very lives depend upon listening to God's message, for he states that by their doing so, their "soul will keep alive." What, though, is the "indefinitely lasting covenant" that Jehovah will conclude with those who respond to him? That covenant is "respecting the loving-kindnesses to David." Centuries earlier, Jehovah promised David that his throne would become "firmly established to time indefinite." (2 Samuel 7:16) Hence, the "indefinitely lasting covenant" mentioned here pertains to rulership.

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9. How may many Jews be "paying out money for what is not bread"?

10. (a) How will Jehovah reward the exiled Jews if they listen to him? (b) What covenant had Jehovah made with David?

A Permanent Heir to an Everlasting Kingdom

11 Admittedly, the idea of rulership in the line of David might seem farfetched to those Jewish exiles. They have lost their land and even their nationhood! But that is just temporary. Jehovah has not forgotten his covenant with David. No matter how unlikely it seems from a human standpoint, God's purpose concerning an everlasting Kingdom in David's line *will* succeed. But how and when? In 537 B.C.E., Jehovah releases his people from Babylonian captivity and restores them to their homeland. Does this result in the establishment of an indefinitely lasting kingdom? No, they continue subject to another pagan empire, Medo-Persia. "The appointed times" for the nations to have their rule have not yet expired. (Luke 21:24) With no king in Israel, the promise that Jehovah gave to David will remain unfulfilled for centuries to come.

12 More than 500 years after Israel's release from Babylonian captivity, Jehovah took a major step toward fulfilling the Kingdom covenant when he transferred the life of his firstborn Son, the beginning of his creative work, from heavenly glory into the womb of the Jewish virgin Mary. (Colossians 1:15-17) When announcing that event, Jehovah's angel told Mary: "This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule as king over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of his kingdom." (Luke 1:32, 33) So Jesus was born into the royal line of David and inherited the right of

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11. Why might the fulfillment of God's promise to David seem farfetched to the exiles in Babylon?

12. What step did Jehovah take toward fulfilling his Kingdom covenant made with David?

kingship. Once enthroned, Jesus would rule "to time indefinite." (Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 7:14) Thus the way was now open for the fulfillment of Jehovah's centuries-old promise to give King David a permanent heir.

"Commander to the National Groups"

13 What will this future king do? Jehovah says: ***"Look! As a witness to the national groups I have given him, as a leader and commander to the national groups." (Isaiah 55:4)*** When Jesus grew up, he was Jehovah's representative on earth, God's witness to the nations. During his human lifetime, his ministry was directed to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." However, shortly before his ascension to heaven, Jesus said to his followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations . . . Look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 10:5, 6; 15:24; 28:19, 20) Thus, in time, the Kingdom message was carried to non-Jews, and some of them shared in the fulfillment of the covenant made with David. (Acts 13:46) In this way, even after his death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, Jesus continued to be Jehovah's "witness to the national groups."

14 Jesus was also to be "a leader and commander." True to this prophetic description, when on earth Jesus fully accepted the responsibilities of his headship and took

13. How was Jesus "a witness to the national groups" both during his ministry and after his ascension?

14, 15. (a) How did Jesus prove himself to be "a leader and commander"? (b) What prospect was entertained by Jesus' first-century followers?

Jesus proved himself "a leader and commander" to the national groups

the lead in every respect, attracting huge crowds, teaching them words of truth, and indicating the benefits that come to those who follow his leadership. (Matthew 4:24; 7:28, 29; 11:5) He effectively trained his disciples, preparing them to undertake the preaching campaign that lay ahead. (Luke 10:1-12; Acts 1:8; Colossians 1:23) In just three and a half years, Jesus laid the foundation for a unified, international congregation with thousands of members drawn from many races! Only a true "leader and commander" could have accomplished such a monumental task.*

15 Those who were gathered to the first-century Christian congregation were anointed with God's holy spirit, and they had the prospect of becoming joint rulers with Jesus in his heavenly Kingdom. (Revelation 14:1) However, Isaiah's prophecy looks beyond the days of early Christianity. Evidence shows that Jesus Christ did not begin ruling as King of God's Kingdom until 1914. Shortly thereafter, a situation developed among anointed Christians on earth that had many parallels with that of the exiled Jews in the sixth century B.C.E. In fact, what happened to those Christians constitutes a greater fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Modern-Day Captivity and Release

16 Jesus' enthronement as King in 1914 was marked by unprecedented world distress. Why? Because upon be-

* Jesus continues to oversee the disciple-making work. (Revelation 14:14-16) Today, Christian men and women view Jesus as the Head of the congregation. (1 Corinthians 11:3) And in God's due time, Jesus will act as "a leader and commander" in another way, when he directs the decisive battle against God's enemies at the war of Armageddon.—Revelation 19:19-21.

16. What distress followed Jesus' enthronement in 1914?

coming King, Jesus ousted Satan and the other wicked spirit creatures from heaven. Once confined to the earth, Satan began waging war against the remaining holy ones, the remnant of anointed Christians. (Revelation 12:7-12, 17) The climax came in 1918 when the public preaching work virtually stopped and responsible officers of the Watch Tower Society were imprisoned on false charges of sedition. In this way, Jehovah's modern-day servants went into a spiritual captivity, reminiscent of the physical captivity of the ancient Jews. Great reproach hung over them.

17 However, the captive condition of God's anointed servants did not last long. On March 26, 1919, the imprisoned officers were released, and later all charges against them were dropped. Jehovah poured out holy spirit upon his liberated people, invigorating them for the work that lay ahead. Joyfully, they responded to the invitation to "take life's water free." (Revelation 22:17) They bought "wine and milk even without money and without price" and were spiritually fortified for a marvelous expansion that was on the horizon, one that the anointed remnant had not foreseen.

A Great Crowd Runs to God's Anointed

18 Jesus' disciples entertain one of two hopes. First, a "little flock" numbering 144,000 has been gathered —anointed Christians of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds who are "the Israel of God" and have the hope

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17. How was the condition of the anointed reversed in 1919, and how were they then fortified?

18. What two groups are found among the disciples of Jesus Christ, and what do they form today?

of ruling with Jesus in his heavenly Kingdom. (Luke 12: 32; Galatians 6:16; Revelation 14:1) Second, in the last days, "a great crowd" of "other sheep" have manifested themselves. These have the hope of living forever on a paradise earth. Before the outbreak of the great tribulation, this multitude—whose number is not foreordained—serve alongside the little flock, and both groups form "one flock" under "one shepherd."—Revelation 7:9, 10; John 10:16.

19 The gathering in of this great crowd can be discerned in the following words of Isaiah's prophecy: ***"Look! A nation that you do not know you will call, and those of a nation who have not known you will run even to you, for the sake of Jehovah your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he will have beautified you."*** ***(Isaiah 55:5)*** In the years following their release from spiritual captivity, the anointed remnant did not at first understand that before Armageddon they would be instrumental in calling to Jehovah's worship a large "nation." However, as time went on, many honesthearted ones who did not have a heavenly hope began associating with the anointed and serving Jehovah with the same zeal as that of the anointed. These newcomers took note of the beautified condition of God's people, recognizing that Jehovah was among them. (Zechariah 8:23) In the 1930's, the anointed came to understand the real identity of this group, whose numbers were growing in their midst. They came to discern that a great ingathering work still lay ahead. The great crowd was hastening to associate with God's covenant people, and with good reason.

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19. How has "a nation" previously unknown to the Israel of God responded to the call of that spiritual nation?

20 In Isaiah's day, the call went out: ***"Search for Jehovah, you people, while he may be found. Call to him while he proves to be near." (Isaiah 55:6)*** In our day, these words are appropriate, both for those who form the Israel of God and for the growing great crowd. Jehovah's blessing is not unconditional, nor is his invitation extended indefinitely. Now is the time to seek God's favor. When the appointed time for Jehovah's judgment arrives, it will be too late. Hence, Isaiah says: ***"Let the wicked man leave his way, and the harmful man his thoughts; and let him return to Jehovah, who will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will forgive in a large way."—Isaiah 55:7.***

21 The phrase "let him return to Jehovah" implies that those needing to repent had a relationship with God formerly. The expression reminds us that many aspects of this part of Isaiah's prophecy have their first application with the Jewish captives in Babylon. Centuries before, the forefathers of these captives declared their determination to be obedient to Jehovah when they stated: "It is unthinkable, on our part, to leave Jehovah so as to serve other gods." (Joshua 24:16) History shows that the "unthinkable" did happen—repeatedly! The lack of faith on the part of God's people is the reason why they are exiles in Babylon.

22 What will happen if they repent? Through Isaiah, Jehovah promises that he will "forgive in a large way." And he adds: ***"'For the thoughts of you people are not my***

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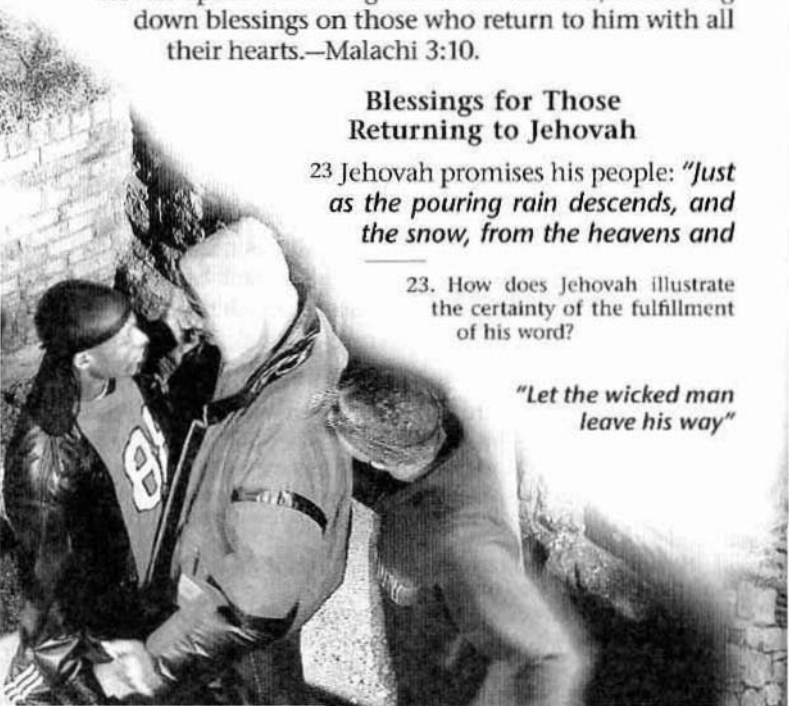
20. (a) In our day, why is it urgent to "search for Jehovah," and how is this done? (b) How will Jehovah respond to those who search for him?

21. How has the nation of Israel proved unfaithful to the declaration made by their forefathers?

22. Why does Jehovah say that his thoughts and ways are higher than those of humans?

thoughts, nor are my ways your ways,' is the utterance of Jehovah. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" **(*Isaiah 55:8, 9*)** Jehovah is perfect, and his thoughts and ways are unreachably high. Even his mercy is on a level that we humans can never hope to attain. Consider: When we forgive a fellow human, it is a case of a sinner forgiving a sinner. We realize that sooner or later we will need to have some fellow human forgive us. (Matthew 6:12) But Jehovah, even though he never needs to be forgiven, forgives "in a large way"! Truly, he is a God of great loving-kindness. And in his mercy, Jehovah opens the floodgates of the heavens, showering down blessings on those who return to him with all their hearts.—Malachi 3:10.



Blessings for Those Returning to Jehovah

23 Jehovah promises his people: ***"Just as the pouring rain descends, and the snow, from the heavens and***

23. How does Jehovah illustrate the certainty of the fulfillment of his word?

"Let the wicked man leave his way"

does not return to that place, unless it actually saturates the earth and makes it produce and sprout, and seed is actually given to the sower and bread to the eater, so my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it." **(*Isaiah 55:10, 11*)** Everything Jehovah says is certain to be fulfilled. Just as the rain and the snow falling from the skies accomplish their purpose of saturating the earth and bringing forth fruit, so Jehovah's word that goes forth from his mouth is completely reliable. What he promises, he will fulfill —with absolute certainty.—Numbers 23:19.

24 Hence, if the Jews heed the words prophetically uttered for them through Isaiah, they will without fail receive the salvation Jehovah has promised. As a result, they will experience great joy. Jehovah states: ***"With rejoicing you people will go forth, and with peace you will***

24, 25. What blessings are in store for Jewish exiles who act on Jehovah's message through Isaiah?

be brought in. The mountains and the hills themselves will become cheerful before you with a joyful outcry, and the very trees of the field will all clap their hands. Instead of the thicket of thorns the juniper tree will come up. Instead of the stinging nettle the myrtle tree will come up. And it must become for Jehovah something famous, a sign to time indefinite that will not be cut off."—Isaiah 55: 12, 13.

25 In 537 B.C.E., the Jewish exiles do indeed go forth out of Babylon with rejoicing. (Psalm 126:1, 2) When they arrive in Jerusalem, they find a land choked with thickets of thorns and stinging nettles—remember, the land has lain desolate for decades. But God's repatriated people can now help to bring about a lovely transformation! Towering trees, such as the juniper and the myrtle, replace thorns and nettles. Jehovah's blessing becomes readily evident as his people serve him "with a joyful outcry." It is as if the land itself were rejoicing.

26 In 1919 the remnant of anointed Christians were liberated from their spiritual captivity. (Isaiah 66:8) Together with the great crowd of other sheep, they are now serving God with rejoicing in a spiritual paradise. Free of any taint of Babylonish influence, they enjoy a favored condition, which has become for Jehovah "something famous." Their spiritual prosperity glorifies his name and exalts him as the God of true prophecy. What Jehovah has accomplished for them demonstrates his Godship and is evidence of his faithfulness to his word and his mercy toward repentant ones. May all who continue to "buy wine and milk even without money and without price" rejoice in serving him forever!

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26. What blessed condition do God's people enjoy today?

Foreigners Gathered to God's House of Prayer

Isaiah 56:1-12

ON FRIDAY, May 31, 1935, Joseph F. Rutherford addressed a convention crowd in Washington, D.C. He discussed the identity of the "great crowd," or "great multitude," seen in vision by the apostle John. At the climax of Brother Rutherford's talk, he asked: "Will all those who have the hope of living forever on the earth please stand?" According to one of those attending, "over half of the audience stood." Then the speaker said: "Behold! The great multitude!" Another who was present recalls: "There was at first a hush, then a gladsome cry, and the cheering was loud and long."—Revelation 7:9; *King James Version.*

2 That was an outstanding moment in the ongoing fulfillment of a prophecy written down some 2,700 years earlier and appearing in our Bibles as Isaiah chapter 56. As with many other prophecies in Isaiah, this one contains both comforting promises and stern warnings. In the first application, it is addressed to God's covenant people of Isaiah's own day, but its fulfillment extends over the centuries to our day.

What Salvation Requires

3 Isaiah chapter 56 begins with admonition to the Jews.

1, 2. What thrilling announcement was made in 1935, and of what was this a part?

3. If the Jews seek salvation from God, what must they do?

However, all true worshipers should take heed of what the prophet writes. We read: ***"This is what Jehovah has said: 'Keep justice, you people, and do what is righteous. For my salvation is at hand to come in, and my righteousness to be revealed. Happy is the mortal man that does this, and the son of mankind that lays hold of it, keeping the sabbath in order not to profane it, and keeping his hand in order not to do any kind of badness.'"*** **(*Isaiah 56:1, 2*)** The inhabitants of Judah who seek salvation from God must obey the Mosaic Law, observing justice and leading righteous lives. Why? Because Jehovah himself is righteous. Those who pursue righteousness enjoy the happiness that comes from having Jehovah's favor.—Psalm 144:15b.

4 The prophecy highlights Sabbath observance because the Sabbath is an important feature of the Mosaic Law. Indeed, one of the reasons why the inhabitants of Judah eventually go into exile is their neglect of the Sabbath. (Leviticus 26:34, 35; 2 Chronicles 36:20, 21) The Sabbath is a sign of the special relationship Jehovah has with the Jews, and those who observe the Sabbath show that they value that relationship. (Exodus 31:13) Further, observing the Sabbath would remind Isaiah's contemporaries that Jehovah is the Creator. Such observance would also bring to mind his mercies toward them. (Exodus 20: 8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15) Finally, keeping the Sabbath would provide a regular, structured arrangement for worshiping Jehovah. Resting once a week from their regular work would give the inhabitants of Judah opportunity for prayer, study, and meditation.

5 What, though, of Christians? Does the encouragement

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4. Why is Sabbath observance of importance in Israel?
5. In principle, how can Christians apply the counsel to keep the Sabbath?

to observe the Sabbath apply to them? Not directly, since Christians are not under the Law and are therefore not required to observe the Sabbath. (Colossians 2:16, 17) Still, the apostle Paul explained that there is "a sabbath resting" for faithful Christians. This "sabbath resting" involves having faith in Jesus' ransom sacrifice for salvation and ceasing to rely on works alone. (Hebrews 4:6-10) Hence, the words of Isaiah's prophecy regarding the Sabbath remind Jehovah's servants today of the vital need to have faith in God's arrangement for salvation. It is also a fine reminder of the need to cultivate a close relationship with Jehovah and to pursue a course of regular, consistent worship.

Comfort for the Foreigner and the Eunuch

6 Jehovah now addresses two groups who want to serve him but who under the Mosaic Law are disqualified from coming into the Jewish congregation. We read: ***"Let not the foreigner that has joined himself to Jehovah say, 'Without doubt Jehovah will divide me off from his people.' Neither let the eunuch say, 'Look! I am a dry tree.'"*** **(*Isaiah 56:3*)** The foreigner's fear is that he will be cut off from Israel. The eunuch's concern is that he will never have children to preserve his name. Both groups should take courage. Before we see why, let us consider what standing they have under the Law in relation to the nation of Israel.

7 Uncircumcised foreigners are excluded from sharing in worship with Israel. For example, they are not allowed to partake of the Passover. (Exodus 12:43) Foreigners who

6. What two groups now receive attention?
7. What limits does the Law put on foreigners in Israel?

do not flagrantly break the laws of the land enjoy justice and hospitality, but they have no permanent ties with the nation. Of course, some fully embrace the Law, and as a sign of this, the men get circumcised. Then they are proselytes, privileged to worship in the courtyard of Jehovah's house and considered a part of the congregation of Israel. (Leviticus 17:10-14; 20:2; 24:22) However, even proselytes are not full participants in Jehovah's covenant with Israel, and they have no land inheritance in the Promised Land. Other foreigners may turn to the temple in prayer, and evidently they may offer sacrifices through the priesthood as long as the sacrifices conform to the Law. (Leviticus 22:25; 1 Kings 8:41-43) But Israelites are not to associate closely with them.

Eunuchs Receive a Name to Time Indefinite

8 Eunuchs, even if they are born of Jewish parents, are denied full membership of the nation of Israel.* (Deuteronomy 23:1) Among some pagan nations of Bible times, eunuchs had a special place and it was the custom to castrate some of the children taken captive in war. Eunuchs were appointed as officials in the royal courts. A eunuch might be a "guardian of the women,"

* The term "eunuch" also came to refer to a court official, without reference to sexual mutilation. Since the Ethiopian baptized by Philip appears to have been a proselyte—he was baptized before the way was opened to uncircumcised non-Jews—he must have been a eunuch in this sense.—Acts 8:27-39.

8. (a) Under the Law, how were eunuchs viewed? (b) How were eunuchs used in pagan nations, and to what can the term "eunuch" sometimes refer?

The Sabbath would provide opportunity for prayer, study, and meditation

a "guardian of the concubines," or an attendant of the queen. (Esther 2:3, 12-15; 4:4-6, 9) There is no evidence that the Israelites followed such practices or that eunuchs were specially sought out for employment in the service of Israelite kings.*

9 In addition to being able to share in only a limited way in the worship of the true God, physical eunuchs in Israel suffer the great humiliation of being unable to father children to carry on their family name. How comforting, then, are the next words of the prophecy! We read: ***"This is what Jehovah has said to the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths and that have chosen what I have delighted in and that are laying hold of my covenant: 'I will even give to them in my house and within my walls a monument and a name, something better than sons and daughters. A name to time indefinite I shall give them, one that will not be cut off.' "—Isaiah 56:4, 5.***

10 Yes, the time will come when being even a physical eunuch will no longer be an impediment to being fully accepted as Jehovah's servant. If obedient, eunuchs will have "a monument," or a place, in Jehovah's house and a name, better than sons and daughters. When does this happen? Not until after the death of Jesus Christ. At that time the old Law covenant was replaced by the new covenant, and fleshly Israel was replaced by "the Is-

* Ebed-melech, who came to Jeremiah's aid and who had direct access to King Zedekiah, is called a eunuch. This would appear to have reference to his being a court official rather than his being physically mutilated.—Jeremiah 38:7-13.

9. What consoling words does Jehovah address to physical eunuchs?
10. When did the situation of eunuchs change, and what privilege has been open to them since then?

rael of God." (Galatians 6:16) Since then, all of those exercising faith have been able to render acceptable worship to God. Fleshly distinctions and physical condition no longer count. Those who endure faithfully, whatever their physical state, will have "a name to time indefinite . . . one that will not be cut off." Jehovah will not forget them. Their names will be written in his "book of remembrance," and in God's due time, they will receive life everlasting.—Malachi 3:16; Proverbs 22:1; 1 John 2:17.

Foreigners Worship With God's People

11 What, though, of the foreigners? The prophecy now returns to these, and Jehovah has words of great comfort for them. Isaiah writes: ***"The foreigners that have joined themselves to Jehovah to minister to him and to love the name of Jehovah, in order to become servants to him, all those keeping the sabbath in order not to profane it and laying hold of my covenant, I will also bring them to my holy mountain and make them rejoice inside my house of prayer. Their whole burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be for acceptance upon my altar. For my own house will be called even a house of prayer for all the peoples."*** ***—Isaiah 56:6, 7.***

12 In our time "the foreigners" have made their appearance gradually. Before the first world war, it was understood that a greater number of individuals would receive salvation than the number of those with the hope of ruling in heaven with Jesus—the ones we recognize today as the Israel of God. Bible students were aware of Jesus' words recorded at John 10:16: "I have other sheep, which

11. To receive blessings, what are foreigners encouraged to do?
12. What was the understanding once held regarding Jesus' prophecy of the "other sheep"?

are not of this fold; those also I must bring, and they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, one shepherd." These "other sheep" were understood to be an earthly class. But most Bible Students believed that the other sheep would make their appearance during the Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ.

13 Eventually, progress was made in the understanding of a related scripture that speaks of sheep. In Matthew chapter 25, there is a record of Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats. According to that parable, the sheep receive everlasting life because they support Jesus' brothers. Hence, they are a class separate and distinct from the anointed brothers of Christ. In 1923, during a convention in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A., it was explained that those sheep must make their appearance, not during the Millennium, but during the concluding days of this system of things. Why? Because Jesus gave the parable as part of his answer to the question: "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?"—Matthew 24:3.

14 During the 1920's, some individuals who were associated with the Bible Students came to feel that Jehovah's spirit was not witnessing to them that they had a heavenly calling. Yet, they were zealous servants of the Most High God. In 1931 the position of these was better understood when the book *Vindication* was published. As part of a verse-by-verse discussion of the Bible book of Eze-

13. Why was it reasoned that the sheep of Matthew chapter 25 must appear during the concluding days of this system of things?

14, 15. How was progress made in understanding the position of the other sheep in the time of the end?

kiel, *Vindication* explained the vision of "the man" with the writer's inkhorn. (Ezekiel 9:1-11) This "man" is seen going through Jerusalem and marking the foreheads of those sighing and crying over the abominations being committed there. "The man" represents Jesus' brothers, the remnant of anointed Christians alive on earth during the time of judgment of antitypical Jerusalem, Christendom. Those marked are the other sheep living during that time. In the vision they are spared when Jehovah's executioners bring vengeance on that apostate city.

15 In 1932 a deeper understanding of the prophetic drama of King Jehu of Israel and Jehonadab, a non-Israelite supporter, indicated how these other sheep act in support of Christ's anointed brothers—just as Jehonadab went along and supported Jehu in his destruction of Baal worship. Finally, in 1935 the other sheep living during the time of the end of this system of things were recognized as being the great crowd seen in vision by the apostle John. This was first explained at the aforementioned convention in Washington, D.C., when Joseph F. Rutherford pointed to those with an earthly hope as "the great multitude."

16 Thus it was gradually seen that "the foreigners" have a large part to play in Jehovah's purposes during these last days. They come to the Israel of God in order to worship Jehovah. (Zechariah 8:23) With that spiritual nation, they offer acceptable sacrifices to God and enter into the sabbath resting. (Hebrews 13:15, 16) Moreover, they worship at God's spiritual temple, which, like the temple at Jerusalem, is "a house of prayer for all the

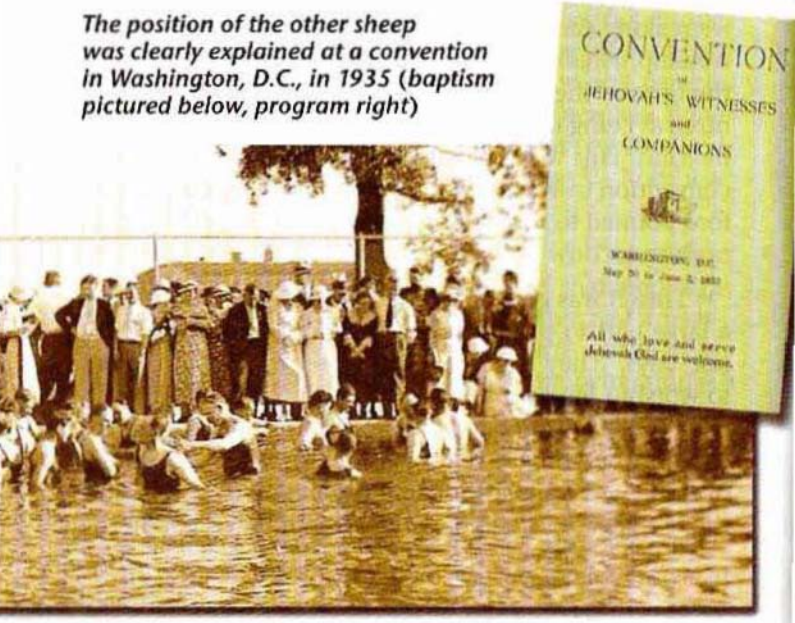
16. What privileges and responsibilities do "the foreigners" enjoy?

nations." (Mark 11:17) They exercise faith in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, 'washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb.' And they serve Jehovah constantly, "rendering him sacred service day and night."—Revelation 7:14, 15.

17 These modern-day foreigners lay hold of the new covenant in the sense that by associating with the Israel of God, they enjoy benefits and blessings that come through the new covenant. While they are not participants in that covenant, they submit wholeheartedly to the laws associated with it. Thus Jehovah's law is within their hearts, and they come to know Jehovah as their

17. How do the modern-day foreigners lay hold of the new covenant?

The position of the other sheep was clearly explained at a convention in Washington, D.C., in 1935 (baptism pictured below, program right)



heavenly Father and the supreme Sovereign.—Jeremiah 31:33, 34; Matthew 6:9; John 17:3.

18 Isaiah's prophecy continues: ***"The utterance of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah, who is collecting together the dispersed ones of Israel, is: 'I shall collect together to him others besides those already collected together of his.'"*** **(*Isaiah 56:8*)** During the time of the end, Jehovah has collected "the dispersed ones of Israel," those of the anointed remnant. In addition, he is collecting others, those of the great crowd. Together they worship in peace and harmony under the oversight of Jehovah and his enthroned King, Christ Jesus. Because of their loyalty to Jehovah's government by Christ, the Fine Shepherd has made them into a united, joyful flock.

Blind Watchmen, Voiceless Dogs

19 The foregoing warm, upbuilding words are followed by a striking, almost shocking, contrast. Jehovah is prepared to act with mercy toward foreigners and eunuchs. But many who claim to be members of God's congregation are condemned and are in line for judgment. More than that, they are not even deserving of a decent burial and are fit only to be devoured by ravenous beasts. Thus, we read: ***"All you wild animals of the open field, come to eat, all you wild animals in the forest."*** **(*Isaiah 56:9*)** What are these wild animals going to feast on? The prophecy will explain. In doing so, it may remind us of the fate awaiting those who oppose God at the coming

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18. What gathering work is being accomplished during the time of the end?

19. What invitation is extended to the wild animals of field and forest?

war of Armageddon, whose slain bodies are left for the birds of heaven to devour.—Revelation 19:17, 18.

20 The prophecy continues: ***"His watchmen are blind. None of them have taken note. All of them are speechless dogs; they are not able to bark, panting, lying down, loving to slumber. They are even dogs strong in soulful desire; they have known no satisfaction. They are also shepherds that have not known how to understand. They have all of them turned to their own way, each one for his unjust gain from his own border: 'Come, men! Let me take some wine; and let us drink intoxicating liquor to the limit. And tomorrow will certainly turn out just as today, great in a very much larger way.'"—Isaiah 56:10-12.***

21 The religious leaders of Judah profess to worship Jehovah. They claim to be "his watchmen." But they are spiritually blind, voiceless, and sleepy. If they cannot keep on the watch and sound the warning of danger, what good are they? Such religious watchmen are without understanding, in no position to give spiritual direction to sheeplike people. Moreover, they are corrupt. They have insatiable selfish desires. Instead of following Jehovah's direction, they seek their own way, pursue unjust gain, overindulge in intoxicating liquor, and encourage others to do the same. So oblivious are they of God's impending judgment that they tell people that things will be fine.

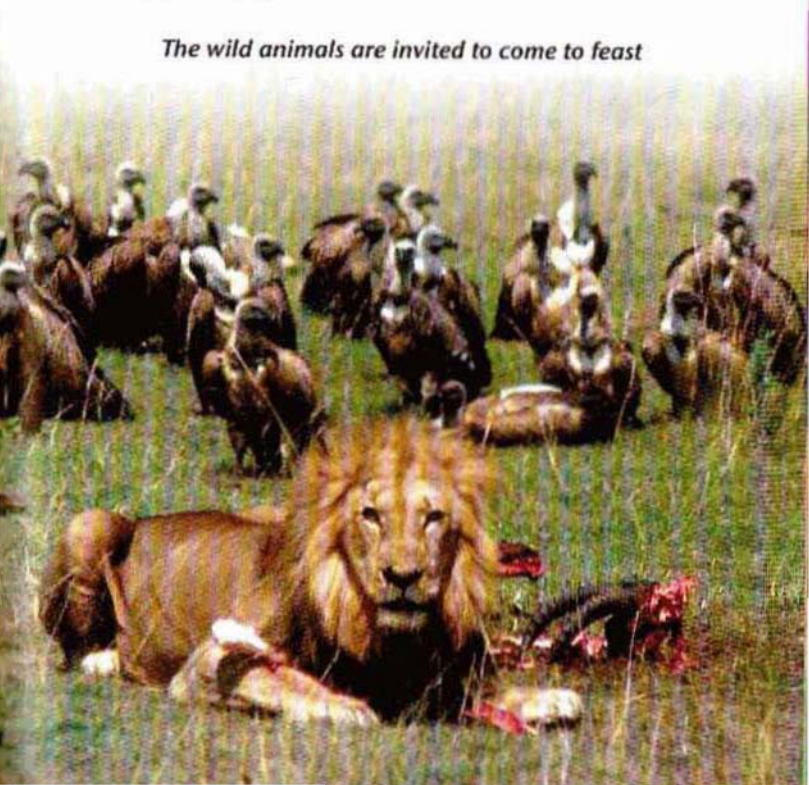
22 Earlier in his prophecy, Isaiah used similar imagery to describe the unfaithful religious leaders of Judah—spiritually drunk, drowsy, and lacking in understanding.

20, 21. What failings make the religious leaders useless as spiritual guides?

22. How are the religious leaders of Jesus' day like those of ancient Judah?

They burdened the people with traditions of men, spoke religious lies, and trusted in Assyria for help rather than looking to God. (2 Kings 16:5-9; Isaiah 29:1, 9-14) They have clearly learned nothing. Sadly, the same sort of leaders were present in the first century. Instead of embracing the good news brought to them by God's own Son, they rejected Jesus and conspired to have him put to death. Jesus frankly called them "blind guides," adding that if "a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit." —Matthew 15:14.

The wild animals are invited to come to feast



Watchmen of Today

23 The apostle Peter warned that false teachers would also rise up to mislead Christians. He wrote: "There also came to be false prophets among the people [of Israel], as there will also be false teachers among you. These very ones will quietly bring in destructive sects and will disown even the owner that bought them, bringing speedy destruction upon themselves." (2 Peter 2:1) What has been the result of the false teachings and sectarianism of such false teachers? Christendom, whose religious leaders today pray for God's blessing on their political friends and then promise a bright future. Christendom's religious leaders have proved to be blind, voiceless, and asleep with regard to spiritual things.

24 However, Jehovah is bringing millions of foreigners to worship with the last ones of the Israel of God in his great spiritual house of prayer. These foreigners, although from many nations, races, and languages, are at unity with one another and with the Israel of God. They are convinced that salvation can come only from Jehovah God through Jesus Christ. Motivated by love for Jehovah, they join Christ's anointed brothers in giving voice to their faith. And they are deeply comforted by the words of the inspired apostle who wrote: "If you publicly declare that 'word in your own mouth,' that Jesus is Lord, and exercise faith in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you will be saved."—Romans 10:9.

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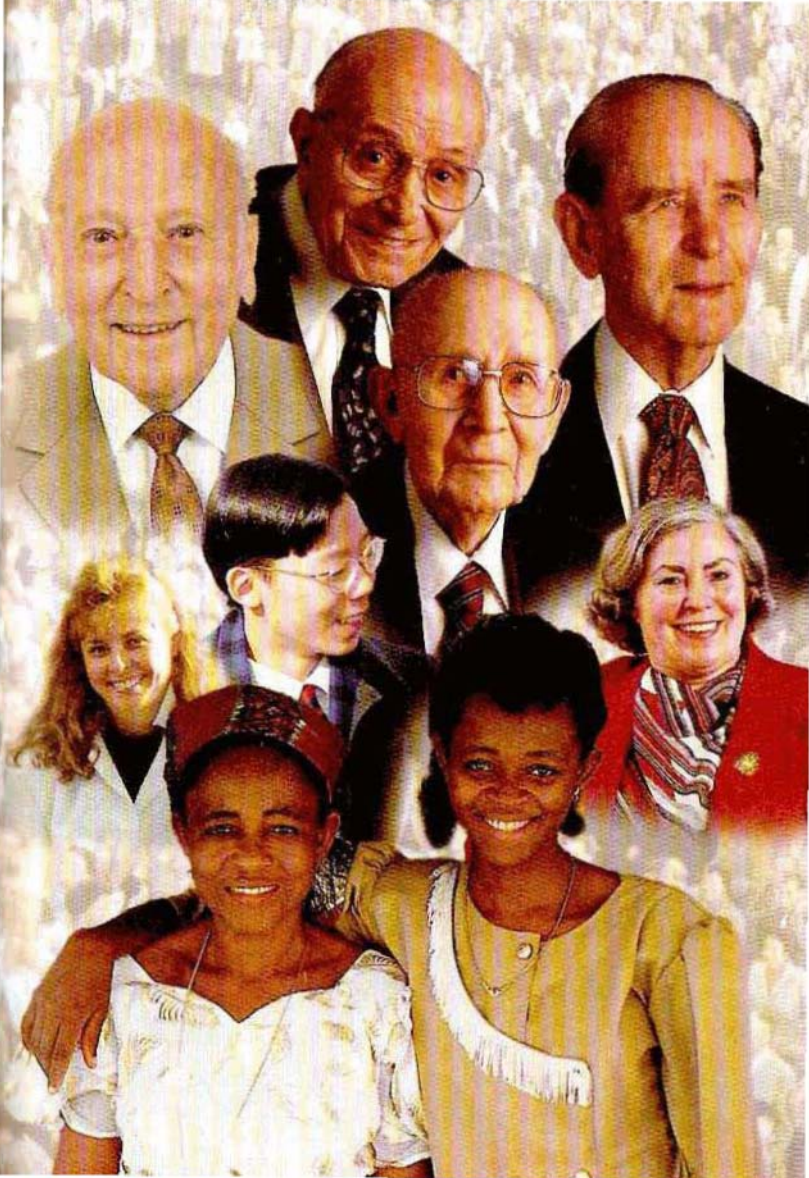
23. What prophecy of Peter regarding religious leaders has been fulfilled?
24. What unity exists between spiritual Israel and the foreigners?

The foreigners and the Israel of God are at unity with one another



Jehovah Revives the Spirit of the Lowly Ones

Isaiah 57:1-21

"THIS is what the High and Lofty One, who is residing forever and whose name is holy, has said: 'In the height and in the holy place is where I reside, also with the one crushed and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly ones and to revive the heart of the ones being crushed.'" (Isaiah 57:15) So wrote the prophet Isaiah in the eighth century B.C.E. What was happening in Judah that made this message so encouraging? How do these inspired words help Christians today? A consideration of Isaiah chapter 57 will help us answer those questions.

"You Men, Come Up Close Here"

2 This part of Isaiah's prophecy seems to apply in Isaiah's own day. Consider how entrenched wickedness has now become: ***"The righteous one himself has perished, but there is no one taking it to heart. And men of loving-kindness are being gathered to the dead, while no one discerns that it is because of the calamity that the righteous one has been gathered away. He enters into peace; they take rest upon their beds, each one that is walking straightforwardly."*** **(*Isaiah 57:1, 2*)** If a righteous man

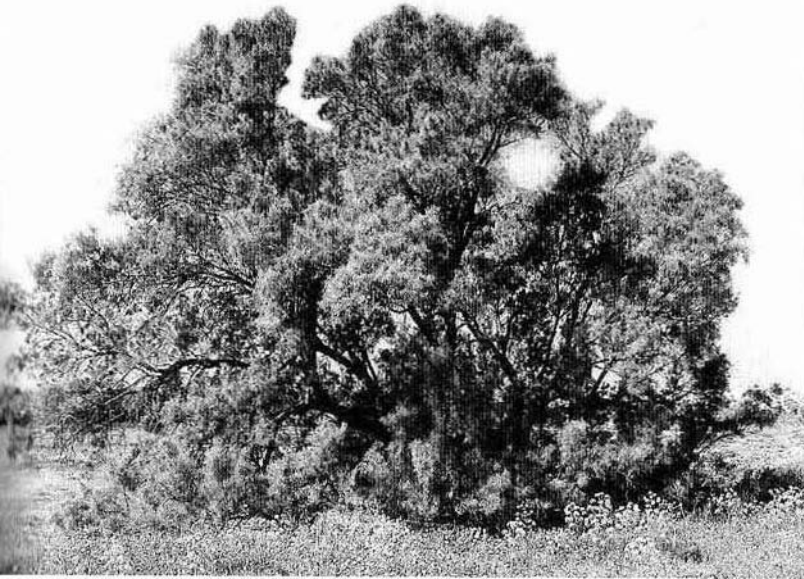
1. What assurance did Jehovah give, and what questions are raised by his words?
2. (a) When do the words of Isaiah chapter 57 seem to apply? (b) What is the situation of righteous ones in Isaiah's day?

falls, no one cares. His untimely death goes unnoticed. Falling asleep in death brings him peace, release from the suffering inflicted by the ungodly, and escape from calamity. God's chosen nation has sunk to a deplorable state. But how those who remain faithful must be encouraged to know that Jehovah not only sees what is going on but will support them!

3 Jehovah summons the wicked generation of Judah, saying: ***"As for you men, come up close here, you sons of a soothsaying woman, the seed of an adulterous person and of a woman that commits prostitution."*** **(*Isaiah 57:3*)** They have well earned such shameful descriptions

3. How does Jehovah address the wicked generation of Judah, and why?

Judah practices immoral worship under every luxuriant tree



as sons of a soothsayer and offspring of an adulterer and of a prostitute. The false worship to which they have turned includes disgusting acts of idolatry and spiritism as well as immoral sexual practices. Hence, Jehovah asks these sinners: ***"Over whom is it that you have a jolly good time? Against whom do you keep opening wide the mouth, keep sticking out the tongue? Are you not the children of transgression, the seed of falsehood, those who are working up passion among big trees, under every luxuriant tree, slaughtering the children in the torrent valleys under the clefts of the crags?"—Isaiah 57:4, 5.***

4 The wicked ones of Judah practice their shocking pagan worship openly, having "a jolly good time." They scornfully mock God's prophets who have been sent to correct them, sticking out their tongues in a shameless, disrespectful gesture. Although they are children of Abraham, their rebellious ways make them children of transgression and the seed of falsehood. (Isaiah 1:4; 30:9; John 8:39, 44) Out among the big trees in the countryside, they stir up religious fervor in their idolatrous worship. And what cruel worship! Why, they even slaughter their own children, like the nations whose detestable ways led to their being driven off the land by Jehovah!—1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 16:3, 4; Isaiah 1:29.

Pouring Out a Drink Offering to Stones

5 See how deeply the inhabitants of Judah have plunged into idolatry: ***"With the smooth stones of the torrent valley was your portion. They—they were your lot. Moreover, to them you poured out a drink offering, you offered up a***

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4. Of what are the wicked ones of Judah guilty?

5, 6. (a) What have the inhabitants of Judah chosen to do rather than worship Jehovah? (b) How blatant and widespread is Judah's idol worship?

gift. For these things shall I comfort myself?" (Isaiah 57:6) The Jews are God's covenant people, yet rather than worship him, they pick stones out of the riverbed and make gods of these. David proclaimed that Jehovah was his portion, but these sinners have chosen lifeless stone idols as their lot and pour out drink offerings to them. (Psalm 16:5; Habakkuk 2:19) What comfort can Jehovah find in such perversion of worship by his name people?

6 Everywhere—under big trees, in torrent valleys, on hills, in their cities—Judah commits idolatry. But Jehovah sees it all, and through Isaiah, He exposes her depravity: ***"Upon a mountain high and lifted up you set your bed. There also you went up to offer sacrifice. And behind the door and the doorpost you set your memorial." (Isaiah 57:7-8a)*** Upon the high places, Judah makes her bed of spiritual uncleanness, and there she offers sacrifices to foreign gods.* Even private houses have idols behind the doors and the doorposts.

7 Some may wonder why Judah has become so involved in unclean worship. Has some stronger power forced her to abandon Jehovah? The answer is no. She does it willingly, eagerly. Jehovah states: ***"Apart from me you uncovered yourself and proceeded to go up; you made your bed spacious. And for yourself you went concluding a covenant with them. You loved a bed with them. The male organ you beheld." (Isaiah 57:8b)*** Judah has made a covenant with her false gods, and she loves her illicit relationship with them. She especially loves the immoral

* Likely the term "bed" refers either to the altar or to the place of pagan worship. Calling it a bed is a reminder that such worship is spiritual prostitution.

7. With what spirit does Judah engage in immoral worship?

sexual practices—likely including the use of phallic symbols—that characterize worship of these gods!

8 The description of grossly immoral, cruel idol worship fits what we know of several wicked kings of Judah. Manasseh, for example, built up the high places, erected altars to Baal, and put false religious altars in two temple courtyards. He made his sons pass through the fire, practiced magic, employed divination, and promoted spiritistic practices. King Manasseh also put into Jehovah's temple the graven image of the sacred pole that he had made.* He seduced Judah into doing "what was bad more than the nations whom Jehovah had annihilated." (2 Kings 21:2-9) Some believe that Manasseh had Isaiah killed, although Manasseh's name does not appear in Isaiah 1:1.

"You Continued Sending Your Envoys"

9 Judah's transgression goes beyond serving false gods. Using Isaiah as his mouthpiece, Jehovah says: ***"You proceeded to descend toward Melech with oil, and kept making your ointments abundant. And you continued sending your envoys far off, so that you lowered matters to Sheol." (Isaiah 57:9)*** The unfaithful kingdom of Judah goes down to "Melech," "the king" in Hebrew—likely the king of a foreign power—offering him expensive and appealing gifts, symbolized by oil and perfumed ointments. Judah sends emissaries to faraway places. Why? To per-

* Sacred poles may have represented the female principle, and sacred pillars may have been phallic symbols. Both were used by the unfaithful inhabitants of Judah.—2 Kings 18:4; 23:14.

8. Under which king in particular did idolatry flourish in Judah?
9. Why does Judah send envoys "far off"?

suade Gentile nations to make political alliances with her. Having turned her back on Jehovah, she puts her trust in foreign kings.

10 One example of this is in the days of King Ahaz. Feeling threatened by an alliance between Israel and Syria, that unfaithful king of Judah sends messengers to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, saying: "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me out of the palm of the king of Syria and out of the palm of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." Ahaz sends silver and gold as a bribe to the king of Assyria, and the king responds, launching a devastating attack on Syria. (2 Kings 16:7-9) In her dealings with the Gentile nations, Judah stoops to "the depths of Sheol." (*An American Translation*) Because of those dealings, she will die, or cease to exist as an independent nation with a king.

10. (a) How does King Ahaz seek an alliance with the king of Assyria? (b) In what way does Judah 'lower matters to Sheol'?

Judah builds altars all over the land

11 Jehovah continues to address Judah: ***"In the multitude of your ways you have toiled. You have not said, 'It is hopeless!' You have found a revival of your own power. That is why you have not grown sick."*** **(*Isaiah 57:10*)** Yes, the nation has labored hard in her apostate ways, and she fails to see the hopelessness of her endeavors. To the contrary, she deludes herself into believing that she is succeeding in her own power. She feels invigorated and healthy. How foolish!

12 Today there is an organization whose conduct is reminiscent of that of Judah in Isaiah's day. Christendom uses the name of Jesus, but she pursues alliances with the nations and has filled her places of worship with idols. Her adherents even set up idolatrous images in their private homes. Christendom has sacrificed her young people in the wars of the nations. How offensive all of this must be to the true God, who commands Christians: "Flee from idolatry"! (1 Corinthians 10:14) By involving herself in politics, Christendom has 'committed fornication with the kings of the earth.' (Revelation 17:1, 2) She is, in fact, a major supporter of the United Nations. What lies ahead for this religious harlot? Well, what does Jehovah say to her prototype, unfaithful Judah, especially as represented by her capital city, Jerusalem?

'Your Collection Will Not Deliver You'

13 ***"Whom did you become frightened at and begin to fear, so that you took up lying?"*** asks Jehovah. A good question! Judah certainly shows no wholesome, godly

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11. What false sense of security does Judah display?
12. What conditions in Christendom parallel those in Judah?
13. What "lying" does Judah take up, and how does she react to Jehovah's patience?

fear of Jehovah. Otherwise, she would not have become a nation of liars, worshipers of false gods. Jehovah goes on to say: ***"I was not the one that you remembered. You took nothing to your heart. Was I not keeping silent and hiding matters? So you were in no fear even of me."*** **(*Isaiah 57:11*)** Jehovah has kept silent, not inflicting immediate punishment upon Judah. Does Judah appreciate this? No, instead she views God's forbearance as indifference. She has lost all fear of him.

14 However, the period of God's long-suffering will end. Looking toward that time, Jehovah declares: ***"I myself shall tell forth your righteousness and your works, that they will not benefit you. When you cry for aid your collection of things will not deliver you, but a wind will carry even all of them away. An exhalation will take them away."*** **(*Isaiah 57:12, 13a*)** Jehovah will expose Judah's sham righteousness. Her hypocritical works will be of no benefit. Her "collection of things," her inventory of idols, will not deliver her. When calamity strikes, the gods in which she trusts will be blown away by a mere breath of wind.

15 Jehovah's words are fulfilled in 607 B.C.E. That is when Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem, burns the temple, and takes most of the people captive. "Thus Judah went into exile from off its soil." —2 Kings 25:1-21.

16 Similarly, Christendom's large inventory of idols will not deliver her in the day of Jehovah's anger. (Isaiah 2:19-22; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10) Along with the rest

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14, 15. What does Jehovah say about Judah's works and her "collection of things"?

16. What awaits Christendom and the rest of "Babylon the Great"?

of "Babylon the Great"—the world conglomerate of false religion—Christendom will be annihilated. The symbolic scarlet-colored wild beast and its ten horns "will make [Babylon the Great] devastated and naked, and will eat up her fleshy parts and will completely burn her with fire." (Revelation 17:3, 16, 17) How glad we are to have obeyed the command: "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, 5) May we never return to her or her ways.

"The One Taking Refuge in Me Will Inherit the Land"

17 What, though, of the next words of Isaiah's prophecy? ***"The one taking refuge in me will inherit the land and will take possession of my holy mountain." (Isaiah 57:13b)*** To whom is Jehovah speaking now? He is looking beyond the coming cataclysm and foretelling the liberation of his people from Babylon and the restoration of pure worship in his holy mountain, Jerusalem. (Isaiah 66:20; Daniel 9:16) What a source of encouragement this must be to any Jews who remain faithful! Further, Jehovah says: ***"One will certainly say, 'Bank up, you people, bank up! Clear the way. Remove any obstacle from the way of my people.'" (Isaiah 57:14)*** When the time comes for God to deliver his people, the way will be ready, with all obstacles removed.—2 Chronicles 36: 22, 23.

18 It is at this point that the prophet Isaiah relates

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17. What promise is made to 'the one taking refuge in Jehovah,' and when is this realized?

18. How is Jehovah's loftiness described, yet what loving concern does he display?

the words quoted at the outset: ***"This is what the High and Lofty One, who is residing forever and whose name is holy, has said: 'In the height and in the holy place is where I reside, also with the one crushed and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly ones and to revive the heart of the ones being crushed.'"*** **(*Isaiah 57:15*)** Jehovah's throne is in the highest heavens. There is no position higher or loftier. How comforting to know that from there he sees everything—not only the sins of the wicked but also the righteous acts of those who try to serve him! (Psalm 102:19; 103:6) Moreover, he hears the groans of the oppressed and revives the hearts of the crushed. These words must have touched the hearts of repentant Jews in ancient times. They certainly touch our hearts today.

19 Comforting, too, are Jehovah's further words: ***"It will not be to time indefinite that I shall contend, nor perpetually that I shall be indignant; for because of me the spirit itself would grow feeble, even the breathing creatures that I myself have made."*** **(*Isaiah 57:16*)** None of God's creatures could survive if Jehovah's wrath were perpetual, without end. Happily, though, God's indignation is only for a limited time. When it has accomplished its purpose, it ceases. This inspired insight helps us develop deep appreciation for Jehovah's love toward his creation.

20 We gain more insight as Jehovah continues. First he says: ***"At the erroneousness of his unjust gain I grew indignant, and I proceeded to strike him, concealing my face, while I was indignant. But he kept walking as a***

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19. When does Jehovah's indignation cease?

20. (a) How does Jehovah deal with an unrepentant wrongdoer? (b) In what way does Jehovah comfort the contrite one?

***renegade in the way of his heart."* (*Isaiah 57:17*)** The wrongs committed because of greed certainly invite God's wrath. As long as one remains a renegade at heart, Jehovah remains indignant. But what if the renegade responds to the discipline? Then Jehovah shows how his love and compassion move him to act: ***"I have seen his very ways; and I began to heal him and conduct him and make compensation with comfort to him and to his mourning ones."* (*Isaiah 57:18*)** After taking disciplinary action, Jehovah heals the contrite one and comforts him and those mourning with him. That is why in 537 B.C.E., the Jews were able to return home. True, Judah was never again an independent kingdom. Still, the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, and true worship was restored.

21 "The High and Lofty One," Jehovah, also showed concern for the welfare of the anointed remnant in 1919. Because of their contrite, humble spirit, the great God, Jehovah, kindly noticed their affliction and delivered them from Babylonish captivity. He removed all stumbling blocks and led them to freedom so that they could render pure worship to him. Thus Jehovah's words through Isaiah had a fulfillment then. And behind those words are eternal principles that apply to each one of us. Jehovah accepts worship only from those who are lowly in mind. And if one of God's servants should sin, he should be quick to acknowledge his error, accept reproof, and correct his ways. May we never forget that Jehovah heals and comforts humble ones but "opposes the haughty ones."—James 4:6.

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21. (a) How did Jehovah revive the spirit of anointed Christians in 1919? (b) What quality do we as individuals do well to cultivate?

'Peace to Those Far and Near'

22 Contrasting the future of those who repent with that of those who persist in their wicked ways, Jehovah declares: ***"I am creating the fruit of the lips. Continuous peace there will be to the one that is far away and to the one that is near, . . . and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the sea that is being tossed, when it is unable to calm down, the waters of which keep tossing up seaweed and mire. There is no peace . . . for the wicked ones."—Isaiah 57:19-21.***

23 The fruit of the lips is the sacrifice of praise offered to God—public declaration to his name. (Hebrews 13:15) How is Jehovah "creating" that public declaration? In order to offer a sacrifice of praise, an individual first has to learn of God and then put faith in him. Faith—a fruit of God's spirit—moves that person to tell others what he has heard. In other words, he makes public declaration. (Romans 10:13-15; Galatians 5:22) It should be remembered, too, that Jehovah is ultimately the one who commissions his servants to tell forth his praise. And Jehovah is the one who liberates his people, making it possible for them to offer such sacrifices of praise. (1 Peter 2:9) Hence, Jehovah can well be said to create this fruit of the lips.

24 What thrilling fruit of the lips the Jews must be offering as they return to their homeland singing praises to Jehovah! They must be joyful to know God's peace, whether they are "far away"—distant from Judah,

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22. What future does Jehovah foretell for (a) the repentant? (b) the wicked?

23. What is the fruit of the lips, and in what way is Jehovah "creating" this fruit?

24. (a) Who come to know God's peace, and with what result? (b) Who do not come to know peace, and what is the result for them?

still waiting to return—or "near"—already in their homeland. In broad contrast, how different things are for the wicked! Any who fail to respond to Jehovah's disciplinary acts, the wicked whoever and wherever they are, have no peace at all. Seething like the restless sea, they keep producing, not the fruit of the lips, but "seaweed and mire," everything that is unclean.

25 Today, too, Jehovah's worshipers everywhere declare the good news of God's Kingdom. Christians far and near in more than 230 lands offer the fruit of their lips, sounding forth praise of the only true God. The praises they sing are heard "from the extremity of the earth." (Isaiah 42:10-12) Those who hear their expressions and respond are embracing the truth of God's Word, the Bible. Such ones are coming to know peace, which comes from serving "the God who gives peace."—Romans 16:20.

26 True, the wicked pay no heed to the Kingdom message. Soon, though, they will not be allowed to disturb the peace of the righteous. "Just a little while longer, and the wicked one will be no more," Jehovah promises. Those taking refuge in Jehovah will inherit the land in a wonderful way. "The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace." (Psalm 37:10, 11, 29) What a lovely place our earth will then be! May all of us be determined never to lose God's peace, so that we can sing God's praise for all eternity.

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25. How are many far and near coming to know peace?
26. (a) What lies ahead for the wicked? (b) What grand promise is made to the meek, and what should be our determination?

Hypocrisy Exposed!

Isaiah 58:1-14

"OUTWARDLY indeed, [you] appear righteous to men," Jesus said to the religious leaders of his day, "but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." (Matthew 23: 28) Jesus' condemnation of hypocrisy reflects the viewpoint of his heavenly Father. Chapter 58 of Isaiah's prophecy specifically focuses attention on the hypocrisy that is rampant in Judah. Strife, oppression, and violence are the order of the day, and Sabbath observance has degenerated into a meaningless ritual. The people give mere token service to Jehovah and make a showy display of piety by insincere fasting. No wonder Jehovah exposes them for what they are!

'Tell the People Their Sins'

2 Although Jehovah is disgusted with Judah's conduct, His words include a heartfelt appeal for the nation to repent. Still, Jehovah does not want his reproof to be indistinct. Hence, he commands Isaiah: ***"Call out full-throated; do not hold back. Raise your voice just like a horn, and tell my people their revolt, and the house of Jacob their sins." (Isaiah 58:1)*** Boldly proclaiming Jehovah's words might earn Isaiah ill will from the people, but he does not

1. How do Jesus and Jehovah view hypocrisy, and what form does it take in Isaiah's day?
2. What spirit does Isaiah show as he declares Jehovah's message, and who today are like him?

shrink back. He still has the same spirit of dedication that he showed when he said: "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8) What a fine example of endurance Isaiah is to the modern-day Witnesses of Jehovah, who also are commissioned to preach God's Word and expose religious hypocrisy!—Psalm 118:6; 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

3 Ostensibly, the people in Isaiah's day seek Jehovah and express delight in his righteous judgments. We read Jehovah's words: ***"Day after day it was I whom they kept seeking, and it was in the knowledge of my ways that they would express delight, like a nation that carried on righteousness itself and that had not left the very justice of their God, in that they kept asking me for righteous judgments, drawing near to God in whom they had delight."*** ***(Isaiah 58:2)*** Is this professed delight in Jehovah's ways genuine? No. They are "like a nation that carried on righteousness itself," but the resemblance is merely superficial. In truth, this nation has "left the very justice of their God."

4 The situation is much like that later revealed to the prophet Ezekiel. Jehovah told Ezekiel that the Jews were saying to one another: "Come, please, and hear what the word is that is going forth from Jehovah." But God warned Ezekiel of their insincerity: "They will come in to you, . . . and they will certainly hear your words but these they will not do, for with their mouth they are expressing lustful desires and after their unjust gain is where their heart is going. And, look! you are to them like a song of sensuous loves, like one with a pretty voice and playing a stringed instrument well. And they will certainly hear your words, but there are none doing them." (Ezekiel

3, 4. (a) What false appearance do the people in Isaiah's day put on? (b) What is the real situation in Judah?

33:30-32) Isaiah's contemporaries also claim to be seeking Jehovah constantly, but they do not obey his words.

Hypocritical Fasting

5 In an effort to gain divine favor, the Jews go through the formality of fasting, but their pretended piety only alienates them from Jehovah. In apparent bewilderment they ask: ***"For what reason did we fast and you did not see, and did we afflict our soul and you would take no note?"*** Jehovah responds frankly, saying: ***"Indeed you people were finding delight in the very day of your fasting, when there were all your toilers that you kept driving to work. Indeed for quarreling and struggle you would fast, and for striking with the fist of wickedness. Did you not keep fasting as in the day for making your voice to be heard in the height? Should the fast that I choose become like this, as a day for earthling man to afflict his soul? For bowing down his head just like a rush, and that he should spread out mere sackcloth and ashes as his couch? Is it this that you call a fast and a day acceptable to Jehovah?"—Isaiah 58:3-5.***

6 While fasting, feigning righteousness, and even asking for Jehovah's righteous judgments, the people pursue selfish pleasures and business interests. They indulge in strife, oppression, and violence. In an attempt to whitewash their behavior, they engage in showy displays of mourning—drooping their heads like bulrushes and sitting in sackcloth and ashes—in apparent repentance for their sins.

5. How do the Jews try to gain divine favor, and with what reaction from Jehovah?
6. What actions by the Jews betray their fasting as hypocritical?

The Jews fasted and bowed their heads in mock repentance —but they did not change their ways

Of what value is all of this if they continue to rebel? They show none of the godly sorrow and repentance that should be associated with sincere fasts. Their wailing—although noisy—is not heard in heaven.

7 The Jews of Jesus' day put on a similar show of ceremonial fasting, some doing so twice a week! (Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:11, 12) Many of the religious leaders also imitated Isaiah's generation by being harsh and domineering. Hence, Jesus courageously exposed those religious hypocrites, telling them that their form of worship was futile. (Matthew 15:7-9) Today, too, millions "publicly declare they know God, but they disown him by their works, because they are detestable and disobedient and not approved for good work of any sort." (Titus 1:16) Such ones may hope for God's mercy, but their conduct betrays their insincerity. In contrast, Jehovah's Witnesses display true godly devotion and genuine brotherly love.—John 13:35.

What True Repentance Involves

8 Jehovah wants his people to do more than fast over their sins; he wants them to repent. Then they will gain his favor. (Ezekiel 18:23, 32) He explains that in order to be meaningful, fasting must be accompanied by a correction of past sins. Consider the heart-searching questions that Jehovah asks: ***"Is not this the fast that I choose? To loosen the fetters of wickedness, to release the bands of the yoke bar, and to send away the crushed ones free, and that you people should tear in two every yoke bar?"—Isaiah 58:6.***

9 Fetters and yoke bars are apt symbols of harsh bondage. So instead of fasting and at the same time oppress-

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7. How did the Jews of Jesus' time act hypocritically, and how do many today do the same?

8, 9. What positive actions must accompany sincere repentance?

ing fellow believers, the people ought to obey the command: "You must love your fellow as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) They should release all whom they have oppressed and unjustly enslaved.* Showy religious acts, such as fasting, are no substitute for genuine godly devotion and acts demonstrating brotherly love. A contemporary of Isaiah, the prophet Micah, writes: "What is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?"—Micah 6:8.

10 Justice, kindness, and modesty call for the doing of good to others, which is the essence of Jehovah's Law. (Matthew 7:12) Far better than fasting would be a sharing of their bounty with the needy. Jehovah asks: ***"Is [the fast that I choose] not the dividing of your bread out to the hungry one, and that you should bring the afflicted, homeless people into your house? That, in case you should see someone naked, you must cover him, and that you should not hide yourself from your own flesh?"*** **(*Isaiah 58:7*)** Yes, rather than making a show of fasting, those having the means to do so should give food, clothing, or housing to needy fellow inhabitants of Judah—their own flesh.

11 These beautiful principles of brotherly love and compassion expressed by Jehovah do not apply only to the Jews in Isaiah's time. They guide Christians as well. Hence, the apostle Paul wrote: "Really, then, as long as we have time favorable for it, let us work what is good toward

* Jehovah made the provision for those of his people who fell into debt to sell themselves into slavery—essentially becoming hired laborers—to pay off their debt. (Leviticus 25:39-43) However, the Law required that slaves be treated kindly. Those treated brutally were to be set free.—Exodus 21:2, 3, 26, 27; Deuteronomy 15:12-15.

10, 11. (a) For the Jews, what would be better than fasting? (b) How can Christians today apply Jehovah's counsel to the Jews?

all, but especially toward those related to us in the faith." (Galatians 6:10) The Christian congregation must be a haven of love and brotherly affection, especially in view of the increasingly criticial times in which we live.—2 Timothy 3:1; James 1:27.

Obedience Brings Rich Blessings

12 If only Jehovah's people would have the insight to heed his loving reproof! Jehovah says: ***"In that case your light would break forth just like the dawn; and speedily would recuperation spring up for you. And before you your righteousness would certainly walk; the very glory of Jehovah would be your rear guard. In that case you would call, and Jehovah himself would answer; you would cry for help, and he would say, 'Here I am!'"*** **(*Isaiah 58:8, 9a*)** What warm, appealing words! Jehovah blesses and protects those delighting in loving-kindness and righteousness. If Jehovah's people repent of their harshness and hypocrisy and obey him, things will get much brighter for them. Jehovah will grant "recuperation," a spiritual and physical recovery for the nation. He will also guard them, as he did their forefathers when they were leaving Egypt. And he will respond immediately to their cries for help. —Exodus 14:19, 20, 31.

13 Jehovah now adds to his earlier exhortation, saying: ***"If you will remove from your midst the yoke bar*** [of harsh, unjust slavery], ***the poking out of the finger*** [possibly in scorn or false accusation] ***and the speaking of what is***

12. What will Jehovah do if his people obey him?
13. What blessings await the Jews if they respond to Jehovah's exhortation?

hurtful; and you will grant to the hungry one your own soulful desire, and you will satisfy the soul that is being afflicted, your light also will certainly flash up even in the darkness, and your gloom will be like midday." (Isaiah 58: 9b, 10) Selfishness and harshness are self-defeating and bring Jehovah's wrath. Kindness and generosity, however, especially when exercised toward the hungry and the afflicted, bring God's rich blessing. If only the Jews will take these truths to heart! Then their spiritual radiance and prosperity will make them shine like the midday sun, dispelling any gloom. Above all, they will bring honor and praise to Jehovah, the Source of their glory and blessings. —1 Kings 8:41-43.

A Nation Restored

14 Regrettably, the nation ignores Jehovah's appeal and plunges even deeper into wickedness. Eventually, they leave Jehovah no choice but to send them into exile, just as he warned. (Deuteronomy 28:15, 36, 37, 64, 65) Still, Jehovah's next words through Isaiah continue to offer hope. God predicts that a disciplined, contrite remnant will joyfully return to the land of Judah, even though it lies desolate.

15 Pointing forward to the restoration of his people in 537 B.C.E., Jehovah, through Isaiah, says: ***"Jehovah will be bound to lead you constantly and to satisfy your soul even in a scorched land, and he will invigorate your very bones; and you must become like a well-watered garden, and like the source of water ["spring," The New English Bible], the waters of which do not lie ["fail," NE]." (Isaiah 58:11)*** Jehovah will restore Israel's scorched home-

14. (a) How do Isaiah's contemporaries react to his words? (b) What does Jehovah continue to offer?
15. What joyful restoration does Jehovah foretell?

land to luxuriant productivity. What is more wonderful, he will bless his repentant people, invigorating their "very bones" from a spiritually lifeless state to one of full vitality. (Ezekiel 37:1-14) The people themselves will become like "a well-watered garden" filled with spiritual fruitage.

16 Restoration will include the rebuilding of cities destroyed by the Babylonian invaders in 607 B.C.E. ***"At your instance men will certainly build up the places devastated a long time; you will raise up even the foundations of continuous generations. And you will actually be called the repairer of the gap, the restorer of roadways by which to dwell." (Isaiah 58:12)*** The parallel expressions "the places devastated a long time" and "the foundations of continuous generations" (or, the foundations that have been lying in ruins for generations) show that the repatriated remnant will rebuild the ruined cities of Judah, especially Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 2:5; 12:27; Isaiah 44:28) They will repair "the gap"—a collective term referring to breaches in the walls of Jerusalem and no doubt of other cities as well. —Jeremiah 31:38-40; Amos 9:14.

Blessings That Come From Faithful Sabbath Observance

17 The Sabbath was an expression of God's deep concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of his people. Jesus said: "The sabbath came into existence for the sake of man." (Mark 2:27) This day sanctified by Jehovah afforded the Israelites a special opportunity to show their love for God. Sadly, by Isaiah's time it has been reduced to a day of observing empty rituals and indulging in selfish desires. So once again, Jehovah has cause to censure his people. And again, he tries to reach their hearts. He says: *"If in*

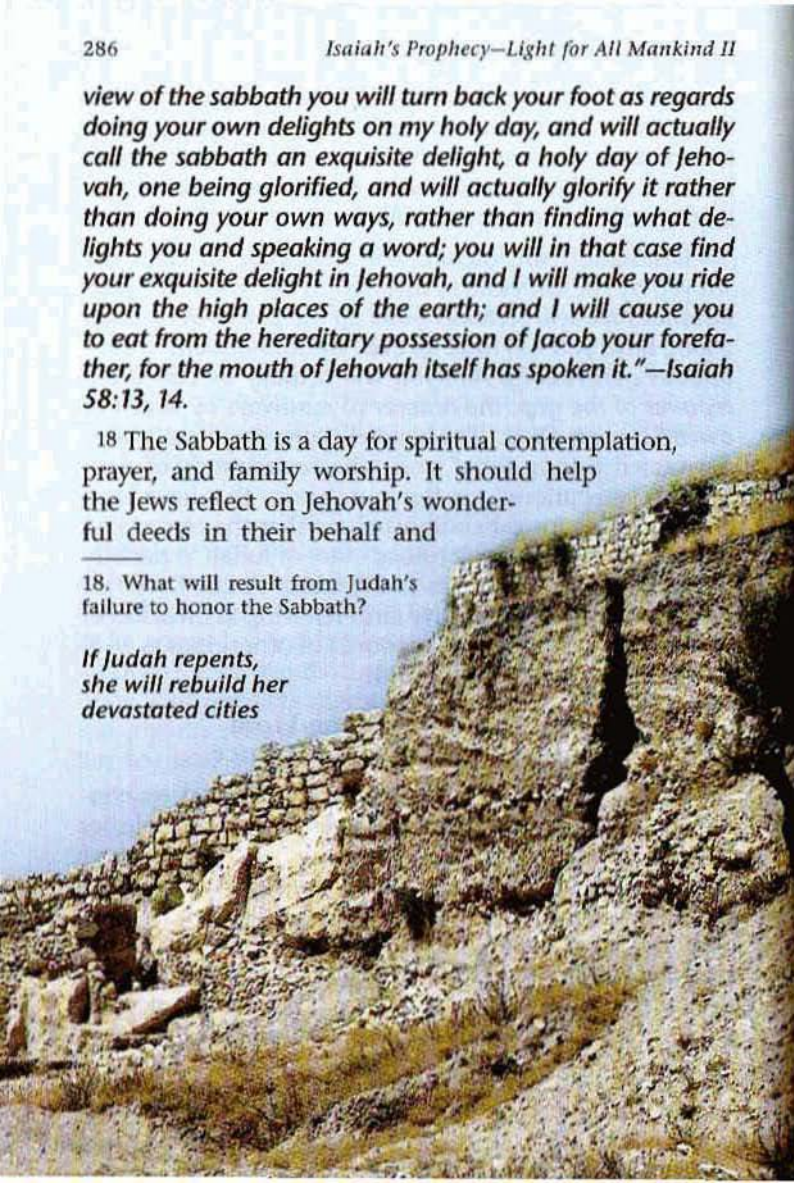
16. How will the land be restored?
17. How does Jehovah appeal to his people to obey the Sabbath laws?

view of the sabbath you will turn back your foot as regards doing your own delights on my holy day, and will actually call the sabbath an exquisite delight, a holy day of Jehovah, one being glorified, and will actually glorify it rather than doing your own ways, rather than finding what delights you and speaking a word; you will in that case find your exquisite delight in Jehovah, and I will make you ride upon the high places of the earth; and I will cause you to eat from the hereditary possession of Jacob your forefather, for the mouth of Jehovah itself has spoken it."—Isaiah 58:13, 14.

18 The Sabbath is a day for spiritual contemplation, prayer, and family worship. It should help the Jews reflect on Jehovah's wonderful deeds in their behalf and

18. What will result from Judah's failure to honor the Sabbath?

If Judah repents, she will rebuild her devastated cities



on the justice and love manifest in his Law. Thus, faithful observance of this holy day should help the people draw closer to their God. Instead, they are perverting the Sabbath and therefore are in danger of being cut off from Jehovah's blessing.—Leviticus 26:34; 2 Chronicles 36:21.

19 Still, if the Jews learn from the discipline and turn to honoring the Sabbath arrangement, rich blessings are in store. The good effects of true worship and respect for the Sabbath will spill over into all aspects of their lives. (Deuteronomy 28:1-13; Psalm 19:7-11) For example, Jehovah will make his people "ride upon the high places of the earth." This expression signifies security and conquest of one's enemies. Whoever controls the high places—the hills and the mountains—controls the land. (Deuteronomy 32:13; 33:29) At one time Israel obeyed Jehovah, and the nation enjoyed his protection and was respected, even feared, by other nations. (Joshua 2:9-11; 1 Kings 4:20, 21) If once again they turn to Jehovah in obedience, some of that former glory will be restored. Jehovah will grant his people a full share in "the hereditary possession of Jacob" —the blessings promised through His covenant with their forefathers, especially the blessing of secure possession of the Promised Land.—Psalm 105:8-11.

20 Is there a lesson in this for Christians? Upon the death of Jesus Christ, the Mosaic Law was done away with, including its Sabbath requirements. (Colossians 2:16, 17) However, the spirit that the Sabbath observance should have encouraged in Judah—putting spiritual interests first and drawing close to Jehovah—is still vital for worshipers of Jehovah. (Matthew 6:33; James 4:8) Moreover, Paul, in his letter to the Hebrews, says: "There remains a sabbath

19. What rich blessings are in store for God's people if they turn to keeping the Sabbath?
20. What "sabbath resting" is there for Christians?

resting for the people of God." Christians enter into this "sabbath resting" by being obedient to Jehovah and pursuing righteousness based on faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 3:12, 18, 19; 4:6, 9-11, 14-16) For Christians, this kind of sabbath observance is kept, not just one day a week, but every day.—Colossians 3:23, 24.

Spiritual Israel 'Rides Upon Earth's High Places'

21 Since their release from Babylonish captivity in 1919, anointed Christians have faithfully observed what was foreshadowed by the Sabbath. As a result, Jehovah has made them "ride upon the high places of the earth." In what sense? Back in 1513 B.C.E., Jehovah made a covenant with Abraham's descendants that if they were obedient, they would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:5, 6) Throughout the 40 years in the wilderness, Jehovah carried them safely, as an eagle carries its fledglings, and blessed them with abundant provisions. (Deuteronomy 32:10-12) The nation lacked faith, however, and finally lost out on all the privileges they could have had. In spite of that, Jehovah does have a kingdom of priests today. It is the spiritual Israel of God.—Galatians 6: 16; 1 Peter 2:9.

22 During "the time of the end," this spiritual nation has done what ancient Israel failed to do. They have kept faith with Jehovah. (Daniel 8:17) As its members strictly observe Jehovah's high standards and lofty ways, in a spiritual sense Jehovah raises them on high. (Proverbs 4:4, 5, 8; Revelation 11:12) Protected from the uncleanness surrounding them, they enjoy an elevated life-style, and rather than insisting on following their own ways, they find "exquisite delight in Jehovah" and in his Word. (Psalm

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21, 22. In what way has Jehovah made the Israel of God "ride upon the high places of the earth"?

37:4) Jehovah has kept them spiritually secure in the face of determined opposition worldwide. Since 1919 their spiritual "land" has not been breached. (Isaiah 66:8) They continue to be a people for his lofty name, which they joyfully declare worldwide. (Deuteronomy 32:3; Acts 15: 14) Moreover, an increasing number of meek ones from all nations now share with them in the grand privilege of being taught Jehovah's ways and helped to walk in his paths.

23 Jehovah has caused his anointed servants to "eat from the hereditary possession of Jacob." When Isaac blessed Jacob instead of Esau, the patriarch's words foretold blessings for all who would exercise faith in the promised Seed of Abraham. (Genesis 27:27-29; Galatians 3:16, 17) Like Jacob—and unlike Esau—anointed Christians and their companions 'appreciate sacred things,' especially the spiritual food that God supplies in abundance. (Hebrews 12:16, 17; Matthew 4:4) This spiritual food—which includes knowledge of what Jehovah is accomplishing through the promised Seed and that Seed's associates—is strengthening, invigorating, and vital for their spiritual life. Hence, it is crucial that they constantly take in spiritual nourishment by reading and meditating on God's Word. (Psalm 1:1-3) It is imperative that they associate with fellow believers at Christian meetings. And it is essential that they uphold the high standards of pure worship as they joyfully share that nourishment with others

24 While eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of Jehovah's promises, may true Christians continue to repudiate hypocrisy of all kinds. Nourished by "the hereditary possession of Jacob," may they continue to enjoy spiritual security upon "the high places of the earth."

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23. How has Jehovah caused his anointed servants to "eat from the hereditary possession of Jacob"?
24. How do true Christians today conduct themselves?

Jehovah's Hand Has Not Become Short

Isaiah 59:1-21

THE nation of Judah claims to be in a covenant relationship with Jehovah. Yet, there is trouble everywhere. Justice is in short supply, crime and oppression are rampant, and hopes for improvement go unrealized. Something is seriously wrong. Many wonder if Jehovah will ever correct matters. This is the situation in the days of Isaiah. But Isaiah's account of this time is more than mere ancient history. His words contain prophetic warnings for any who claim to worship God but ignore His laws. And the inspired prophecy recorded in Isaiah chapter 59 provides warm encouragement for all who strive to serve Jehovah despite living in difficult and dangerous times.

Isolated From the True God

2 Just imagine—Jehovah's covenant people have lapsed into apostasy! They have turned their backs on their Maker, thus removing themselves from under his protective hand. Because of this, they are experiencing severe distress. Do they perhaps blame Jehovah for their hard times? Isaiah tells them: ***"Look! The hand of Jehovah has not become too short that it cannot save, nor has his ear become too heavy that it cannot hear. No, but the very errors of you people have become the things causing division between***

1. What is the situation in Judah, and what do many wonder?
2, 3. Why is Jehovah not protecting Judah?

you and your God, and your own sins have caused the concealing of his face from you to keep from hearing."—Isaiah 59:1, 2.

3 Those words are frank but true. Jehovah is still the God of salvation. As the "Hearer of prayer," he listens to the prayers of his faithful servants. (Psalm 65:2) However, he does not bless wrongdoers. The people themselves are responsible for their alienation from Jehovah. Their own wickedness has led him to conceal his face from them.

4 The truth is, Judah has a terrible record. Isaiah's prophecy lists some of the charges against them: ***"Your own palms have become polluted with blood, and your fingers with error. Your own lips have spoken falsehood. Your own tongue kept muttering sheer unrighteousness." (Isaiah 59:3)*** The people lie and speak unrighteous things. The reference to "palms . . . polluted with blood" indicates that some have even committed murder. What a dishonor to God, whose Law not only prohibits murder but also forbids 'hating your brother in your heart'! (Leviticus 19:17) The unbridled sinfulness of the inhabitants of Judah and the inevitable outcome should remind each one of us today that we need to control sinful thoughts and feelings. Otherwise, we could end up committing wicked acts that would separate us from God.—Romans 12:9; Galatians 5:15; James 1: 14, 15.

5 The disease of sin has infected the whole nation. The prophecy says: ***"There is no one calling out in righteousness, and no one at all has gone to court in faithfulness. There has been a trusting in unreality, and a speaking of worthlessness. There has been a conceiving of trouble, and a bringing of what is hurtful to birth." (Isaiah 59:4)*** No one is speaking righteousness. Even in courts of law, it is rare to

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4. What charges are leveled against Judah?
5. How far has Judah's corruption gone?

find someone who is reliable or faithful. Judah has turned her back on Jehovah and put her trust in alliances with nations, even in lifeless idols. All of these are "unreality," of no value whatsoever. (Isaiah 40:17, 23; 41:29) As a result, there is much talk, but all of it is worthless. Plans are conceived, but they result in trouble and hurtfulness.

6 Unrighteousness and violence in Judah find a striking parallel in Christendom. (See "Apostate Jerusalem—A Parallel of Christendom," on page 294.) Two vicious world wars have been fought involving so-called Christian nations. Down to the present, Christendom's form of religion has proved powerless to stop ethnic cleansing and intertribal slaughter among her own members. (2 Timothy 3:5) Although Jesus taught his followers to trust in God's Kingdom, the nations of Christendom continue to rely for security on military arsenals and political alliances. (Matthew 6:10) Indeed, most of the world's major arms producers are found in the nations of Christendom! Yes, when Christendom trusts in human efforts and institutions for a secure future, she too is trusting in "unreality."

Reaping Bitter Fruit

7 Idolatry and dishonesty cannot produce a healthy society. Because of resorting to such measures, the unfaithful Jews are now reaping the trouble that they themselves have sown. We read: ***"The eggs of a poisonous snake are what they have hatched, and they kept weaving the mere cobweb of a spider. Anyone eating some of their eggs would die, and the egg that was smashed would be hatched into a viper."*** **(*Isaiah 59:5*)** From conception to realization, Judah's schemes produce nothing substantial.

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6. How is Christendom's record like that of Judah?
7. Why do Judah's schemes result only in what is harmful?

Their wrong thinking results only in bad, just as the eggs of a poisonous snake produce only poisonous snakes. And the nation suffers.

8 Some inhabitants of Judah may resort to violence in an effort to protect themselves, but they will fail. Physical force cannot replace trust in Jehovah and works of righteousness as protection any more than cobwebs can replace real fabric as protection against the elements. Isaiah declares: ***"Their mere cobweb will not serve as a garment, nor will they cover themselves with their works. Their works are hurtful works, and the activity of violence is in their palms. Their own feet keep running to sheer badness, and they are in a hurry to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are hurtful thoughts; despoiling and breakdown are in their highways."*** **(*Isaiah 59:6, 7*)** Judah's thinking is flawed. By resorting to violence to try to solve her problems, she demonstrates an ungodly attitude. It matters little to her that many of her victims are innocent and that some are genuine servants of God.

9 These inspired words remind us of the bloody record of Christendom. Surely, Jehovah will call her to account for her tragic misrepresentation of Christianity! Like the Jews of Isaiah's day, Christendom has pursued a morally twisted course because her leaders believe it to be the only practical one. While they talk of peace, they act with injustice. What duplicity! Since Christendom's leaders continue using this tactic, true peace will remain beyond their grasp. It is as the prophecy goes on to say: ***"The way of peace they have ignored, and there is no justice in their tracks. Their roadways they have made crooked for themselves. No one at all treading in them will actually know peace."—Isaiah 59:8.***

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8. What demonstrates Judah's flawed thinking?
9. Why is true peace beyond the grasp of Christendom's leaders?

Apostate Jerusalem —A Parallel of Christendom

Jerusalem, the capital city of God's chosen nation, pictures God's heavenly organization of spirit creatures and also the body of anointed Christians resurrected to heaven as the bride of Christ. (Galatians 4:25, 26; Revelation 21:2) Often, however, Jerusalem's inhabitants were unfaithful to Jehovah, and the city was described as a prostitute and an adulteress. (Ezekiel 16:3, 15, 30-42) In that state, Jerusalem provided a fitting model of apostate Christendom.

Jesus called Jerusalem "the killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent forth to her." (Luke 13:34; Matthew 16:21) Like unfaithful Jerusalem, Christendom claims to serve the true God but deviates widely from his righteous ways. We can be confident that Jehovah will judge Christendom by the same righteous standards with which he judged apostate Jerusalem.

Wandering in Spiritual Darkness

10 Jehovah cannot bless Judah's devious and destructive ways. (Psalm 11:5) So speaking on behalf of the entire nation, Isaiah confesses Judah's guilt: ***"Justice has come to be far away from us, and righteousness does not catch up with us. We keep hoping for light, but, look! darkness; for brightness, but in continuous gloom we kept walking. We keep groping for the wall just like blind men, and like those without eyes we keep groping. We have stumbled at high noon just as in evening darkness; among the stout ones we are just like dead people. We keep groaning,***

10. What confession does Isaiah make on behalf of Judah?

all of us, just like bears; and like doves we mournfully keep cooing." (Isaiah 59:9-11a) The Jews have not let God's Word be a lamp to their feet and a light to their roadway. (Psalm 119:105) As a consequence, things look dark. Even at high noon, they grope about as if it were night. It is as though they were dead. In their longing for relief, they groan loudly like hungry or wounded bears. Some coo pitifully, like lonely doves.

11 Isaiah is only too aware that the reason for Judah's plight is revolt against God. He says: ***"We kept hoping for justice, but there was none; for salvation, but it has stayed far away from us. For our revolts have become many in front of you; and as for our sins, each one has testified against us. For our revolts are with us; and as for our errors, we well know them. There have been transgressing and a denying of Jehovah; and there was a moving back from our God, a speaking of oppression and revolt, a conceiving and a muttering of words of falsehood from the very heart." (Isaiah 59:11b-13)*** Since the inhabitants of Judah have not repented, their sins still count against them. Justice has left the land because the people have left Jehovah. They have proved false through and through, even oppressing their brothers. How like those in Christendom today! Not only do many ignore justice but they also actively persecute faithful Witnesses of Jehovah, who seek to do God's will.

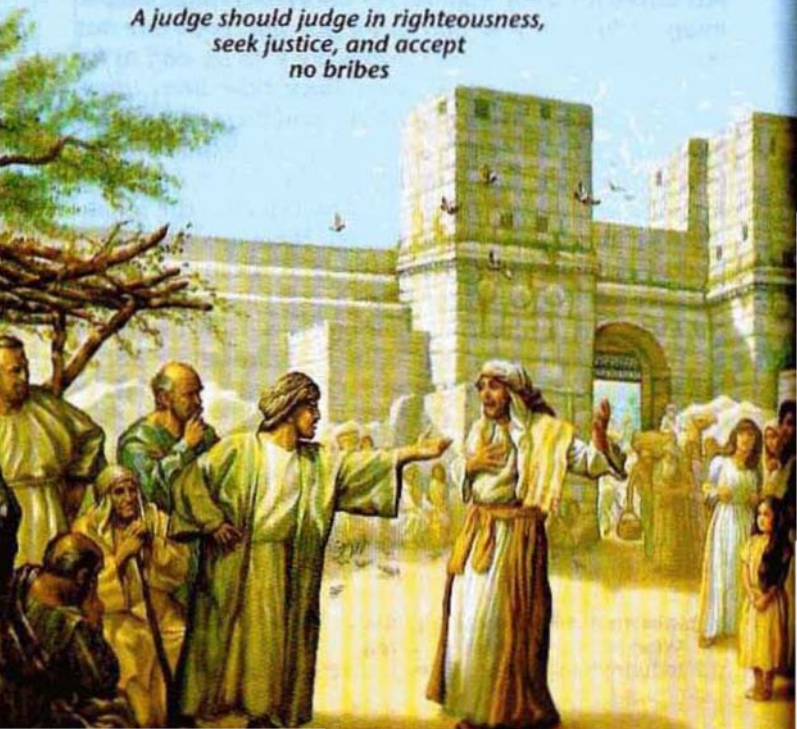
Jehovah Executes Judgment

12 There seems to be no justice, righteousness, or truth in Judah. ***"Justice was forced to move back, and righteousness itself kept standing simply far off. For truth has***

11. Why are Judah's hopes for justice and salvation in vain?
12. What is the attitude of those responsible for administering justice in Judah?

stumbled even in the public square, and what is straightforward is unable to enter."* (*Isaiah 59:14*)** Behind the city gates in Judah, there are public squares where the older men meet to consider legal cases. (Ruth 4:1, 2, 11) Such men should judge in righteousness and pursue justice, not accept bribes. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) Instead, they judge according to their own selfish ideas. Worse yet, they view any who sincerely try to do good as easy prey. We read: ***"The truth proves to be missing, and anyone turning away from badness is being despoiled."—Isaiah 59:15a.

A judge should judge in righteousness, seek justice, and accept no bribes



13 Those who fail to speak out against moral perversion forget that God is not blind, ignorant, or powerless. Isaiah writes: ***"Jehovah got to see, and it was bad in his eyes that there was no justice. And when he saw that there was no man, he began to show himself astonished that there was no one interposing. And his arm proceeded to save for him, and his own righteousness was the thing that supported him." (Isaiah 59:15b, 16)*** Since appointed judges are derelict in their duty, Jehovah will intervene in the matter. When he does, he will act in righteousness and with power.

14 There is a similar situation today. We live in a world where many have "come to be past all moral sense." (Ephesians 4:19) Few believe that Jehovah will ever intervene to eliminate evil from the earth. But Isaiah's prophecy shows that Jehovah closely observes human affairs. He makes judgments, and in his own time, he acts according to those judgments. Are his judgments fair? Isaiah shows that they are. In the case of the nation of Judah, he writes: ***"Then [Jehovah] put on righteousness as a coat of mail, and the helmet of salvation upon his head. Furthermore, he put on the garments of vengeance as raiment and enwrapped himself with zeal as if a sleeveless coat." (Isaiah 59:17)*** These prophetic words picture Jehovah as a warrior girding himself for battle. He is intent on the salvation of his cause. He is sure of his own absolute and unassailable righteousness. And he will be fearlessly zealous in his acts of judgment. There is no doubt that right will prevail.

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13. Since Judah's judges are derelict in their duty, what will Jehovah do?

14. (a) What attitude do many today have? (b) How does Jehovah prepare himself for action?

15 Today in some lands, enemies of truth try to hinder the work of Jehovah's servants by spreading false and defamatory propaganda. True Christians do not hesitate to stand up for the truth, but they never seek personal vengeance. (Romans 12:19) Even when Jehovah settles accounts with apostate Christendom, his worshipers on earth will have no hand in her destruction. They know that Jehovah has reserved vengeance for himself and that he will take appropriate action when the time comes. The prophecy assures us: ***"In accordance with the dealings he will reward correspondingly, rage to his adversaries, due treatment to his enemies. To the islands he will recompense due treatment."*** **(*Isaiah 59:18*)** As in Isaiah's day, not only will God's judgments be fair but they will also be complete. They will even reach "to the islands," to distant parts. No one will be so remote or isolated that he will be out of reach of Jehovah's judgment acts.

15. (a) In what way will true Christians conduct themselves when Jehovah executes judgment? (b) What can be said about Jehovah's judgments?

Like a river in flood, Jehovah's judgments will sweep away all barriers to the doing of his will

16 Those who exert themselves to do right are judged righteously by Jehovah. Isaiah foretells that from one horizon to the other—throughout the entire earth—such ones will survive. And their experiencing Jehovah's protection will profoundly strengthen their reverence and respect for him. (Malachi 1:11) We read: ***"From the sunset they will begin to fear the name of Jehovah, and from the rising of the sun the glory of him, for he will come in like a distressing river, which the very spirit of Jehovah has driven along."*** **(*Isaiah 59:19*)** Like a powerful windstorm pushing a destructive wall of water ahead of it and washing away all in its path, Jehovah's spirit will sweep away all barriers to the fulfillment of his will. His spirit is more powerful than any force that man possesses. When he uses it to execute judgment on men and nations, he will have certain and complete success.

Hope and Blessing for Repentant Ones

17 Under the Law of Moses, an Israelite who sold himself into slavery could be bought back out of slavery by a repurchaser. Previously in Isaiah's prophetic book, Jehovah has been characterized as the Repurchaser of repentant individuals. (Isaiah 48:17) Now he is again described as the Repurchaser of repentant ones. Isaiah records Jehovah's promise: ***"'To Zion the Repurchaser will certainly come, and to those turning from transgression in Jacob,' is the utterance of Jehovah."*** **(*Isaiah 59:20*)** This reassuring promise is fulfilled in 537 B.C.E. But it has a further fulfillment. The apostle Paul quoted these words from the Septuagint version and applied them to Christians. He wrote:

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16. Who will survive Jehovah's judgment acts, and what will they learn from their survival?

17. Who is Zion's Repurchaser, and when does he repurchase Zion?

"In this manner all Israel will be saved. Just as it is written: 'The deliverer will come out of Zion and turn away ungodly practices from Jacob. And this is the covenant on my part with them, when I take their sins away.'" (Romans 11:26, 27) Indeed, Isaiah's prophecy has a greatly extended application—one that reaches down to our time and beyond. How so?

18 In the first century, a small remnant of the nation of Israel accepted Jesus as the Messiah. (Romans 9:27; 11:5) On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., Jehovah poured out his holy spirit on about 120 of those believers and brought them into his new covenant mediated by Jesus Christ. (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 9:15) On that day there came into existence "the Israel of God," a new nation whose members are characterized, not by fleshly descent from Abraham, but by a begetting by God's spirit. (Galatians 6:16) Starting with Cornelius, the new nation included uncircumcised Gentiles. (Acts 10:24-48; Revelation 5:9, 10) Thus they were adopted by Jehovah God and became his spiritual children, fellow heirs with Jesus.—Romans 8:16, 17.

19 Jehovah now makes a covenant with the Israel of God. We read: ***"'As for me, this is my covenant with them,' Jehovah has said. 'My spirit that is upon you and my words that I have put in your mouth—they will not be removed from your mouth or from the mouth of your offspring or from the mouth of the offspring of your offspring,' Jehovah has said, 'from now on even to time indefinite.'"*** **(*Isaiah 59:21*)** Whether these words had an application upon Isaiah himself or not, they were certainly fulfilled in Je-

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18. When and how did Jehovah bring into existence "the Israel of God"?

19. What covenant does Jehovah make with the Israel of God?

sus, who was assured that 'he would see his offspring.' (Isaiah 53:10) Jesus spoke words that he had learned from Jehovah, and Jehovah's spirit rested upon him. (John 1: 18; 7:16) Fittingly, his brothers and fellow heirs, members of the Israel of God, also receive Jehovah's holy spirit and preach a message that they have learned from their heavenly Father. They are all "persons taught by Jehovah." (Isaiah 54:13; Luke 12:12; Acts 2:38) Either through Isaiah or through Jesus, whom Isaiah prophetically pictures, Jehovah now covenants never to replace them but to use them to time indefinite as his witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10) Who, though, are their "offspring" who also benefit from this covenant?

20 In ancient times Jehovah promised Abraham: "By means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves." (Genesis 22:18) In harmony with this, the small remnant of natural Israelites who accepted the Messiah went out into many nations, preaching the good news about the Christ. Starting with Cornelius many uncircumcised Gentiles 'blessed themselves' by means of Jesus, Abraham's Seed. They became part of the Israel of God and a secondary part of the seed of Abraham. They are part of Jehovah's "holy nation," whose commission is to "declare abroad the excellencies of the one that called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light."—1 Peter 2:9; Galatians 3:7-9, 14, 26-29.

21 Today the full number of the Israel of God appears to have been gathered. Still, the nations continue to be

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20. How was Jehovah's promise to Abraham fulfilled in the first century?

21. (a) What "offspring" has the Israel of God produced in modern times? (b) How are the "offspring" comforted by the covenant, or contract, that Jehovah has made with the Israel of God?

blessed—and on a grand scale. How? In that the Israel of God has had "offspring," disciples of Jesus whose hope is everlasting life on a paradise earth. (Psalm 37:11, 29) These "offspring" are also taught by Jehovah and are instructed in his ways. (Isaiah 2:2-4) While not baptized with holy spirit or considered to be participants in the new covenant, they are strengthened by Jehovah's holy spirit to overcome all the obstacles that Satan puts in the way of their preaching work. (Isaiah 40:28-31) Their number now reaches into the millions and continues to increase as they produce offspring of their own. Jehovah's covenant, or contract, with the anointed ones gives these "offspring" confidence that Jehovah will continue to use them too as his spokesmen to time indefinite. —Revelation 21:3, 4, 7.

22 May all of us, then, maintain our faith in Jehovah. He is both willing and able to save! His hand will never be short; he will always deliver his faithful people. All who trust in him will continue to bear his good words in their mouths "from now on even to time indefinite."

22. What confidence can we have in Jehovah, and how should this affect us?

Jehovah covenants that his people will never lose the privilege of being his witnesses

True Worship Expands Worldwide

Isaiah 60:1-22

CHAPTER 60 of Isaiah is written as a soul-stirring drama. In the opening verses, our attention is captured by a touching scene. A series of events follows in rapid succession, leading us to a moving finale. The chapter describes in colorful word pictures the restoration of true worship in ancient Jerusalem and the worldwide expansion of true worship today. Moreover, it points to eternal blessings in store for all of God's loyal worshipers. Each one of us can play a part in the fulfillment of this fascinating portion of Isaiah's prophecy. Let us therefore examine it carefully.

Light Shines in the Darkness

2 The opening words of this chapter of Isaiah are addressed to a woman in sad circumstances. She is evidently lying prostrate in darkness on the ground. Suddenly, light pierces the gloom as Jehovah, through Isaiah, calls out: ***"Arise, O woman, shed forth light, for your light has come and upon you the very glory of Jehovah has shone forth."*** **(*Isaiah 60:1*)** Yes, the "woman" should get to her feet and reflect God's glory! Why is this a matter of urgency? The prophecy continues: ***"Look! darkness itself***

1. What encouraging message does Isaiah chapter 60 contain?
2. What command is given to a woman lying in darkness, and why is it urgent that she obey?

***will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups; but upon you Jehovah will shine forth, and upon you his own glory will be seen."* (*Isaiah 60:2*)** For the benefit of those around her who are still groping in darkness, the "woman" must "shed forth light." What will be the result? ***"Nations will certainly go to your light, and kings to the brightness of your shining forth."* (*Isaiah 60:3*)** These opening words provide the gist of what will be explained in greater detail in the verses that follow—true worship must expand worldwide!

3 Although speaking about future events, Jehovah tells the "woman" that her light "has come." This stresses the certainty that the prophecy will be fulfilled. The "woman" being referred to is Zion, or Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. (Isaiah 52:1, 2; 60:14) The city stands for the entire nation. At the time of the first fulfillment of this prophecy, the "woman" is found lying in darkness, where she has been since Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E. However, in 537 B.C.E., a faithful remnant of exiled Jews return to Jerusalem and restore pure worship. At last, Jehovah causes light to shine upon his "woman," and his restored people become a source of enlightenment among the spiritually bedarkened nations.

A Greater Fulfillment

4 Our interest in these prophetic words goes beyond their fulfillment upon Jerusalem of old. Today Jehovah's heavenly "woman" is represented on earth by "the Israel

3. (a) Who is the "woman"? (b) Why has the "woman" been lying in darkness?
4. Who today on earth represent the "woman," and to whom do the prophetic words apply by extension?

of God." (Galatians 6:16) Over the period of its existence, from Pentecost 33 C.E. until now, this spiritual nation has come to have a total of 144,000 spirit-anointed members, "who have been bought from the earth" with the prospect of ruling with Christ in heaven. (Revelation 14:1, 3) The modern-day fulfillment of Isaiah chapter 60 centers on those of the 144,000 who are alive on earth during "the last days." (2 Timothy 3:1) The prophecy also has to do with the companions of these anointed Christians, the "great crowd" of "other sheep."—Revelation 7:9; John 10:11, 16.

5 For a short time in the early 1900's, those of the Israel of God still on earth found themselves prostrate in darkness, so to speak. The first world war drew to a close with them in the situation symbolically described in the book of Revelation—their corpses lying "on the broad way of the great city which is in a spiritual sense called Sodom and Egypt." (Revelation 11:8) In 1919, however, Jehovah shed forth his light upon them. In response, they stood up and reflected God's light, fearlessly proclaiming the good news of God's Kingdom.—Matthew 5:14-16; 24:14.

6 Influenced by Satan, chief of "the world rulers of this darkness," mankind in general has rejected the announcement of the royal presence of Jesus Christ, "the light of the world." (Ephesians 6:12; John 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4) Nonetheless, millions have been drawn to Jehovah's light, including "kings" (those who become anointed heirs of the heavenly Kingdom) and "nations" (the great crowd of other sheep).

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5. When did surviving members of the Israel of God find themselves lying in darkness, and when did Jehovah's light shine forth upon them?

6. How has the world in general responded to the proclamation of Jesus' royal presence, but who have been drawn to Jehovah's light?

Expansion Causes Heartfelt Joy

7 Developing the theme set forth at Isaiah 60:3, Jehovah gives the "woman" another command: ***"Raise your eyes all around and see!"*** When the "woman" obeys, a heartwarming sight greets her—her children are coming home! ***"They have all of them been collected together; they have come to you. From far away your own sons keep coming, and your daughters who will be taken care of on the flank."*** **(*Isaiah 60:4*)** The international Kingdom proclamation that began in 1919 resulted in thousands of additional anointed "sons" and "daughters" being joined to the Israel of God. In this way Jehovah took steps to complete the foretold number of 144,000, who will rule with Christ.—Revelation 5:9, 10.

8 This increase caused rejoicing. ***"At that time you will see and certainly become radiant, and your heart will actually quiver and expand, because to you the wealthiness of the sea will direct itself; the very resources of the nations will come to you."*** **(*Isaiah 60:5*)** The ingathering of anointed ones during the 1920's and 1930's brought great happiness to the Israel of God. Yet, they have had an additional reason for joy. Especially since the mid-1930's, people who were once part of "the sea" of mankind alienated from God have come out of all the nations to worship with the Israel of God. (Isaiah 57:20; Haggai 2:7) These people do not go off to serve God, each one in his own way. Rather, they come to God's "woman" and become part of the united flock of God. As a result, all of God's servants share in the expansion of true worship.

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7. What heartwarming sight does the "woman" see?
8. What cause for happiness has the Israel of God had since 1919?

Nations Converge Upon Jerusalem

9 Using illustrations familiar to Isaiah's contemporaries, Jehovah describes the expansion. The "woman," looking from her vantage point on Mount Zion, first scans the eastern horizon. What does she see? ***"The heaving mass of camels itself will cover you, the young male camels of Midian and of Ephah. All those from Sheba—they will come. Gold and frankincense they will carry. And the praises of Jehovah they will announce."*** **(*Isaiah 60:6*)** Camel caravans used by traveling merchants of various tribes wend their way along the roads leading to Jerusalem. (Genesis 37:25, 28; Judges 6:1, 5; 1 Kings 10:1, 2) Camels are everywhere, like a flood covering the land! The caravans bring valuable gifts, showing that the traders come with peaceful intentions. They want to worship Jehovah and give him the best they can offer.

10 These merchants are not the only ones on the march. ***"All the flocks of Kedar—they will be collected together to you. The rams of Nebaioth—they will minister to you."*** Yes, pastoral tribes are also traveling to Jerusalem. They come with gifts of their most valuable possessions —flocks of sheep—and offer themselves as ministers. How will Jehovah receive them? He says: ***"With approval they will come up upon my altar, and I shall beautify my own house of beauty."*** **(*Isaiah 60:7*)** Jehovah accepts their gifts, which will be used in pure worship.—Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 49:28, 29.

11 Jehovah now directs the "woman" to look to the

9, 10. Who are seen converging on Jerusalem, and how does Jehovah receive them?

11, 12. (a) What sight greets the "woman" as she gazes westward? (b) Why are so many hurrying to Jerusalem?

western horizon, and he asks: ***"Who are these that come flying just like a cloud, and like doves to their birdhouse holes?"*** Jehovah himself answers: ***"In me the islands themselves will keep hoping, the ships of Tarshish also as at the first, in order to bring your sons from far away, their silver and their gold being with them, to the name of Jehovah your God and to the Holy One of Israel, for he will have beautified you."—Isaiah 60:8, 9.***

12 Imagine that you are standing with the "woman," gazing westward across the Great Sea. What do you see? A distant cloud of white dots skimming the surface of the water. They look like birds, but as they come closer, you see that they are ships with their sails unfurled. They have come "from far away."* (Isaiah 49:12) So many vessels are speeding toward Zion that they resemble a flock of homeward-bound doves. Why is the fleet in such a hurry? It is eager to deliver its cargo of worshipers of Jehovah coming from faraway ports. Indeed, all the new arrivals—both Israelites and foreigners, from the east or the west and from nearby or faraway lands—are hurrying to Jerusalem to dedicate their all to the name of Jehovah, their God.—Isaiah 55:5.

13 What a vivid picture Isaiah 60:4-9 paints of the worldwide expansion that has taken place since Jehovah's "woman" began shedding forth light amid the darkness

* Tarshish was likely located in what is now known as Spain. However, according to some reference works, the expression "ships of Tarshish" refers to the *type* of ships—"high-masted ocean-going vessels"—that were *"fit* to ply to Tarshish," in other words, ships considered suitable for making long voyages to faraway ports.—1 Kings 22:48.

13. In modern times, who are the "sons" and "daughters," and who are the "resources of the nations"?

of this world! First came the "sons" and "daughters" of heavenly Zion, those who became anointed Christians. In 1931 these publicly identified themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses. Then a cloud of meek ones, "the very resources of the nations" and "the wealthiness of the sea," hurried to join the remaining ones of Christ's brothers.* Today all these servants of Jehovah coming from the four corners of the globe and from all walks of life join the Israel of God in praising their Sovereign Lord, Jehovah, and in exalting his name as the grandest name in all the universe.

14 What does it mean, though, that these new arrivals from the nations "come up upon [God's] altar"? A sacrifice is placed upon an altar. The apostle Paul used an expression involving sacrifice when he wrote: "I entreat you . . . to present your bodies a sacrifice living, holy, acceptable to God, a sacred service with your power of reason." (Romans 12:1) Genuine Christians are willing to give of themselves. (Luke 9:23, 24) They devote their time, energy, and skills to the promoting of pure worship. (Romans 6:13) In doing so, they offer acceptable sacrifices of praise to God. (Hebrews 13:15) How heartwarming it is that millions of worshipers of Jehovah today, both young and old, have put their personal desires in a position secondary to the interests of God's Kingdom! They display a genuine spirit of self-sacrifice.—Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 5:15.

* While there were active, zealous Christians with an earthly hope associated with the Israel of God before 1930, their numbers started increasing noticeably in the 1930's.

14. How is it that the new arrivals "come up upon [God's] altar"?

New Arrivals Share in the Expansion

15 The new arrivals offer both their possessions and their personal services in support of Jehovah's "woman." ***"Foreigners will actually build your walls, and their own kings will minister to you; for in my indignation I shall have struck you, but in my goodwill I shall certainly have mercy upon you." (Isaiah 60:10)*** Jehovah's mercy was expressed in the sixth century B.C.E. when foreigners helped in the construction work in Jerusalem. (Ezra 3:7; Nehemiah 3:26) In today's larger fulfillment, "foreigners," the great crowd, support the anointed remnant in building up true worship. They help build Christian qualities in their Bible students and thus build up Christian congregations and strengthen the citylike "walls" of Jehovah's organization. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15) They also build in a literal way, working hard in the construction of Kingdom Halls, Assembly Halls, and Bethel facilities. Thus they join their anointed brothers in caring for the needs of Jehovah's expanding organization.—Isaiah 61:5.

16 Each year as a result of the spiritual building program, hundreds of thousands of "foreigners" begin to associate with Jehovah's organization, and the way is open for still more. Jehovah says: ***"Your gates will actually be kept open constantly; they will not be closed even by day or by night, in order to bring to you the resources of the nations, and their kings will be taking the lead."***

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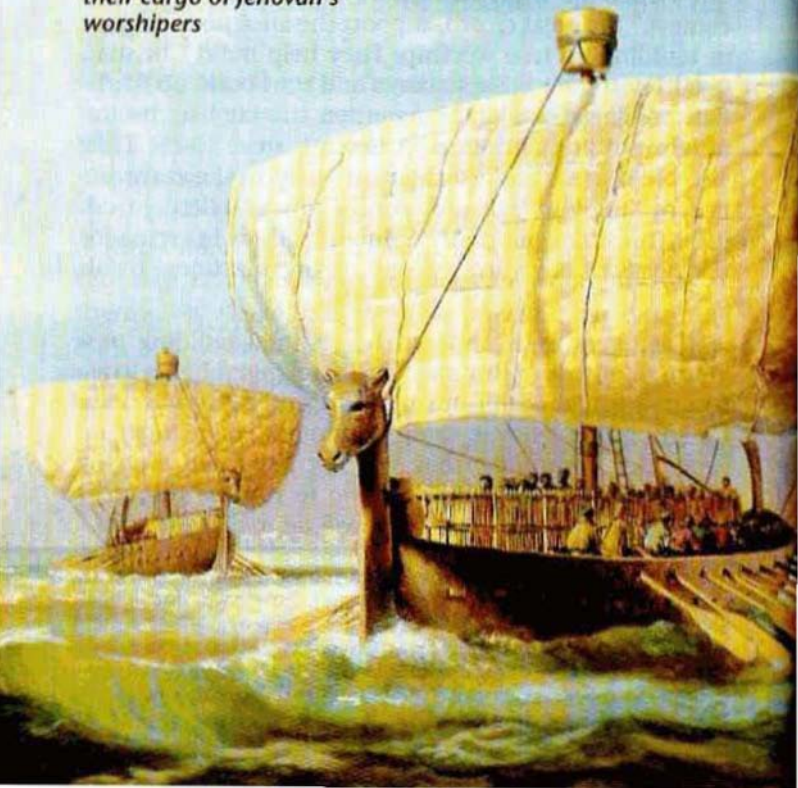
15. (a) In ancient times, how was Jehovah's mercy expressed with regard to foreigners? (b) In modern times, how have "foreigners" shared in building up true worship?

16, 17. (a) How have the "gates" of God's organization been kept open? (b) How have "kings" ministered to Zion? (c) What will happen to those who try to close the "gates" that Jehovah wishes left open?

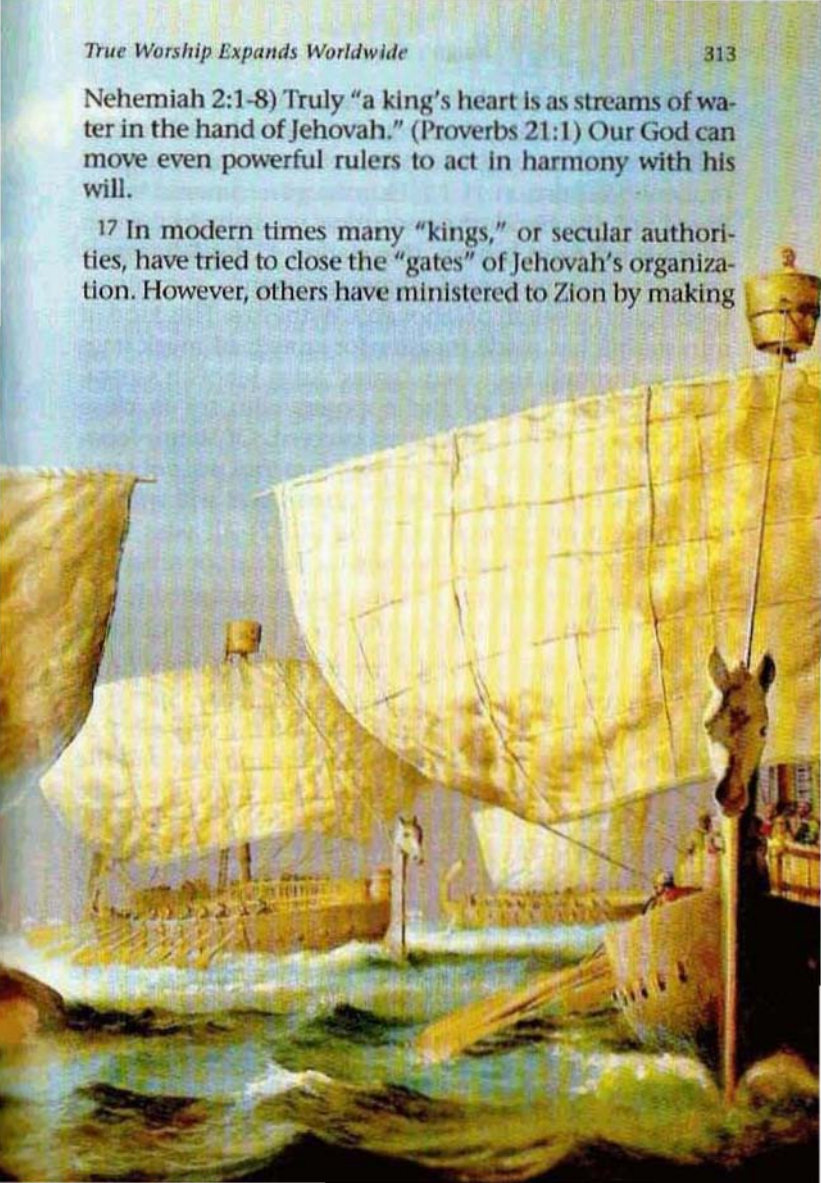
(*Isaiah 60:11*) Who, though, are the "kings" taking the lead in bringing the resources of the nations to Zion? In ancient times Jehovah moved the hearts of certain rulers to "minister to" Zion. Cyrus, for example, took the initiative in sending the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Later, Artaxerxes contributed resources and sent Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2, 3;



"The ships of Tarshish" carry their cargo of Jehovah's worshipers

Nehemiah 2:1-8) Truly "a king's heart is as streams of water in the hand of Jehovah." (Proverbs 21:1) Our God can move even powerful rulers to act in harmony with his will.

17 In modern times many "kings," or secular authorities, have tried to close the "gates" of Jehovah's organization. However, others have ministered to Zion by making



decisions that helped to keep those "gates" open. (Romans 13:4) In 1919, secular authorities released Joseph F. Rutherford and his companions from unjust imprisonment. (Revelation 11:13) Human governments "swallowed up" the flood of persecution unleashed by Satan after his fall from heaven. (Revelation 12:16) Some governments have promoted religious tolerance, sometimes specifically in behalf of Jehovah's Witnesses. This kind of ministering has made it easier for crowds of meek ones to pass through the open "gates" into Jehovah's organization. And what of the opposers who try to close those "gates"? They will never succeed. Of them, Jehovah says: ***"Any nation and any kingdom that will not serve you will perish; and the nations themselves will without fail come to devastation." (Isaiah 60:12)*** All who fight against God's "woman"—be they individuals or organizations—will perish in the coming war of Armageddon at the latest.—Revelation 16:14, 16.

18 After this warning of judgment, the prophecy turns back to promises of exaltation and prosperity. Speaking to his "woman," Jehovah states: ***"To you the very glory of Lebanon will come, the juniper tree, the ash tree and the cypress at the same time, in order to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I shall glorify the very place of my feet." (Isaiah 60:13)*** Luxuriant trees symbolize beauty and fruitfulness. (Isaiah 41:19; 55:13) The expressions "sanctuary" and "place of my feet" in this verse refer to Jerusalem's temple. (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 99:5) However, the apostle Paul explained that the temple in Jerusalem was a typical representation foreshadowing a greater spiritual temple, the arrangement for approaching Jeho-

18. (a) What is meant by the promise that trees will flourish in Israel? (b) What is the 'place of Jehovah's feet' today?

vah in worship on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. (Hebrews 8:1-5; 9:2-10, 23) Today Jehovah glorifies the 'place of his feet,' the earthly courtyards of this great spiritual temple. These become so inviting that they attract people out of all nations to share in true worship there.—Isaiah 2:1-4; Haggai 2:7.

19 Now turning his attention back to the opposers, Jehovah says: ***"To you the sons of those afflicting you must go, bowing down; and all those treating you disrespectfully must bend down at the very soles of your feet, and they will have to call you the city of Jehovah, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."*** **(*Isaiah 60:14*)** Yes, seeing the bountiful increase and the superior way of life that God's blessing brings to his people will compel some opposers to bow down and call out to the "woman." That is, they will be forced to acknowledge—at Armageddon at the latest—that the anointed remnant and their companions truly do represent God's heavenly organization, "the city of Jehovah, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

Using Available Resources

20 How great a change in circumstances Jehovah's "woman" experiences! Jehovah says: ***"Instead of your proving to be one left entirely and hated, with nobody passing through, I will even set you as a thing of pride to time indefinite, an exultation for generation after generation. And you will actually suck the milk of nations, and the breast of kings you will suck; and you will be certain to know that I, Jehovah, am your Savior, and the Powerful One of Jacob is your Repurchaser."—Isaiah 60:15, 16.***

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19. What will opposers be forced to acknowledge, and when at the latest will they do this?
20. What great change in circumstances does the "woman" experience?

21 For 70 years ancient Jerusalem is off the map, so to speak, "with nobody passing through." But starting in 537 B.C.E., Jehovah repopulates the city, making it "a thing of pride." Similarly, toward the end of the first world war, the Israel of God experienced a period of desolation in which they felt "left entirely." But in 1919, Jehovah repurchased his anointed servants from captivity, and since then he has blessed them with unprecedented expansion and spiritual prosperity. His people have sucked "the milk of nations," using resources from the nations for the advancement of true worship. For example, wise use of modern technology has made possible the translation and publication of Bibles and Bible literature in hundreds of languages. As a result, hundreds of thousands each year study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses and come to know that Jehovah, through Christ, is their Savior and Repurchaser.—Acts 5:31; 1 John 4:14.

Organizational Progress

22 The growth in the number of Jehovah's people is accompanied by organizational progress. Jehovah states: ***"Instead of the copper I shall bring in gold, and instead of the iron I shall bring in silver, and instead of the wood, copper, and instead of the stones, iron; and I will appoint peace as your overseers and righteousness as your task assigners."*** **(*Isaiah 60:17*)** Replacing copper with gold is an improvement, and the same is true of the other materials here mentioned. In harmony with this, Jehovah's people have been experiencing improved organizational arrangements throughout the last days.

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21. (a) How does ancient Jerusalem become "a thing of pride"? (b) What blessings have Jehovah's anointed servants enjoyed since 1919, and how have they sucked "the milk of nations"?
22. What special kind of progress does Jehovah promise?

23 By 1919, congregations had elders and deacons who were elected in a democratic way. Starting in that year, a service director was theocratically appointed to supervise field service activities in the congregation, but there were cases where some elected elders resisted the service director. In 1932, things changed. Through the *Watchtower* magazine, congregations were instructed to discontinue the electing of elders and deacons. Rather, they would elect a service committee to work along with the service director. That was a great improvement.

24 In 1938, more "gold" was brought in when it was established that all servants in the congregation were to be theocratically appointed. Congregation administration came to be in the hands of a company servant (later, congregation servant) and the various servants who assisted him, all appointed under the oversight of "the faithful and discreet slave."* (Matthew 24:45-47) In 1972, however, it was seen that the Scriptural method of overseeing a congregation is through a body of elders rather than through one man. (Philippians 1:1) Other changes were made at both the congregation level and the Governing Body level. An example of the latter was seen on October 7, 2000, when it was announced that members of the Governing Body who were serving as directors of the Watch Tower Society of Pennsylvania and affiliated corporations had voluntarily stepped aside. In this way, the Governing Body, representing the faithful and discreet slave, is able to give more attention to caring for the spiritual oversight of "the congregation of God" and its

* In those days, local congregations were called companies.

23, 24. What improved organizational arrangements have Jehovah's people been experiencing since 1919?

associates, the other sheep. (Acts 20:28) All such arrangements have been improvements. They have strengthened Jehovah's organization and blessed his worshipers.

25 Who has been behind these improvements? Are they due to the organizational ability or the ingenious thinking of some humans? No, for Jehovah stated: "I shall bring in gold." All this progress is the result of divine guidance. As Jehovah's people submit to his guidance and make adjustments, they reap benefits. Peace prevails among them, and the love of righteousness impels them to serve him.

26 God-given peace has a transforming effect. Jehovah promises: ***"No more will violence be heard in your land, despoiling or breakdown within your boundaries. And you will certainly call your own walls Salvation and your gates Praise." (Isaiah 60:18)*** How true! Even opposers admit that peacefulness is an outstanding mark of true Christians. (Micah 4:3) This peace with God and among Jehovah's Witnesses themselves makes each Christian meeting place a refreshing oasis in a violent world. (1 Peter 2:17) It is a foretaste of the abundance of peace that will exist when all earth's inhabitants will be "persons taught by Jehovah."—Isaiah 11:9; 54:13.

The Glorious Light of Divine Approval

27 The intensity of the light that shines upon Jerusalem is described by Jehovah when he states: ***"For you the sun will no more prove to be a light by day, and for brightness the moon itself will no more give you light. And Jehovah***

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25. Who has been behind the organizational progress of Jehovah's people, and what benefits have been reaped?
26. What mark identifying true Christians do even opposers notice?
27. What constant light shines upon Jehovah's "woman"?

***must become to you an indefinitely lasting light, and your God your beauty. No more will your sun set, nor will your moon go on the wane; for Jehovah himself will become for you an indefinitely lasting light, and the days of your mourning will have come to completion."* (*Isaiah 60:19, 20*)** Jehovah will continue to be "an indefinitely lasting light" for his "woman." He will never "set" like the sun or "wane" like the moon.* His constant light of approval shines upon anointed Christians, the human representatives of God's "woman." They, along with the great crowd, enjoy such a blaze of spiritual light that no darkness on the world's political or economic scene can diminish it. And they have confidence in the bright future that Jehovah has set before them.—Romans 2:7; Revelation 21:3-5.

28 Regarding Jerusalem's inhabitants Jehovah goes on to say: ***"As for your people, all of them will be righteous; to time indefinite they will hold possession of the land, the sprout of my planting, the work of my hands, for me to be beautified."* (*Isaiah 60:21*)** When natural Israel returned from Babylon, they took "possession of the land." But in that case, "to time indefinite" turned out to be until the first century C.E. when the armies of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish state. In 1919 the remnant of anointed Christians came out of spiritual

* The apostle John uses similar language in describing "new Jerusalem," the 144,000 in their heavenly glory. (Revelation 3:12; 21:10, 22-26) This is fitting, for "new Jerusalem" represents all members of the Israel of God after they receive their heavenly reward, becoming with Jesus Christ the capital part of God's "woman," "the Jerusalem above." —Galatians 4:26.

28. (a) What is promised regarding the returning inhabitants of Jerusalem? (b) What did anointed Christians take possession of in 1919? (c) For how long will the righteous possess the land?

captivity and took possession of a spiritual land. (Isaiah 66:8) This land, or realm of activity, is marked by a paradisaic spiritual prosperity that will not fade. Unlike ancient Israel, spiritual Israel as a body will not prove unfaithful. Moreover, Isaiah's prophecy will also have a material fulfillment when the earth becomes a literal paradise characterized by an "abundance of peace." Then the righteous with an earthly hope will possess the land forever.—Psalm 37:11, 29.

29 At the conclusion of Isaiah chapter 60 can be found a solemn promise, which Jehovah guarantees by his own name. He states: ***"The little one himself will become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation. I myself, Jehovah, shall speed it up in its own time."*** **(*Isaiah 60:22*)** When the dispersed anointed ones were restored to activity in 1919, they were "the little one."* But their number multiplied as the remaining spiritual Israelites were brought in. And the increase became phenomenal as the gathering of the great crowd got under way.

30 Before long, the peace and righteousness existing among God's people attracted so many honesthearted ones that "the small one" literally grew into "a mighty nation." At present it is more populous than a considerable number of the world's sovereign states. Clearly, Jehovah, through Jesus Christ, has directed the Kingdom work and has sped it up. What a thrill it is to see the worldwide expansion of true worship and to have a part in it! Yes, it is a joy to realize that this increase brings glory to Jehovah, who prophesied these things so long ago.

* In 1918 the average number who shared in preaching the word each month was fewer than 4,000.

29, 30. How has "the little one" become "a thousand"?

Righteousness Sprouts in Zion

Isaiah 61:1-11

LET freedom be proclaimed! Jehovah has determined to free his people and restore them to their ancestral land. Like a seed that sprouts after a gentle rain, true worship will once again appear. When that day arrives, despair will give way to joyful praise, and heads formerly covered with ashes of mourning will be crowned with divine approval.

2 Who will bring about this marvelous transformation? Only Jehovah can do such a thing. (Psalm 9:19, 20; Isaiah 40:25) The prophet Zephaniah prophetically commanded: "Joyfully cry out, O daughter of Zion! Break out in cheers, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Jehovah has removed the judgments upon you." (Zephaniah 3:14, 15) What a joyful time that will be! When Jehovah gathers the restored remnant from Babylon in 537 B.C.E., it will be like a dream come true.—Psalm 126:1.

3 This restoration is foretold in Isaiah chapter 61. However, while that prophecy clearly had a fulfillment in 537 B.C.E., it is fulfilled in greater detail at a later period. The more detailed fulfillment involves Jesus and

1, 2. What change is about to befall Israel, and who will bring this about?
3. What fulfillments do the prophetic words of Isaiah chapter 61 have?

his followers in the first century and Jehovah's people in modern times. How meaningful, then, these inspired words are!

"The Year of Goodwill"

4 Isaiah writes: ***"The spirit of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah is upon me, for the reason that Jehovah has anointed me to tell good news to the meek ones. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to those taken captive and the wide opening of the eyes even to the prisoners." (Isaiah 61:1)*** Who is the one commissioned to tell good news? Likely, in the first instance it is Isaiah, who is inspired by God to record good news for the captives in Babylon. However, Jesus pointed to the most important fulfillment when he applied Isaiah's words to himself. (Luke 4:16-21) Yes, Jesus was sent forth to tell good news to the meek, and to this end he was anointed with holy spirit at his baptism.—Matthew 3:16, 17.

5 Moreover, Jesus taught his followers to be evangelizers, or preachers of the good news. At Pentecost 33 C.E., about 120 of these were anointed with holy spirit and became spiritual sons of God. (Acts 2:1-4, 14-42; Romans 8: 14-16) They too were commissioned to tell the good news to the meek and brokenhearted. Those 120 were the first of 144,000 to be anointed in this way. The final ones of this group are still active on earth today. Hence, for about 2,000 years, anointed followers of Jesus have been witnessing "about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus."—Acts 20:21.

4. Who is commissioned to tell good news in the first fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1, and who in the second?
5. Who have been preaching the good news for some 2,000 years?

6 Isaiah's inspired message brought relief to repentant Jews in Babylon. In the days of Jesus and his disciples, it brought relief to Jews who were brokenhearted because of the wickedness in Israel and were languishing in captivity to the false religious traditions of first-century Judaism. (Matthew 15:3-6) Today millions ensnared by Christendom's pagan customs and God-dishonoring traditions are "sighing and groaning" because of the detestable things committed in that religious system. (Ezekiel 9:4) Those who respond to the good news are liberated from that pitiable state. (Matthew 9:35-38) Their eyes of understanding are opened wide when they learn to worship Jehovah "with spirit and truth."—John 4:24.

7 There is a timetable for preaching the good news. Jesus and his followers were commissioned: ***"Proclaim the year of goodwill on the part of Jehovah and the day of vengeance on the part of our God; to comfort all the mourning ones." (Isaiah 61:2)*** A year is a long time, but it has a beginning and an end. Jehovah's "year of goodwill" is the period during which he gives meek ones the opportunity to respond to his proclamation of freedom.

8 In the first century, the year of goodwill for the Jewish nation started in 29 C.E. when Jesus began his earthly ministry. He told the Jews: "Repent, you people, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." (Matthew 4:17) That year of goodwill lasted until "the day of vengeance" of Jehovah, which climaxed in 70 C.E. when Jehovah allowed the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem and its temple. (Matthew 24:3-22) We today are living in another

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6. Who received relief from hearing the good news preached in ancient times, and what about today?

7, 8. (a) What are the two 'years of goodwill'? (b) What are Jehovah's 'days of vengeance'?

year of goodwill, one that began with the establishment of God's Kingdom in the heavens in 1914. This year of goodwill will conclude with another, more widespread day of vengeance when Jehovah brings about the destruction of this entire world system of things at the "great tribulation."—Matthew 24:21.

9 Who today benefit from God's year of goodwill? Those who accept the message, demonstrate meekness, and zealously support the proclamation of God's Kingdom in "all the nations." (Mark 13:10) Such ones find that the good news brings real comfort. However, those who reject the message, refusing to take advantage of Jehovah's year of goodwill, will soon have to face the reality of his day of vengeance.—2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

Spiritual Fruitage That Glorifies God

10 The Jews who return from Babylon realize that Jehovah has performed a great deed in their behalf. Their mourning as captives turns into exultation and praise because they are finally free. Thus, Isaiah fulfills his prophetic commission, that is, ***"to assign to those mourning over Zion, to give them a headdress instead of ashes, the oil of exultation instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of the downhearted spirit; and they must be called big trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, for him to be beautified."—Isaiah 61:3.***

11 In the first century, the Jews who accepted release from bondage to false religion also praised God for his great deed in their behalf. Their downhearted spirit was

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9. Who today benefit from Jehovah's year of goodwill?
10. How are the Jews returning from Babylon affected by Jehovah's great deed in their behalf?
11. Who in the first century had good reason to praise Jehovah for his great deed?

replaced with a "mantle of praise" when they were delivered from a spiritually dead nation. Such a change was first experienced by Jesus' disciples when their mourning over his death turned to rejoicing over their anointing with holy spirit by their resurrected Lord. Soon after, a similar change was experienced by 3,000 meek individuals who responded to the preaching of those newly anointed Christians and got baptized at Pentecost 33 C.E. (Acts 2:41) How good it was to be confident of having Jehovah's blessing! Instead of "mourning over Zion," they received holy spirit and were refreshed by "the oil of exultation," which symbolizes the exultation of those who are richly blessed by Jehovah.—Hebrews 1:9.

12 Jehovah blesses his people with "big trees of righteousness." Who are these big trees? In the years following 537 B.C.E., they were individuals who studied and meditated on God's Word and cultivated Jehovah's righteous standards. (Psalm 1:1-3; Isaiah 44:2-4; Jeremiah 17: 7, 8) Such men as Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and High Priest Joshua proved to be outstanding "big trees"—stalwarts for truth and against spiritual pollution in the nation.

13 From Pentecost 33 C.E. onward, God planted similar "big trees of righteousness"—courageous anointed Christians—in the spiritual estate of his new nation, "the Israel of God." (Galatians 6:16) Over the centuries, these "trees" have come to number 144,000, producing righteous fruitage to beautify, or bring glory to, Jehovah God. (Revelation 14:3) The final ones of these stately "trees" have flourished in the years since 1919, when Jehovah revived the remaining ones of the Israel of God from their temporary

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12, 13. (a) Who were "big trees of righteousness" among the returning Jews in 537 B.C.E.? (b) Who have been "big trees of righteousness" since Pentecost 33 C.E.?

state of inactivity. By supplying them with an abundant supply of spiritual waters, Jehovah has produced a virtual forest of righteous, fruit-bearing trees.—Isaiah 27:6.

14 Highlighting the work of these "trees," Isaiah continues: ***"They must rebuild the long-standing devastated places; they will raise up even the desolated places of former times, and they will certainly make anew the devastated cities, the places desolate for generation after generation." (Isaiah 61:4)*** Under the decree of King Cyrus of Persia, faithful Jews who returned from Babylon rebuilt Jerusalem and its temple, which had been left in a devastated condition for so long. Restoration projects would also mark the years following 33 C.E. and 1919.

15 In 33 C.E., Jesus' disciples were greatly saddened by his arrest, trial, and death. (Matthew 26:31) However, their outlook changed when he appeared to them after his resurrection. And once holy spirit was poured out on them, they got busy with the work of preaching the good news, "both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Thus they began to restore pure worship. In a similar way, from 1919 onward Jesus Christ caused the remnant of his anointed brothers to rebuild "places desolate for generation after generation." For centuries the clergy of Christendom had failed to impart the knowledge of Jehovah, replacing it with man-made traditions and unscriptural doctrines. The anointed Christians cleaned out of their congregations practices that were tainted by false religion so that the restoration of true worship could go forward. And they began what would prove to be the greatest witnessing campaign that the world has ever known.—Mark 13:10.

14, 15. What projects were undertaken by Jehovah's released worshipers starting in (a) 537 B.C.E.? (b) 33 C.E.? (c) 1919?

16 This was a huge commission. How could the relatively few remaining ones of the Israel of God accomplish such a task? Jehovah inspired Isaiah to declare: ***"Strangers will actually stand and shepherd the flocks of you people, and the foreigners will be your farmers and your vinedressers." (Isaiah 61:5)*** The figurative strangers and foreigners have proved to be "a great crowd" of Jesus' "other sheep."* (Revelation 7:9; John 10:11, 16) They are not anointed with holy spirit with a view to a heavenly inheritance. Rather, they have the hope of everlasting life on a paradise earth. (Revelation 21:3, 4) Still, they love Jehovah and have been entrusted with spiritual shepherding, farming, and vinedressing duties. Such activities are not menial tasks. Under the direction of the remaining ones of the Israel of God, these workers help in the shepherding, nurturing, and harvesting of people.—Luke 10:2; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; Revelation 14:15, 16.

17 What of the Israel of God? Jehovah tells them, through Isaiah: ***"As for you, the priests of Jehovah you will be called; the ministers of our God you will be said to be. The resources of the nations you people will eat, and in their glory you will speak elatedly about yourselves." (Isaiah 61:6)*** In ancient Israel, Jehovah provided the Levitical priesthood to offer sacrifices in behalf of the priests themselves and their fellow Israelites. However, in 33 C.E., Jehovah ceased using the Levitical priesthood and inaugurated

* Isaiah 61:5 could have had a fulfillment in ancient times, since non-Jews accompanied natural Jews on their return to Jerusalem and likely helped in restoring the land. (Ezra 2:43-58) However, from verse 6 the prophecy seems to apply only to the Israel of God.

16. Who have been helping anointed Christians in their restoration work, and with what tasks have they been entrusted?
17. (a) What will members of the Israel of God be called? (b) What is the only sacrifice needed for forgiveness of sins?

a better arrangement. He accepted the perfect life of Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Since then, no other sacrifice has been needed. Jesus' sacrifice is valid for all time.—John 14:6; Colossians 2:13, 14; Hebrews 9:11-14, 24.

18 How, then, are the members of the Israel of God "the priests of Jehovah"? Writing to fellow anointed Christians, the apostle Peter said: "You are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession, that you should declare abroad the excellencies' of the one that called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) Hence, as a group, anointed Christians form a priesthood with a specific commission: to tell the nations about Jehovah's glory. They are to be witnesses of him. (Isaiah 43:10-12) Throughout the last days, anointed Christians have faithfully discharged this vital commission. As a result, millions now share with them in the work of witnessing about Jehovah's Kingdom.

19 Further, members of the Israel of God have the prospect of serving as priests in another way. After their death, they are resurrected to immortal spirit life in heaven. There they serve not only as rulers with Jesus in his Kingdom but also as priests of God. (Revelation 5:10; 20:6) As such, they will be privileged to apply the benefits of Jesus' ransom sacrifice to faithful mankind on earth. In the apostle John's vision recorded in Revelation chapter 22, they are again described as "trees." All 144,000 "trees" are seen in heaven, producing "twelve crops of fruit, yielding their fruits each month. And the leaves of the trees [are] for the curing of the nations." (Revelation 22:1, 2) What a wonderful priestly service that is!

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18. What kind of priesthood does the Israel of God form, and what is their commission?

19. What service will anointed Christians be privileged to perform?

Shame and Humiliation, Then Rejoicing

20 Since 1914 when Jehovah's year of goodwill began, the royal priesthood has met with nothing but opposition from Christendom's clergy. (Revelation 12:17) Nevertheless, all efforts to stop the preaching of the good news have ultimately failed. Isaiah's prophecy foretold this, saying: ***"Instead of your shame there will be a double portion, and instead of humiliation they will cry out joyfully over their share. Therefore in their land they will take possession of even a double portion. Rejoicing to time indefinite is what will come to be theirs."—Isaiah 61:7.***

21 During World War I, the anointed remnant suffered shame and humiliation at the hands of nationalistic Christendom. Members of the clergy were among those who falsely accused eight faithful brothers from the headquarters in Brooklyn of sedition. These brothers were unjustly imprisoned for nine months. Finally, in the spring of 1919, they were freed, and later all charges against them were dropped. Thus the scheme to stop the preaching work backfired. Instead of allowing his worshipers to suffer lasting shame, Jehovah liberated them and restored them to their spiritual estate, "their land." There they received a double portion of blessings. Having Jehovah's blessing more than made up for all that they had suffered. Truly they had reason to cry out joyfully!

22 What Jehovah says next provides another reason for

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20. Despite opposition, the royal priesthood awaits what blessing?
21. How did anointed Christians come to enjoy a double portion of blessings?
22, 23. How have anointed Christians imitated Jehovah, and how has he rewarded them?

Christians today to rejoice: ***"I, Jehovah, am loving justice, hating robbery along with unrighteousness. And I will give their wages in trueness, and an indefinitely lasting covenant I shall conclude toward them."*** **(*Isaiah 61:8*)** Through their study of the Bible, the anointed remnant learned to love justice and hate wickedness. (Proverbs 6:12-19; 11:20) They learned to "beat their swords into plowshares," remaining neutral in mankind's wars and political upheavals. (Isaiah 2:4) They also left behind God-dishonoring practices, such as slander, adultery, theft, and drunkenness.—Galatians 5:19-21.

23 Because anointed Christians share their Creator's love of justice, Jehovah has given them "their wages in trueness." One such 'wage' is an indefinitely lasting covenant —the new covenant—which Jesus announced to his followers on the night before his death. It is on the basis of this covenant that they became a spiritual nation, God's special people. (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20) Under it, Jehovah will apply all the benefits of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, including the forgiveness of sins for both anointed and all other faithful ones of mankind.

Exulting in the Blessings of Jehovah

24 Some among the nations have recognized Jehovah's blessing on his people. This was foretold by Jehovah's promise: ***"Their offspring will actually be known even among the nations, and their descendants in among the peoples. All those seeing them will recognize them, that they are the offspring whom Jehovah has blessed."*** **(*Isaiah 61:9*)** Members of the Israel of God, anointed Christians, have been active among the nations during Jehovah's year of goodwill. Today those who have responded to their

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24. Who from among the nations are "the offspring" who come to be blessed, and how have they become "offspring"?

ministry number into the millions. By working closely with the Israel of God, those from the nations have the privilege of becoming "the offspring whom Jehovah has blessed." Their happy condition is visible to all mankind.

25 All Christians, both anointed and other sheep, look forward to praising Jehovah eternally. They wholeheartedly agree with the prophet Isaiah, who says under inspiration: ***"Without fail I shall exult in Jehovah. My soul will be joyful in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; with the sleeveless coat of righteousness he has enwrapped me, like the bridegroom who, in a priestly way, puts on a headdress, and like the bride who decks herself with her ornamental things."—Isaiah 61:10.***

26 Clad in "the sleeveless coat of righteousness," anointed Christians are determined to remain pure and clean in Jehovah's eyes. (2 Corinthians 11:1, 2) Declared righteous by Jehovah with a view to inheriting heavenly life, they will never return to the desolate estate of Babylon the Great, from which they have been liberated. (Romans 5:9; 8:30) The garments of salvation are priceless to them. Their other sheep companions are similarly determined to observe Jehovah God's elevated standards of pure worship. Having "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," they are declared righteous and will survive "the great tribulation." (Revelation 7:14; James 2:23, 25) Until then, they imitate their anointed companions in avoiding any contamination by Babylon the Great.

27 Today Jehovah's worshipers delight to be in a spiritual paradise. Soon they will also enjoy Paradise in a physical

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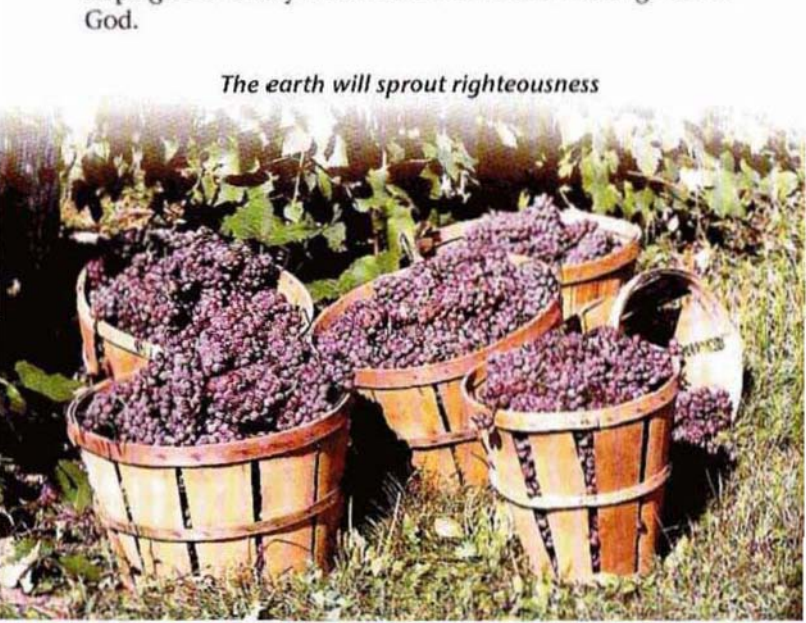
25, 26. How do all Christians echo the sentiments expressed at Isaiah 61:10?

27. (a) During the Millennial Reign, what noteworthy "sprouting" will there be? (b) How is righteousness already sprouting among mankind?

sense. We look forward with all our hearts to that time, which is vividly described in the closing words of Isaiah chapter 61: ***"As the earth itself brings forth its sprout, and as the garden itself makes the things that are sown in it sprout, in like manner the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will cause the sprouting of righteousness and of praise in front of all the nations."*** **(*Isaiah 61:11*)** During Christ's Millennial Reign, the earth will experience "the sprouting of righteousness." Humans will shout triumphantly, and righteousness will expand to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 26:9) We, however, do not have to wait for that glorious day in order to give praise in front of all the nations. Righteousness is already sprouting among the millions who give glory to the God of heaven and publish the good news about his Kingdom. Even now our faith and our hope give us every reason to exult in the blessings of our God.

The earth will sprout righteousness



"A New Name"

Isaiah 62:1-12

REASSURANCE, comfort, hope of restoration—that is what despondent Jews in Babylon need. Several decades have passed since Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed. Some 500 miles away from Babylon, Judah lies desolate, and the Jews seem to have been forgotten by Jehovah. What can improve their situation? Promises from Jehovah that he will bring them back home and allow them to restore pure worship. Then such descriptions as "left entirely" and "desolate" will be replaced by names denoting God's approval. (Isaiah 62:4; Zechariah 2:12) Chapter 62 of Isaiah is full of these promises. However, like other restoration prophecies, this chapter touches on issues far beyond the liberation of the Jews from captivity in Babylon. In its major fulfillment, Isaiah chapter 62 assures us that the salvation of Jehovah's spiritual nation, "the Israel of God," is certain.—Galatians 6:16.

Jehovah Does Not Stay Quiet

2 Babylon is overthrown in 539 B.C.E. Thereafter, King Cyrus of Persia issues a decree enabling God-fearing Jews to return to Jerusalem and restore Jehovah's worship. (Ezra 1:2-4) In 537 B.C.E., the first returning Jews are back in their homeland. Jehovah once again shows favor to Jerusalem, as is reflected in the warmth of his prophetic

1. What assurance is recorded in Isaiah chapter 62?
2. In what way does Jehovah again show favor to Zion?

declaration: ***"For the sake of Zion I shall not keep still, and for the sake of Jerusalem I shall not stay quiet until her righteousness goes forth just like the brightness, and her salvation like a torch that burns."—Isaiah 62:1.***

3 In 537 B.C.E., Jehovah fulfilled his promise to restore Zion, or Jerusalem. Her inhabitants experienced salvation by him, and their righteousness shone brightly. Later, though, they again drifted away from pure worship. Eventually, they rejected Jesus as the Messiah, and Jehovah finally abandoned them as his chosen nation. (Matthew 21:43; 23:38; John 1:9-13) Jehovah caused a new nation, "the Israel of God," to be born. This new nation became his special people, and in the first century, its members zealously preached the good news throughout the then-known world. (Galatians 6:16; Colossians 1:23) Unhappily, following the death of the apostles, there was a falling away from true religion. As a result, an apostate form of Christianity developed, as found today in Christendom. (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; Acts 20:29, 30) For centuries, Christendom had been allowed to bring great reproach upon Jehovah's name. Finally, however, in 1914, Jehovah's "year of goodwill" began, along with the major fulfillment of this part of Isaiah's prophecy.—Isaiah 61:2.

4 Today Jehovah's promise to restore Zion has been fulfilled on his heavenly organization, "Jerusalem above," as represented on earth by her children, spirit-anointed Christians. (Galatians 4:26) Jehovah's heavenly organiza-

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3. (a) Why is earthly Zion finally rejected by Jehovah, and who replaces her? (b) What falling away occurs, and when, and in what period are we living today?

4, 5. (a) Whom do Zion and her children symbolize today? (b) In what way has Jehovah used Zion to make "her salvation like a torch that burns"?

tion serves as a devoted helper—watchful, loving, and industrious. What a thrilling occasion it was when in 1914 she gave birth to the Messianic Kingdom! (Revelation 12:1-5) From 1919 in particular, her earthly children have preached to the nations about her righteousness and salvation. As Isaiah foretold, these children have illuminated the darkness like a torch, letting their light shine. —Matthew 5:15, 16; Philippians 2:15.

5 Jehovah is keenly interested in his worshipers and will not rest, or stay quiet, until he has fulfilled all the promises he made to Zion and her children. The remaining ones of the anointed along with their "other sheep" companions also refuse to keep silent. (John 10:16) They are noisy indeed as they point people to the only way of salvation. —Romans 10:10.

"A New Name" Given by Jehovah

6 What does Jehovah have in mind for Zion, his heavenly "woman," represented by ancient Jerusalem? He states: ***"The nations will certainly see your righteousness, O woman, and all kings your glory. And you will actually be called by a new name, which the very mouth of Jehovah will designate."*** **(*Isaiah 62:2*)** As the Israelites act in righteousness, the nations are forced to look on attentively. Even kings are forced to acknowledge that Jehovah is using Jerusalem and that any rulership they exercise pales into insignificance beside Jehovah's Kingdom.—Isaiah 49:23.

7 Jehovah now confirms the changed condition of Zion by giving her a new name. That new name signifies the blessed condition and honored status enjoyed by Zion's

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6. What does Jehovah have in mind for Zion?
7. What does Zion's new name signify?

earthly children beginning in 537 B.C.E.* It shows that Jehovah acknowledges Zion as belonging to him. Today, the Israel of God is thrilled to be the object of Jehovah's delight in this way, and the other sheep rejoice with them.

8 Having given Zion her new name, Jehovah now promises: ***"You must become a crown of beauty in the hand of Jehovah, and a kingly turban in the palm of your God." (Isaiah 62:3)*** Jehovah holds up his symbolic wife, heavenly Zion, to be viewed with admiration. (Psalm 48:2; 50:2) The crown of beauty and the "kingly turban" indicate that she is clothed with honor and authority. (Zechariah 9:16) Representing heavenly Zion, or "Jerusalem above," the Israel of God is a remarkable result of God's hand—his applied power—in action. (Galatians 4: 26) With Jehovah's help, that spiritual nation has established a monumental record of integrity and devotion. Millions, including both anointed and other sheep, are strengthened to demonstrate outstanding faith and love. During the Millennial Reign of Christ, the anointed, having attained their glorious heavenly reward, will be instruments in Jehovah's hand to uplift the groaning creation to everlasting life.—Romans 8:21, 22; Revelation 22:2.

'Jehovah Has Taken Delight in You'

9 The giving of a new name is part of the delightful

* In Bible prophecy "a new name" can signify a new position or privilege.—Revelation 2:17; 3:12.

8. In what ways has Jehovah honored Zion?
9. Describe the transformation of Zion.

Jehovah will call heavenly Zion by a new name

transformation of heavenly Zion as represented by her earthly children. We read: ***"No more will you be said to be a woman left entirely; and your own land will no more be said to be desolate; but you yourself will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Owned as a Wife. For Jehovah will have taken delight in you, and your own land will be owned as a wife."*** **(*Isaiah 62:4*)** Earthly Zion has been desolate since her destruction in 607 B.C.E. Jehovah's words, however, assure her of the restoration and repopulation of her land. Once-ravaged Zion will no longer be a woman left entirely, and her land will no longer be desolate. The restoration of Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. means a new condition for her, in complete contrast with her formerly ruined state. Jehovah declares that Zion will be called "My Delight Is in Her," and her land, "Owned as a Wife."—Isaiah 54:1, 5, 6; 66:8; Jeremiah 23:5-8; 30: 17; Galatians 4:27-31.

10 Starting in 1919 a similar change was experienced by the Israel of God. During the first world war, anointed Christians appeared to be disowned by God. But in 1919 their favored status was restored, and their way of worship, purified. This affected their teachings, their organization, and their activity. The Israel of God came into its "land," its spiritual estate, or realm of activity.—Isaiah 66: 7, 8, 20-22.

11 Stressing further the new, favored position of his people, Jehovah declares: ***"Just as a young man takes ownership of a virgin as his wife, your sons will take ownership of you as a wife. And with the exultation of a bridegroom over a bride, your God will exult even over you."*** **(*Isaiah***

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10. (a) How was the Israel of God transformed? (b) What is the "land" of the Israel of God?
11. How do the Jews take ownership of their mother as a wife?

62:5) How can the Jews, the "sons" of Zion, take ownership of their mother as a wife? In that Zion's returning sons released from Babylonian exile take possession of their old capital city and settle in her once again. When that happens, Zion is no longer desolate but filled with sons.—Jeremiah 3:14.

12 In a parallel way, since 1919 the children of heavenly Zion have taken possession of their land, their spiritual estate, which has the prophetic name "Owned as a Wife." Their Christian activity in that land has made it evident that these anointed Christians are the "people for [Jehovah's] name." (Acts 15:14) Their bringing forth the fruits of the Kingdom and publishing Jehovah's name have made it plain that Jehovah takes delight in these Christians. He has made it clear that they are part of the organization that is joined to him in unbreakable unity. By anointing these Christians with holy spirit, liberating them from spiritual captivity, and using them to preach the Kingdom hope to all mankind, Jehovah has demonstrated that he rejoices over them with the joy of a bridegroom over a bride.—Jeremiah 32:41.

"Let There Be No Silence on Your Part"

13 The figurative new name given by Jehovah makes his people feel secure. They know that he acknowledges them and that they are owned by him. Now using a different illustration, Jehovah speaks to his people

12. (a) In what way has Jehovah made it clear that anointed Christians are part of the organization that is joined in marriage to him? (b) How do Jehovah's dealings with his people provide a lofty model for marriage today? (See box on page 342.)

13, 14. (a) In ancient times, how does Jerusalem become a city providing safety? (b) In modern times, how has Zion become "a praise in the earth"?

as to a walled city: ***"Upon your walls, O Jerusalem, I have commissioned watchmen. All day long and all night long, constantly, let them not keep still. You who are making mention of Jehovah, let there be no silence on your part,***

A Lofty Model for Marriage

When people marry, they bring their own expectations to the marriage union. But what are God's expectations? The institution of marriage originated with him. What was his purpose for it?

One indication of God's perspective comes from his relationship with the nation of Israel. Isaiah portrays this relationship as a marriage. (Isaiah 62:1-5) Notice what Jehovah God as a "husband" does for his "bride." He protects and sanctifies her. (Isaiah 62:6, 7, 12) He honors and values her. (Isaiah 62:3, 8, 9) And he finds delight in her, as indicated by the new names he gives her.—Isaiah 62:4, 5, 12.

In the Christian Greek Scriptures, Paul echoes Isaiah's description of the relationship between Jehovah and Israel when he compares the relationship of a husband and wife to that of Christ and the congregation of anointed Christians.—Ephesians 5:21-27.

Paul encouraged Christians to imitate in their marriages the relationship between Jesus and the congregation. There can be no greater love than that shown by Jehovah toward Israel and that shown by Christ toward the congregation. Those symbolic relationships provide a lofty model for a successful and happy marriage between Christians.—Ephesians 5:28-33.

and do not give him any silence until he fixes solidly, yes, until he sets Jerusalem as a praise in the earth." (Isaiah 62:6, 7) In Jehovah's due time after the return of the faithful remnant from Babylon, Jerusalem does become "a praise in the earth"—a walled city providing safety to her inhabitants. Day and night, watchmen on those walls are alert to ensure the security of the city and to relay warning messages to her citizens.—Nehemiah 6:15; 7:3; Isaiah 52:8.

14 In modern times Jehovah has used his anointed watchmen to show meek ones the way to freedom from bondage to false religion. These ones have been invited to come within his organization, where they find protection from spiritual contamination, ungodly influences, and Jehovah's displeasure. (Jeremiah 33:9; Zephaniah 3:19) Vital to such protection is the role of the watchman class, "the faithful and discreet slave," which provides spiritual "food at the proper time." (Matthew 24:45-47) Working with the watchman class, the "great crowd" also plays a significant role in making Zion "a praise in the earth."—Revelation 7:9.

15 The service of the watchman class and their companions continues! Their whole-souled attitude is seen in the zealous activity of millions of faithful individuals supported by traveling overseers and their wives; volunteers in the various Bethel homes and printing facilities of Jehovah's Witnesses; missionaries; and special, regular, and auxiliary pioneers. In addition, they work hard in constructing new Kingdom Halls, visiting the sick, assisting individuals who face challenging medical situations,

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15. How do the watchman class and their companions serve Jehovah constantly?

and providing timely relief to victims of disasters and accidents. Many of these self-sacrificing individuals often serve literally "day and night"!—Revelation 7:14, 15.

16 Jehovah's servants are encouraged to pray without ceasing, to ask God that his "will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." (Matthew 6:9, 10; 1 Thessalonians 5:17) They are exhorted: "Do not give [Jehovah] any silence" until the desires and hopes regarding the restoration of true worship are granted. Jesus stressed the need to pray constantly, urging his followers to "cry out to [God] day and night."—Luke 18:1-8.

Service to God Will Be Rewarded

17 The new name Jehovah gives his people reassures them that their efforts are not in vain. ***"Jehovah has sworn with his right hand and with his strong arm: 'I will no more give your grain as food to your enemies, nor will foreigners drink your new wine, for which you have toiled. But the very ones gathering it will eat it, and they will be certain to praise Jehovah; and the very ones collecting it will drink it in my holy courtyards.'"*** **(*Isaiah 62: 8, 9*)** Jehovah's right hand and strong arm are symbols of his power and strength. (Deuteronomy 32:40; Ezekiel 20:5) His swearing by these shows that he is determined to change Zion's state of affairs. In 607 B.C.E., Jehovah permits Zion's enemies to rob her and plunder her belongings. (Deuteronomy 28:33, 51) But now, Zion's possessions will be enjoyed only by those who have a right to them.—Deuteronomy 14:22-27.

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16. In what way do Jehovah's servants "not give him any silence"?
17, 18. (a) In what way can inhabitants of Zion expect to enjoy the fruits of their labor? (b) How do Jehovah's people today enjoy the fruits of their labor?

18 In the modern-day fulfillment of this promise, Jehovah's restored people experience great spiritual prosperity. They fully enjoy the fruits of their labor—an increased number of Christian disciples and an abundance of spiritual food. (Isaiah 55:1, 2; 65:14) Because his people are faithful, Jehovah does not let their enemies interfere with their spiritual prosperity or rob them of the results of their whole-souled service. None of the work that is done in the service of Jehovah is in vain.—Malachi 3: 10-12; Hebrews 6:10.

19 The new name also makes Jehovah's organization attractive to honesthearted people. Multitudes flock to it, and the way is kept open for them. Isaiah's prophecy states: ***"Pass out, pass out through the gates, you men. Clear the way of the people. Bank up, bank up the highway. Rid it of stones. Raise up a signal for the peoples." (Isaiah 62:10)*** In the first instance, this call likely refers to passing out of the gates of the cities of Babylonia in order to return to Jerusalem. The returnees are to clear stones out of the way to make the journey easier and to raise up a signal to show the way.—Isaiah 11:12.

20 Since 1919, anointed Christians have been set apart for divine service and are traveling "the Way of Holiness." (Isaiah 35:8) They were the first to walk on the spiritual highway out of Babylon the Great. (Isaiah 40:3; 48:20) God gave them the privilege of taking the lead in declaring his mighty works and in showing others the way onto the highway. Ridding it of stones —clearing away stumbling blocks—was mainly for their

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19, 20. (a) How is the way cleared for the Jews to return to Jerusalem? (b) How in modern times has the way been cleared for meek ones to come into Jehovah's organization?

own benefit. (Isaiah 57:14) They needed to see God's purposes and teachings clearly. False beliefs are stumbling stones on the pathway to life, but Jehovah's Word is "like a forge hammer that smashes the crag." With it, anointed Christians shattered stumbling stones that could trip those who wanted to serve Jehovah.—Jeremiah 23:29.

21 In 537 B.C.E., Jerusalem became the signal that beckoned the Jewish remnant to return and rebuild the temple. (Isaiah 49:22) In 1919 when the anointed remnant were delivered from bondage to false religion, they did not wander aimlessly. They knew their destination, for Jehovah had established a signal for them. What signal? The same signal foretold at Isaiah 11:10, which reads: "It must occur in that day that there will be the root of Jesse that will be standing up as a signal for the peoples." The apostle Paul applies these words to Jesus. (Romans 15: 8, 12) Yes, the signal is Christ Jesus, reigning as King on heavenly Mount Zion!—Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 14:1.

22 Around Jesus Christ, both the anointed Christians and the other sheep are gathered to engage in the unifying worship of the Most High God. His rulership serves to vindicate Jehovah's universal sovereignty and to bless honesthearted ones out of all nations of the earth. Is this not reason for every one of us to join in exalting him with praise?

"Your Salvation Is Coming"!

23 The new name that Jehovah grants to his wife-like organization has to do with the eternal salvation of

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21, 22. What signal has Jehovah established for those leaving false religion, and how do we know?

23, 24. How is salvation being brought to those having faith in God?

her children. Isaiah writes: ***"Look! Jehovah himself has caused it to be heard to the farthest part of the earth: 'Say, you people, to the daughter of Zion, "Look! Your salvation is coming. Look! The reward he gives is with him, and the wages he pays are before him."'"*** **(*Isaiah 62:11*)** Salvation came to the Jews when Babylon fell and they returned to their homeland. But these words point to something greater. Jehovah's declaration brings to mind Zechariah's prophecy regarding Jerusalem: "Be very joyful, O daughter of Zion. Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem. Look! Your king himself comes to you. He is righteous, yes, saved; humble, and riding upon an ass, even upon a full-grown animal the son of a she-ass." —Zechariah 9:9.

In modern times Jehovah's watchman class has not kept silent

24 Three and a half years after Jesus was baptized in water and anointed with God's spirit, he rode into Jerusalem and cleansed its temple. (Matthew 21:1-5; John 12:14-16) Today, Jesus Christ is the one bringing salvation from Jehovah to all of those having faith in God. Since his enthronement in 1914, Jesus is also Jehovah's appointed Judge and Executioner. In 1918, three and a half years after his enthronement, he cleansed Jehovah's spiritual temple, as represented on earth by the congregation of anointed Christians. (Malachi 3:1-5) His being raised as a signal marked the beginning of a great ingathering of people from all over the earth, in support of the Messianic Kingdom. Following the ancient pattern, "salvation" came to the Israel of God when they were liberated from Babylon the Great in 1919. "The reward" or "the wages" in store for the self-sacrificing harvest workers is either immortal life in heaven or eternal life on earth. All who stay faithful can be confident that their "labor is not in vain in connection with the Lord."—1 Corinthians 15:58.

25 How positive the outlook is for Jehovah's heavenly organization, for its anointed representatives here on earth, and for everyone actively associated with them! (Deuteronomy 26:19) Isaiah prophesied: ***"Men will certainly call them the holy people, those repurchased by Jehovah; and you yourself will be called Searched For, a City Not Left Entirely." (Isaiah 62:12)*** At one time "Jerusalem above," represented by the Israel of God, felt forsaken. She will never feel that way again. Jehovah's people will forever be the object of his protective care, enjoying his continuing smile of approval.

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25. What assurance is given to Jehovah's people?

Jehovah Makes a Beautiful Name for Himself

Isaiah 63:1-14

FOR nearly two thousand years, Christians have been "awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah." (2 Peter 3:12; Titus 2:13) It is understandable that they are anxious for that day to come. After all, it will mark the beginning of their relief from the ravages of imperfection. (Romans 8:22) It will also mean an end to the pressures they suffer during these "critical times hard to deal with."—2 Timothy 3:1.

2 However, while Jehovah's day will bring relief for righteous ones, it will also mean destruction for "those who do not know God and those who do not obey the good news about our Lord Jesus." (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8) This is sobering to contemplate. Will God really bring about the destruction of the wicked simply to rescue his people from distressing conditions? The 63rd chapter of Isaiah shows that there is a far loftier issue involved, namely, the sanctification of God's name.

The March of the Victorious Warrior

3 In Isaiah chapter 62, we read of the liberation of the

1, 2. (a) What personal interest do Christians have in the coming "day of Jehovah"? (b) What lofty issue is involved in the coming of Jehovah's day?

3, 4. (a) What is the setting for the prophecy in Isaiah chapter 63? (b) Who does Isaiah see marching toward Jerusalem, and whom have some scholars identified that one to be?

Jews from captivity in Babylon and their restoration to their homeland. Naturally, the question arises: Will the restored remnant of Jews need to fear further devastation from other enemy nations? Isaiah's vision does much to allay their fear. The prophecy begins: ***"Who is this one coming from Edom, the one with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah, this one who is honorable in his clothing, marching in the abundance of his power?"—Isaiah 63:1a.***

4 Isaiah sees a warrior, energetic and triumphant, marching toward Jerusalem. His magnificent clothing indicates that he is of the very highest rank. He comes from the direction of Edom's most prominent city, Bozrah, suggesting that he has won a great victory over that enemy land. Who can this warrior be? Some scholars identify him with Jesus Christ. Others believe him to be the Jewish military leader Judas Maccabaeus. However, the warrior himself indicates his own identity when he answers the foregoing question by saying: ***"I, the One speaking in righteousness, the One abounding in power to save."—Isaiah 63:1b.***

5 There is little question that this warrior is Jehovah God himself. Elsewhere, he is described as having an "abundance of dynamic energy" and as "speaking what is righteous." (Isaiah 40:26; 45:19, 23) The warrior's magnificent garments remind us of the psalmist's words: "O Jehovah my God, you have proved very great. With dignity and splendor you have clothed yourself." (Psalm 104:1) While Jehovah is the God of love, the Bible shows that he takes on the mantle of a warrior when necessary. —Isaiah 34:2; 1 John 4:16.

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5. Who is the warrior seen by Isaiah, and why do you so answer?

6 Why, though, is Jehovah returning from a battle in Edom? The Edomites, perpetuators of an animosity that began with their forefather, Esau, are age-old enemies of God's covenant people. (Genesis 25:24-34; Numbers 20:14-21) The depth of Edom's hatred for Judah became particularly evident during the desolation of Jerusalem when the Edomites cheered on the Babylonian soldiers. (Psalm 137:7) Jehovah takes such animosity as an offense against him personally. No wonder that he determined to unleash his sword of vengeance against Edom!—Isaiah 34:5-15; Jeremiah 49:7-22.

7 Isaiah's vision is therefore of much encouragement to the Jews returning to Jerusalem. It assures them of safe dwelling in their new home. Indeed, by the days of the prophet Malachi, God made Edom's "mountains a desolated waste and his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." (Malachi 1:3) Does this mean, then, that Isaiah's prophecy was completely fulfilled by Malachi's day? No, for in spite of its desolate condition, Edom was determined to rebuild its devastated places, and Malachi continued to call Edom "the territory of wickedness" and "the people whom Jehovah has denounced to time indefinite."* (Malachi 1:4, 5) Prophetically, however, Edom encompasses more than the descendants of Esau. It serves as a symbol of *all* the nations that prove themselves to be enemies of Jehovah's worshipers. The nations of Christendom have been particularly prominent in this regard. What will happen to this modern-day Edom?

* The Herods of the first century C.E. were Edomites.

6. Why is Jehovah returning from a battle in Edom?
7. (a) How was the prophecy against Edom initially fulfilled? (b) What does Edom symbolize?

The Winepress

8 Isaiah asks the returning warrior: ***"Why is it that your clothing is red, and your garments are like those of one treading in the winepress?"*** Jehovah replies: ***"The wine trough I have trodden by myself, while there was no man with me from the peoples. And I kept treading them in my anger, and I kept trampling them down in my rage. And their spurting blood kept spattering upon my garments, and all my clothing I have polluted."—Isaiah 63:2, 3.***

9 These graphic words describe a bloodbath. Why, even God's elegant garments are stained, like the garments of one treading a winepress! A winepress is a fitting symbol of the trapped condition in which enemies of Jehovah God find themselves when he moves to destroy them. When will this symbolic winepress be trodden? The prophecies of Joel and of the apostle John also speak of a symbolic winepress. The winepress of those prophecies is to be trodden when Jehovah treads down his enemies to destruction at Armageddon. (Joel 3:13; Revelation 14:18-20; 16:16) The prophetic winepress of Isaiah points forward to the same time.

10 Why, though, does Jehovah say that he trod this winepress by himself, while there was no man with him from the peoples? Will not Jesus Christ, as God's representive, take the lead in treading the winepress? (Revelation 19:11-16) Yes, but Jehovah is referring to humans, not spirit creatures. He is saying that no human is equal to the task of ridding the earth of Satan's followers. (Isaiah 59:15, 16) It is left to God Almighty to keep tread-

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8, 9. (a) In what activity has the warrior seen by Isaiah been engaged? (b) When and how is the symbolic winepress trodden?
10. Why does Jehovah say that he trod the winepress by himself?

ing them in his anger, until they have been completely crushed.

11 Jehovah further explains why he performs this task personally, saying: ***"The day of vengeance is in my heart, and the very year of my repurchased ones has come." (Isaiah 63:4)**** Only Jehovah has the right to execute vengeance upon those who harm his people. (Deuteronomy 32:35) In ancient times the "repurchased ones" were the Jews who suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. (Isaiah 35:10; 43:1; 48:20) In modern times they are the anointed remnant. (Revelation 12:17) Like their ancient counterparts, they have been repurchased from religious captivity. And like those Jews, the anointed, along with their "other sheep" companions, have been the victims of persecution and opposition. (John 10:16) Isaiah's prophecy thus assures Christians today that at God's appointed time, He will intervene in their behalf.

12 Jehovah continues: ***"I kept looking, but there was no helper; and I began to show myself astonished, but there was no one offering support. So my arm furnished me salvation, and my rage was what supported me. And I kept stamping down peoples in my anger, and I proceeded to make them drunk with my rage and to bring down to the earth their spurting blood."—Isaiah 63:5, 6.***

13 No human helper can claim credit for Jehovah's

* The expression "year of my repurchased ones" may refer to the same period of time as the term "day of vengeance." Note how similar terms are used in parallel at Isaiah 34:8.

11. (a) Why does Jehovah bring a "day of vengeance"? (b) Who were the "repurchased ones" in ancient times, and who are they today?

12, 13. (a) In what way is there no helper for Jehovah? (b) How does Jehovah's arm furnish salvation, and how does his rage support him?

grand day of vengeance. Nor does Jehovah need any human support to carry out his will.* His immeasurably powerful arm of strength is sufficient for the task. (Psalm 44:3; 98:1; Jeremiah 27:5) Moreover, his rage supports him. How? In that God's rage is not uncontrolled emotion but righteous indignation. Since Jehovah always acts on the basis of righteous principles, his rage supports and motivates him in bringing "down to the earth" the "spurting blood" of his enemies, to their humiliation and defeat.—Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 25:10; 26:5.

God's Loving-Kindnesses

14 In times past, the Jews quickly lost appreciation for the things Jehovah did in their behalf. Appropriately, then, Isaiah reminds them of *why* Jehovah did such things. Isaiah declares: ***"The loving-kindnesses of Jehovah I shall mention, the praises of Jehovah, according to all that Jehovah has rendered to us, even the abundant goodness to the house of Israel that he has rendered to them according to his mercies and according to the abundance of his loving-kindnesses. And he went on to say: 'Surely they are my people, sons that will not prove false.' So it was to them that he came to be a Savior. During all their distress it was distressing to him. And his own personal messenger saved them. In his love and in his compassion he himself repurchased them, and he proceeded to lift them up and carry them all the days of long ago."*** ***—Isaiah 63:7-9.***

* Jehovah expresses astonishment that no one offered support. It might indeed be thought astonishing that almost 2,000 years after the death of Jesus, the powerful ones of mankind still oppose God's will.—Psalm 2:2-12; Isaiah 59:16.

14. What appropriate reminders does Isaiah now give?

15 What an outstanding example Jehovah sets in demonstrating loving-kindness, or loyal love! (Psalm 36:7; 62:12) Jehovah formed a loving attachment to Abraham. (Micah 7:20) He promised the patriarch that by means of his seed, or offspring, all nations of the earth would bless themselves. (Genesis 22:17, 18) Jehovah stuck to that promise, showing abundant goodness to the house of Israel. Outstanding among his loyal acts was his rescue of Abraham's offspring from slavery in Egypt.—Exodus 14:30.

16 Following the Exodus, Jehovah brought Israel to Mount Sinai and made this promise: "If you will strictly obey my voice and will indeed keep my covenant, then you will certainly become my special property . . . And you yourselves will become to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:5, 6) Was Jehovah being deceptive in making this offer? No, for Isaiah reveals that Jehovah said to himself: "Surely they are my people, sons that will not prove false." One scholar observes: "The 'surely' is not the fiat of sovereignty or foreknowledge: it is the hope and confidence of love." Yes, Jehovah made his covenant in good faith, sincerely wanting his people to succeed. In spite of their obvious shortcomings, he displayed confidence in them. How wonderful it is to worship a God who places such trust in his worshipers! Elders today do much to strengthen those entrusted to their charge when they manifest similar confidence in the basic goodness of God's people.—2 Thessalonians 3:4; Hebrews 6:9, 10.

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15. How and why did Jehovah show loving-kindness to Abraham's offspring in Egypt?

16. (a) What viewpoint did Jehovah have when he made his covenant with Israel? (b) How does God deal with his people?

17 Nevertheless, the psalmist says regarding the Israelites: "They forgot God their Savior, the Doer of great things in Egypt." (Psalm 106:21) Their disobedient, stiff-necked attitude often resulted in their coming into dire circumstances. (Deuteronomy 9:6) Did Jehovah cease showing them loving-kindness? On the contrary, Isaiah relates that "during all their distress it was distressing to him." What empathy Jehovah has! As with any loving father, it pained God to see his children suffer, even when the suffering was due to their own foolishness. As foretold and in evidence of his love, he sent his "personal messenger," likely Jesus in his prehuman existence, to lead them into the Promised Land. (Exodus 23:20) Thus Jehovah lifted the nation up and carried it, "just as a man carries his son." (Deuteronomy 1:31; Psalm 106:10) Today we can be confident that Jehovah is equally aware of our sufferings and that he feels for us when we are in dire straits. We can confidently 'throw all our anxieties upon him because he cares for us.'—1 Peter 5:7.

God Becomes an Enemy

18 Never, though, should we presume upon God's loving-kindness. Isaiah continues: ***"They themselves rebelled and made his holy spirit feel hurt. He now was changed into an enemy of theirs; he himself warred against them." (Isaiah 63:10)*** Jehovah warned that although he is a God merciful and gracious, "by no means will he give exemption from punishment." (Exodus 34:6, 7) The Israelites put themselves in line for punishment by establishing a pattern of rebellion. "Do not forget how

17. (a) What evidence did Jehovah give of his love for the Israelites? (b) What confidence can we have today?

18. Why did Jehovah come to be an enemy of his people?

you have provoked Jehovah your God in the wilderness," reminded Moses. "From the day that you went out of the land of Egypt until your coming to this place you people have proved rebellious in your behavior with Jehovah." (Deuteronomy 9:7) By resisting the wholesome effects of God's spirit, they have hurt, or grieved, it. (Ephesians 4: 30) They have forced Jehovah to become an enemy of theirs.—Leviticus 26:17; Deuteronomy 28:63.

19 In the midst of their affliction, some Jews are moved to reflect on the past. Says Isaiah: ***"One began to remember the days of long ago, Moses his servant: 'Where is the One that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the One that put within him His own holy spirit? The One making His beautiful arm go at the right hand of Moses; the One splitting the waters from before them in order to make an indefinitely lasting name for his own self; the One making them walk through the surging waters so that, like a horse in the wilderness, they did not stumble? Just as when a beast itself goes down into the valley plain, the very spirit of Jehovah proceeded to make them rest.'"—Isaiah 63:11-14a.****

20 Yes, suffering the results of disobedience, the Jews long for the days when Jehovah was their Deliverer instead of their enemy. They recall how their "shepherds," Moses and Aaron, led them safely through the Red Sea.

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* This verse could also begin: "*He* began to remember." (Isaiah 63:11, footnote) However, this does not necessarily mean that Jehovah is the one remembering. The words that follow express the feelings of God's people and not of Jehovah himself. The *Soncino Books of the Bible* thus renders these words: "Then His people remembered the days of old."

19, 20. What things do the Jews remember, and why?

(Psalm 77:20; Isaiah 51:10) They recall a time when instead of hurting God's spirit, they were led by it through the guidance given by Moses and other spirit-appointed older men. (Numbers 11:16, 17) They also remember seeing Jehovah's "beautiful arm" of strength being used in their behalf through Moses! In time, God took them out of the great and fear-inspiring wilderness and led them into a land flowing with milk and honey—a place of rest. (Deuteronomy 1:19; Joshua 5:6; 22:4) Now, though, the Israelites suffer because of having lost their favorable relationship with God!

'A Beautiful Name for Himself'

21 Still, the material loss of the Israelites pales in comparison with the loss of the privilege they have tossed away, namely, that of sharing in the glorifying of God's name. Moses promised the Jews: "Jehovah will establish you as a holy people to himself, just as he swore to you, because you continue to keep the commandments of Jehovah your God, and you have walked in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth will have to see that Jehovah's name has been called upon you, and they will indeed be afraid of you." (Deuteronomy 28:9, 10) When Jehovah acted in defense of Abraham's descendants, rescuing them from slavery in Egypt, he was not doing so simply to make life more convenient or pleasant for them. He was acting in behalf of something far more important—his name. Yes, he was seeing to it that his name was "declared in all the earth." (Exodus 9:15, 16) And when God showed mercy after the rebellion of

21. (a) What great privilege could Israel have had in connection with God's name? (b) What was God's primary reason for liberating Abraham's descendants from Egypt?

Jehovah had high hopes for his people

Israel in the wilderness, his reason for doing so was not mere sentiment. Jehovah himself said: "I went acting for the sake of my own name that it might not be profaned before the eyes of the nations."—Ezekiel 20:8-10.

22 What a powerful conclusion Isaiah then gives to this prophecy! He says: ***"Thus you led your people in order to make a beautiful name for your own self."*** **(*Isaiah 63:14b*)** Now it can be clearly seen why Jehovah fights mightily in the interests of his people. It is to make a beautiful name for himself. Isaiah's prophecy thus serves as a powerful reminder that bearing the name of Jehovah is both an awesome privilege and a great responsibility. True Christians today love the name of Jehovah more than their own lives. (Isaiah 56:6; Hebrews 6:10) They are loath to do anything that could possibly bring reproach upon that sacred name. They respond to God's loyal love by remaining loyal to him. And because they love Jehovah's beautiful name, they long for the day when he will trample his enemies in the winepress of his anger—not merely because it will benefit them but because it will lead to the glorification of the name of the God they love.—Matthew 6:9.

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22. (a) In the future, why will God once again fight in behalf of his people? (b) In what ways does our love for God's name affect our actions?

A Prayer of Repentance

Isaiah 63:15–64:12

THE destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in 607 B.C.E. was discipline from Jehovah, an expression of his extreme disapproval. The disobedient nation of Judah deserved the severe punishment. Yet, Jehovah did not intend that the Jews be exterminated. The apostle Paul alluded to the purpose of Jehovah's discipline when he said: "True, no discipline seems for the present to be joyous, but grievous; yet afterward to those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness."—Hebrews 12:11.

2 How will the Jews react to the hard experience? Will they hate Jehovah's discipline? (Psalm 50:16, 17) Or will they accept it as training? Will they repent and be healed? (Isaiah 57:18; Ezekiel 18:23) The prophecy of Isaiah suggests that at least some of the former inhabitants of Judah will respond well to the discipline. Beginning in the last verses of chapter 63 and continuing through chapter 64, the nation of Judah is represented as a contrite people who approach Jehovah in heartfelt supplication. The prophet Isaiah, on behalf of his countrymen in their future exile, utters a prayer of repentance. While doing so, he speaks of coming events as if they were taking place before his eyes.

1, 2. (a) What is the purpose of divine discipline? (b) What choice will the Jews face after receiving Jehovah's discipline?

A Compassionate Father

3 Isaiah prays to Jehovah: ***"Look from heaven and see out of your lofty abode of holiness and beauty."*** The prophet is speaking of the spiritual heavens, where Jehovah and his invisible spirit creatures dwell. Expressing the thoughts of the Jews in exile, Isaiah continues: ***"Where are your zeal and your full might, the commotion of your inward parts, and your mercies? Toward me they have restrained themselves." (Isaiah 63:15)*** Jehovah has held back his power and controlled his deep feelings—"the commotion of [his] inward parts, and [his] mercies"—toward his people. Yet, Jehovah is the "Father" of the Jewish nation. Abraham and Israel (Jacob) were their natural forefathers, but if these were restored to life, they might be inclined to reject their apostate offspring. Jehovah has greater compassion. (Psalm 27:10) Isaiah gratefully says: ***"You, O Jehovah, are our Father. Our Repurchaser of long ago is your name."—Isaiah 63:16.***

4 Isaiah continues with a heartfelt expression: ***"Why do you, O Jehovah, keep making us wander from your ways? Why do you make our heart hard against the fear of you? Come back for the sake of your servants, the tribes of your hereditary possession." (Isaiah 63:17)*** Yes, Isaiah prays that Jehovah will again turn his attention to his servants. In what sense, though, does Jehovah make the Jews wander from his ways? Is Jehovah responsible for the hardness of their hearts that leads them to have no

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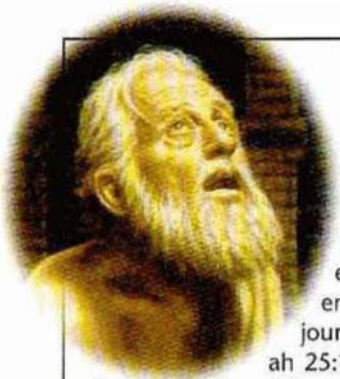
3. (a) How does Isaiah's prophetic prayer exalt Jehovah? (b) How does Daniel's prayer show that the prophetic prayer of Isaiah represents the thoughts of repentant Jews in Babylon? (See box on page 362.)

4, 5. (a) In what sense does Jehovah make his people wander from his ways? (b) What kind of worship does Jehovah want?



Daniel's Prayer of Repentance

The prophet Daniel lived in Babylon throughout the 70-year period of Jewish captivity. Sometime during the 68th year of the exile, Daniel discerned from Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel's sojourn was nearing its end. (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10; Daniel 9:1, 2) Daniel turned to Jehovah in prayer—a prayer of repentance on behalf of the entire Jewish nation. Daniel relates: "I proceeded to set my face to Jehovah the true God, in order to seek him with prayer and with entreaties, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. And I began to pray to Jehovah my God and to make confession."—Daniel 9:3, 4.

Daniel uttered his prayer some two hundred years after Isaiah penned the prophetic prayer found in chapters 63 and 64 of his book. Undoubtedly, many sincere Jews prayed to Jehovah during the difficult years of exile. The Bible, however, highlights Daniel's prayer, which evidently represented the feelings of many faithful Jews. Thus, his prayer shows that the sentiments of Isaiah's prophetic prayer were indeed the sentiments of faithful Jews in Babylon.

Note some similarities between Daniel's prayer and Isaiah's.

Isaiah 63:16	Daniel 9:15
Isaiah 63:18	Daniel 9:17
Isaiah 64:1-3	Daniel 9:15
Isaiah 64:4-7	Daniel 9:4-7
Isaiah 64:6	Daniel 9:9, 10
Isaiah 64:10, 11	Daniel 9:16-18

fear of him? No, but he does allow it, and in their despair the Jews lament that Jehovah gave them such freedom. (Exodus 4:21; Nehemiah 9:16) They wish that Jehovah had stepped in to prevent them from doing wrong.

5 Of course, God does not deal with humans in that way. We are free moral agents, and Jehovah allows us to decide for ourselves whether to obey him or not. (Deuteronomy 30:15-19) Jehovah wants worship that stems from hearts and minds that are motivated by genuine love. Hence, he has allowed the Jews to exercise their free will, even though this has permitted them to rebel against him. It is in this way that he has made their hearts hard.—2 Chronicles 36:14-21.

6 What is the result? Isaiah prophetically says: ***"For a little while your holy people had possession. Our own adversaries have stamped down your sanctuary. We have for a long time become as those over whom you did not rule, as those upon whom your name had not been called."*** **(*Isaiah 63:18, 19*)** Jehovah's people had possession of his sanctuary for a while. Then Jehovah allowed it to be destroyed and his nation to be taken into exile. When that happened, it was as if there had been no covenant between him and the offspring of Abraham and as if his name had not been called upon them. Now captive in Babylon, the Jews cry out in their hopelessness: ***"O if only you had ripped the heavens apart, that you had come down, that on account of you the very mountains had quaked, as when a fire ignites the brushwood, and the fire makes the very water boil up, in order to make***

6, 7. (a) What results from the Jews' leaving Jehovah's ways? (b) What vain wish is expressed, but what have the Jews no right to expect?

your name known to your adversaries, that on account of you the nations might be agitated!" **(*Isaiah 64:1, 2*)** Jehovah does indeed have the power to save. He certainly could have come down and fought for his people, ripping apart heavenlike governmental systems and breaking up mountainlike empires. Jehovah could have made his name known by showing his fiery zeal in behalf of his people.

7 Jehovah had done such things in the past. Isaiah recounts: ***"When you did fear-inspiring things for which we could not hope, you came down. On account of you the mountains themselves quaked."*** **(*Isaiah 64:3*)** Such great acts demonstrated Jehovah's power and Godship. However, the unfaithful Jews of Isaiah's time have no right to expect Jehovah to act in such a way for their benefit.

Only Jehovah Can Save

8 False gods perform no powerful acts of salvation for their worshipers. Isaiah writes: ***"From time long ago none have heard, nor have any given ear, nor has an eye itself seen a God, except you, that acts for the one that keeps in expectation of him. You have met up with the one exulting and doing righteousness, those who keep remembering you in your own ways."*** **(*Isaiah 64:4, 5a*)** Jehovah alone is "the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him." (Hebrews 11:6) He acts to protect those doing righteousness and those remembering him. (Isaiah 30:18) Have the Jews acted in this way? No. Isaiah says to Jehovah: ***"Look! You yourself became indignant, while we kept***

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8. (a) What is one way that Jehovah is different from the false gods of the nations? (b) Why does Jehovah not act to save his people despite being able to do so? (c) How does Paul quote and apply Isaiah 64:4? (See box on page 366.)

sinning—in them a long time, and should we be saved?" (Isaiah 64:5b) Because God's people have a long record of persistent sinfulness, there is no basis for Jehovah to hold back his indignation and act for their salvation.

9 The Jews cannot undo the past, but if they repent and return to pure worship, they can hope for forgiveness and future blessings. Jehovah will reward repentant ones in his due time by releasing them from Babylonian captivity. Still, they need to be patient. Despite their repentance, Jehovah will not change his timetable. If they keep alert and are responsive to Jehovah's will, however, they are assured of eventual liberation. Similarly, Christians today patiently keep in expectation of Jehovah. (2 Peter 3:11, 12) We take to heart the words of the apostle Paul, who said: "Let us not give up in doing what is fine, for in due season we shall reap if we do not tire out."—Galatians 6:9.

10 Isaiah's prophetic prayer is more than a formal confession of sin. It expresses sincere recognition of the nation's inability to save itself. The prophet says: ***"We become like someone unclean, all of us, and all our acts of righteousness are like a garment for periods of menstruation; and we shall fade away like leafage, all of us, and our errors themselves will carry us away just like a wind." (Isaiah 64:6)*** By the end of the exile, repentant Jews may have ceased practicing apostasy. They may have turned to Jehovah with acts of righteousness. But they are still imperfect. Their good deeds, while praiseworthy, are no better than soiled garments when it

9. What can repentant Jews hope for, and what can we learn from this?

10. What inability is frankly confessed in Isaiah's prayer?

"Eye Has Not Seen"

In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul quoted the book of Isaiah when he wrote: "Just as it is written: 'Eye has not seen and ear has not heard, neither have there been conceived in the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him.'" (1 Corinthians 2:9)* Neither Paul's statement nor the expressions of Isaiah refer to the things Jehovah has prepared for his people in a heavenly inheritance or in a future earthly paradise. Paul is applying Isaiah's words to the blessings that were already being enjoyed by Christians in the first century, such as understanding the deeper things of God and receiving spiritual enlightenment from Jehovah.

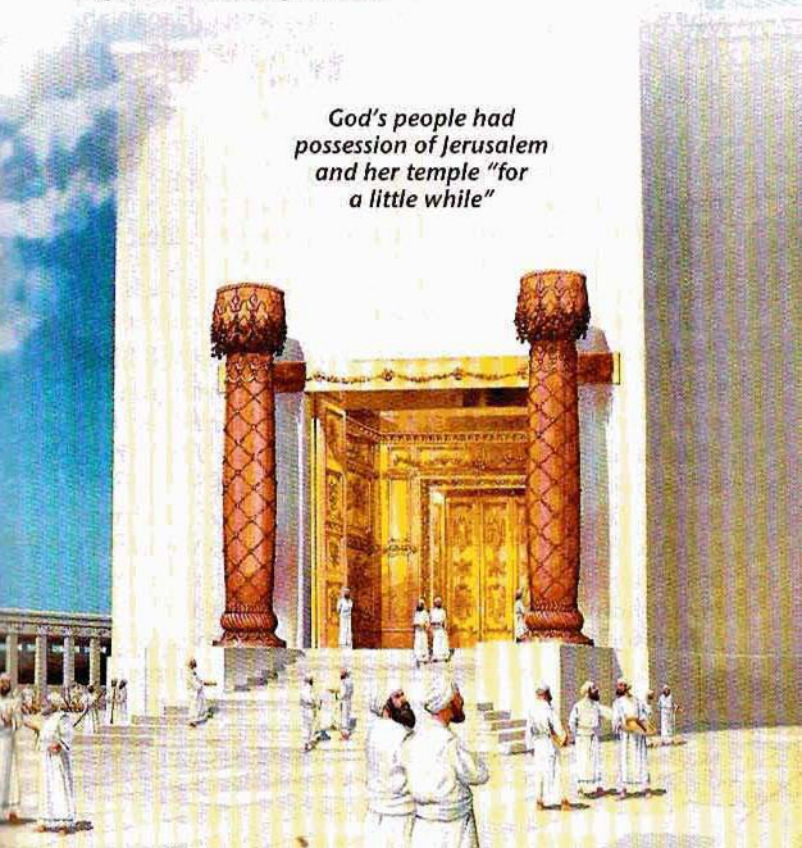
We can understand deep spiritual things only when it is Jehovah's due time to reveal them—and even then, only if we are spiritual people with a close relationship with Jehovah. Paul's words apply to those with little or no spirituality. Their eye cannot see, or discern, spiritual truths, and their ear cannot hear, or understand, such things. Knowledge of the things that God has prepared for those who love him does not even enter into the hearts of such men. But to those who are dedicated to God, as Paul was, God has revealed these things through his spirit.—1 Corinthians 2:1-16.

*Paul's words are not found in the Hebrew Scriptures exactly as he quoted them. He seems to be combining the thoughts of Isaiah 52:15; 64:4; and 65:17.

comes to atonement for sins. Jehovah's forgiveness is an undeserved gift motivated by his mercy. It is not something that can be earned.—Romans 3:23, 24.

11 As Isaiah looks ahead, what does he see? The prophet prays: ***"There is no one calling upon your name, no one rousing himself to lay hold on you; for you have concealed your face from us, and you cause us to melt by the power of our error."*** **(*Isaiah 64:7*)** The spiritual condition

11. (a) What unhealthy spiritual condition exists among most of the Jews in exile, and why may this be? (b) Who were excellent examples of faith during the exile?



God's people had possession of Jerusalem and her temple "for a little while"

of the nation is abysmal. The people have not been calling upon God's name in prayer. While no longer guilty of the gross sin of idolatry, they are evidently negligent in their worship, and there is "no one rousing himself to lay hold" on Jehovah. They clearly do not enjoy a healthy relationship with the Creator. Perhaps some feel unworthy to address Jehovah in prayer. Others may go about their daily routine without taking him into account. Of course, there are such individuals as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Ezekiel among the exiles, and these are fine examples of faith. (Hebrews 11:33, 34) As the 70-year period of captivity draws to a close, such men as Haggai, Zechariah, Zerubbabel, and High Priest Joshua stand ready to take an excellent lead in calling upon the name of Jehovah. Still, Isaiah's prophetic prayer seems to describe the condition of the majority of the exiles.

"To Obey Is Better Than a Sacrifice"

12 Repentant Jews are willing to change. Representing them, Isaiah prays to Jehovah: ***"Now, O Jehovah, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are our Potter; and all of us are the work of your hand."*** (***Isaiah 64:8***) These words once again acknowledge Jehovah's authority as Father, or Life-Giver. (Job 10:9) Jews who repent are compared to malleable clay. Those who respond to Jehovah's discipline can in a figurative way be shaped, or formed, in harmony with God's standards. But this can be accomplished only if Jehovah, the Potter, extends forgiveness. Hence, Isaiah twice appeals to him to remember that the Jews are his people: ***"Do not be indignant, O Je-***

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12. How does Isaiah express the willingness of repentant Jews to change their conduct?

hovah, to the extreme, and do not forever remember our error. Look, now, please: we are all your people."—Isaiah 64:9.

13 During the exile, the Jews endure much more than mere captivity in a pagan land. The desolate condition of Jerusalem and her temple brings reproach upon them and their God. Isaiah's prayer of repentance recounts some of the things that cause this reproach: ***"Your own holy cities have become a wilderness. Zion itself has become a sheer wilderness, Jerusalem a desolate waste. Our house of holiness and beauty, in which our forefathers praised you, has itself become something for burning in the fire; and every one of our desirable things has become a devastation."—Isaiah 64:10, 11.***

14 Of course, Jehovah is well aware of the state of affairs in the ancestral land of the Jews. About 420 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, he warned his people that if they turned away from his commandments and served other gods, he would "cut [them] off from upon the surface of the ground," and the beautiful temple would "become heaps of ruins." (1 Kings 9:6-9) True, Jehovah found delight in the land he had given to his people, the magnificent temple built in his honor, and the sacrifices made to him. But loyalty and obedience are more important than material things, even sacrifices. The prophet Samuel aptly said to King Saul: "Does Jehovah have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Look! To obey

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13. What is the condition of the land of Israel while God's people are in exile?

14. (a) How did Jehovah warn of the situation that now exists? (b) While Jehovah found delight in his temple and the sacrifices made there, what is more important?

is better than a sacrifice, to pay attention than the fat of rams."—1 Samuel 15:22.

15 Nevertheless, can the God of Israel look upon the calamity of his repentant people and fail to be moved to pity? Such is the question with which Isaiah ends his prophetic prayer. On behalf of the exiled Jews, he pleads: ***"In the face of these things will you continue keeping yourself in check, O Jehovah? Will you stay still and let us be afflicted to the extreme?" (Isaiah 64:12)*** As the situation turns out, Jehovah does indeed forgive his people, and in 537 B.C.E., he brings them back to their land so that they can resume pure worship there. (Joel 2:13) Centuries later, however, Jerusalem and her temple were once again destroyed, and God's covenant nation was finally rejected by him. Why? Because Jehovah's people had drifted away from his commandments and had rejected the Messiah. (John 1:11; 3:19, 20) When that happened, Jehovah replaced Israel with a new nation, a spiritual nation, namely, "the Israel of God."—Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9.

Jehovah, the "Hearer of Prayer"

16 Important lessons can be learned from what happened to Israel. We see that Jehovah is "good and ready to forgive." (Psalm 86:5) As imperfect creatures, we depend on his mercy and forgiveness to receive salvation. No works of ours can help us to earn these blessings. However, Jehovah does not extend forgiveness indiscriminately. Only those who repent of their sins and turn around are in line for divine pardon.—Acts 3:19.

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15. (a) What plea does Isaiah prophetically make to Jehovah, and how is it answered? (b) What events led up to Jehovah's final rejection of Israel as a nation?

16. What does the Bible teach regarding Jehovah's forgiveness?

17 We also learn that Jehovah is keenly interested in our thoughts and feelings when we express them in prayer to him. He is the "Hearer of prayer." (Psalm 65:2, 3) The apostle Peter assures us: "The eyes of Jehovah are upon the righteous ones, and his ears are toward their supplication." (1 Peter 3:12) Further, we learn that a prayer of repentance must include a humble confession of sins. (Proverbs 28:13) This does not mean, though, that we can presume on God's mercy. The Bible warns Christians "not to accept the undeserved kindness of God and miss its purpose."—2 Corinthians 6:1.

18 Finally, we learn the purpose of God's patience toward his sinful people. The apostle Peter explained that Jehovah is patient "because he does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) Nevertheless, those who persistently abuse God's patience will eventually be punished. Concerning this we read: "[Jehovah] will render to each one according to his works: everlasting life to those who are seeking glory and honor and incorruptibleness by endurance in work that is good; however, for those who are contentious and who disobey the truth but obey unrighteousness there will be wrath and anger."—Romans 2:6-8.

19 This is the way God dealt with ancient Israel. Our relationship with Jehovah today is governed by the same principles because he does not change. While not holding back deserved punishment, he will always be "Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth, preserving loving-kindness for thousands, pardoning error and transgression and sin."—Exodus 34:6, 7.

17, 18. (a) How do we know that Jehovah is genuinely interested in our thoughts and feelings? (b) Why does Jehovah exercise patience toward sinful humans?

19. What unchangeable qualities will Jehovah always display?

"Be Joyful Forever in What I Am Creating"

Isaiah 65:1-25

WILL we ever see an end to injustices and suffering? Over 1,900 years ago, the apostle Peter penned these reassuring words: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to [God's] promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:13) Peter, along with many other faithful servants of God throughout the centuries, looked forward to the grand day when lawlessness, oppression, and violence would cease and righteousness would prevail. Can we be sure that this promise will be fulfilled?

2 Yes, we can! When Peter spoke of "new heavens and a new earth," he was not introducing a new idea. About 800 years earlier, Jehovah through the prophet Isaiah uttered similar words. That earlier promise had a small-scale fulfillment in 537 B.C.E. when the Jews were released from Babylonish captivity, enabling them to return to their homeland. But Isaiah's prophecy is having a grand fulfillment today, and we look forward to an even more thrilling fulfillment in God's coming new world. Indeed, the heartwarming prophecy given through

1. What reassuring words were penned by the apostle Peter, and what question arises?

2. Which prophet had spoken of "new heavens and a new earth," and what fulfillments does that ancient prophecy have?

Isaiah provides a glimpse of the blessings that God has in store for those who love him.

Jehovah Reaches Out to "a Stubborn People"

3 Recall that Isaiah 63:15–64:12 contains Isaiah's prophetic prayer on behalf of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. As Isaiah's words make clear, many Jews are not worshiping Jehovah whole-souled, but some have repented and turned to him. Will Jehovah now restore the nation for the sake of that contrite remnant? We find the answer in Isaiah chapter 65. But before uttering a promise of deliverance for the few who are faithful, Jehovah describes the judgment awaiting the many who are without faith.

4 Jehovah has put up with persistent rebelliousness on the part of his people. The time will come, however, when he will abandon them to their enemies and kindly welcome others into his favor. Through Isaiah, Jehovah says: ***"I have let myself be searched for by those who had not asked for me. I have let myself be found by those who had not looked for me. I have said, 'Here I am, here I am!' to a nation that was not calling upon my name." (Isaiah 65:1)*** It is a sad commentary on Jehovah's covenant people that those of the nations will come to Jehovah but stubborn Judah as a whole will refuse to do so. Isaiah is not the only prophet to foretell that God will ultimately choose a people not previously recognized. (Hosea 1: 10; 2:23) The apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 65:1, 2 from the *Septuagint* to prove that people of the nations would obtain "the righteousness that results from faith" even though natural-born Jews refused to do so.—Romans 9: 30; 10:20, 21.

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3. What question is answered for us in Isaiah chapter 65?
4. (a) In contrast with his rebellious people, who will search for Jehovah? (b) How did the apostle Paul apply Isaiah 65:1, 2?

5 Jehovah explains why he will allow his own people to suffer calamity: ***"I have spread out my hands all day long to a stubborn people, those who are walking in the way that is not good, after their thoughts."*** **(*Isaiah 65:2*)** To spread out one's hands denotes an invitation or an entreaty. Jehovah has spread out his hands, not just briefly, but all day long. His heartfelt desire is that Judah return to him. Yet, this stubborn people has failed to respond.

6 What a heartwarming lesson we learn from Jehovah's words! He wants us to draw close to him because he is an approachable God. (James 4:8) These words also show us that Jehovah is humble. (Psalm 113:5, 6) After all, he continues figuratively to spread out his hands, entreating his people to return despite the fact that their stubbornness has made him "feel hurt." (Psalm 78:40, 41) Only after appealing to them for centuries does he finally abandon them to their enemies. Even then, he does not close the door on humble individuals among them.

7 The stubborn Jews have repeatedly provoked Jehovah by their disgraceful conduct. Jehovah describes their offensive actions: ***"The people made up of those offending me right to my face constantly, sacrificing in the gardens and making sacrificial smoke upon the bricks, seating themselves among the burial places, who also pass the night even in the watch huts, eating the flesh of the pig, even the broth of foul things being in their vessels; those who are saying, 'Keep close to yourself. Do not approach me, for I shall certainly convey holiness to you.' These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire burning all day long."*** **(*Isa-***

5, 6. (a) What earnest desire has Jehovah manifested, but how have his people responded? (b) What can we learn from Jehovah's dealings with Judah?

7, 8. In what ways have Jehovah's stubborn people provoked him?

iah 65:3-5) These seemingly pious ones are offending Jehovah 'right to his face'—an expression that may imply audacity and disrespect. They make no effort to conceal their abominations. Is it not especially reprehensible to commit sins in the very presence of the One who ought to be honored and obeyed?

8 These self-righteous sinners are, in effect, saying to other Jews: 'Keep your distance, for I am holier than you.' What hypocrisy! These "pious" ones are offering sacrifices and burning incense to false deities, which God's Law condemns. (Exodus 20:2-6) They are sitting among the burial places, which makes them unclean according to the Law. (Numbers 19:14-16) They are eating the flesh of the pig, an unclean food.* (Leviticus 11:7) Yet, their religious activities make them feel holier than other Jews, and they want other people to keep away so that these will not become sanctified, as it were, or clean, by mere association. Nevertheless, that is not at all how the God who exacts "exclusive devotion" views matters!—Deuteronomy 4:24.

9 Rather than considering these self-righteous ones to be holy, Jehovah says: "These are a smoke in my nostrils." The Hebrew word for "nose" or "nostril" is often used figuratively for anger. Smoke too is associated with Jehovah's burning anger. (Deuteronomy 29:20) The disgusting idolatry into which his people have fallen has provoked Jehovah's burning anger.

10 In his justice, Jehovah cannot let these willful sinners

* Many think that these sinners were at the burial places attempting to communicate with the dead. Their eating the flesh of the pig may have been connected with idol worship.

9. How does Jehovah view the self-righteous sinners?
10. How will Jehovah repay those in Judah for their sins?

go unpunished. Isaiah writes: "*'Look! It is written before me. I shall not keep still, but I will render a reward; I will even render the reward into their own bosom, for their own errors and for the errors of their forefathers at the same time,' Jehovah has said. 'Because they have made sacrificial smoke upon the mountains, and upon the hills they have reproached me, I will also measure out their wages first of all into their own bosom.'*" (*Isaiah 65:6, 7*) By engaging in false worship, these Jews have reproached Jehovah. They have made worship of the true God appear to be no better than that of the nations around them. "For their own errors," including idolatry and spiritism, Jehovah will recompense them "into their own bosom." The expression "bosom" evidently refers to a gathered fold of the upper garment that formed a pouch where vendors might pour a measured amount of produce. (Luke 6:38) For apostate Jews, the meaning is clear —Jehovah will measure out their "reward," or punishment. The God of justice will exact retribution. (Psalm 79:12; Jeremiah 32:18) Since Jehovah does not change, we can be confident that in his due time, he will measure out punishment in a similar way on this wicked system of things.—Malachi 3:6.

"For the Sake of My Servants"

11 Will Jehovah show mercy to faithful ones among his people? Isaiah explains: "*This is what Jehovah has said: 'In the same way that the new wine is found in the cluster and someone has to say, "Do not ruin it, because there is a blessing in it," so I shall do for the sake of my servants in order not to bring everybody to ruin. And I will bring forth out of Jacob an offspring and out of Judah*

11. How does Jehovah indicate that he will save a faithful remnant?

***the hereditary possessor of my mountains; and my chosen ones must take possession of it, and my own servants will reside there.'"* (Isaiah 65:8, 9)** In comparing his people to a cluster of grapes, Jehovah uses an illustration that they can readily understand. Grapes are abundant in the land, and wine made from grapes is a blessing for mankind. (Psalm 104:15) The image presented may be that of a cluster on which some, but not all, of the grapes are good. Or the idea may be that one cluster is good, while other clusters are unripe or rotten. In either case, the vinedresser will not destroy good grapes. Jehovah thus reassures his people that he will not utterly destroy the nation but will spare a faithful remnant. He states that this favored remnant will possess his "mountains," that is, Jerusalem and the land of Judah, the hilly country that Jehovah claimed as his own.

12 What blessings await this faithful remnant? Jehovah explains: ***"Sharon must become a pasture ground for sheep and the low plain of Achor a resting-place for cattle, for my people who will have looked for me."* (Isaiah 65:10)** Flocks play an important role in the lives of many Jews, and abundant grazing land helps to create prosperity during times of peace. Jehovah refers to two extremities of the land in order to paint a picture of peace and prosperity. To the west the Plain of Sharon, noted for its beauty and fertility, stretches along the Mediterranean Coast. The Valley of Achor forms part of the northeastern boundary of the land. (Joshua 15:7) During the coming exile, these areas will lie waste, along with the rest of the land. Jehovah promises, however, that after the exile they will become beautiful pasture grounds for the returning remnant.—Isaiah 35:2; Hosea 2:15.

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12. What blessings await the faithful remnant?

Trusting in "the God of Good Luck"

13 Isaiah's prophecy now turns back to those who have left Jehovah and have persisted in idolatry. It says: ***"You men are those leaving Jehovah, those forgetting my holy mountain, those setting in order a table for the god of Good Luck and those filling up mixed wine for the god of Destiny."*** **(*Isaiah 65:11*)** By setting a table of food and drink before "the god of Good Luck" and "the god of Destiny," these backsliding Jews have fallen into the idolatrous practices of the heathen nations.* What will become of any who naively trust in these gods?

14 Jehovah forthrightly warns them: ***"I will destine you men to the sword, and you will all of you bow down to being slaughtered; for the reason that I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not listen; and you kept doing what was bad in my eyes, and the thing in which I took no delight you chose."*** **(*Isaiah 65:12*)** With a pun on the name of the god of Destiny in the original Hebrew, Jehovah says that those who are worshiping this false deity will be 'destined to the sword,' that is, to destruction. Jehovah has repeatedly called these men to repentance by means of his prophets, but they have ignored him and have stubbornly chosen to do what they know is bad in his eyes. What contempt they show for God! In fulfillment of God's warning, the nation will suffer a great ca-

* Commenting on this verse, Bible translator Jerome (born in the fourth century C.E.) tells of an ancient custom observed by idolaters on the last day of the final month of their year. He wrote: "They would spread a table covered with various kinds of foods and a cup mixed with sweet wine to ensure good luck for the fertility of either the past or the coming year."

13, 14. What practices show that God's people have left him, and what will happen to them as a result?

tastrophe in 607 B.C.E. when Jehovah allows the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and her temple. At that time "the god of Good Luck" will fail to protect its devotees in Judah and Jerusalem.—2 Chronicles 36:17.

15 Today true Christians heed the warning found at Isaiah 65:11, 12. They do not believe in "Good Luck," as if it were some kind of supernatural force able to bestow favors. Refusing to squander their material possessions in trying to appease "the god of Good Luck," they avoid all forms of gambling. They are convinced that those devoting themselves to this god will eventually lose everything, for to such ones Jehovah says: "I will destine you men to the sword."

"Look! My Own Servants Will Rejoice"

16 In reproving those who have abandoned Jehovah, the prophecy describes the contrasting portions awaiting those who sincerely worship God and those who do so hypocritically: ***"This is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah has said: 'Look! My own servants will eat, but you yourselves will go hungry. Look! My own servants will drink, but you yourselves will go thirsty. Look! My own servants will rejoice, but you yourselves will suffer shame. Look! My own servants will cry out joyfully because of the good condition of the heart, but you yourselves will make outcries because of the pain of heart and you will howl because of sheer breakdown of spirit.'"*** **(*Isaiah 65:13, 14*)** Jehovah will bless his faithful servants. With hearts overflowing with joy, they will break out in shouting. Eating, drinking, and rejoicing are terms signifying that Jehovah

15. In what way do true Christians today heed the warning found at Isaiah 65:11, 12?

16. In what ways will Jehovah bless his faithful servants, but what will be true of those who have forsaken him?

will abundantly satisfy the needs of his worshipers. In contrast, those who have chosen to forsake Jehovah will hunger and thirst spiritually. Their needs will not be satisfied. They will cry out and howl because of the anguish and distress that will come upon them.

17 Jehovah's words well describe the spiritual condition today of those who merely claim to serve God. While Christendom's millions suffer breakdown of spirit, however, Jehovah's worshipers cry out joyfully. And they have good reason to rejoice. They are well fed spiritually. Jehovah provides them with an abundant supply of spiritual food through Bible-based publications and Christian gatherings. Truly, the upbuilding truths and the comforting promises of God's Word give us a "good condition of the heart"!

18 Jehovah continues to address those who have forsaken him: ***"You men will certainly lay up your name for an oath by my chosen ones, and the Sovereign Lord Jehovah will actually put you individually to death, but his own servants he will call by another name; so that anyone blessing himself in the earth will bless himself by the God of faith, and anyone making a sworn statement in the earth will swear by the God of faith; because the former distresses will actually be forgotten and because they will actually be concealed from my eyes."*** **(*Isaiah 65:15, 16*)** All that will remain of those who have forsaken Jehovah is their name, which will be used only in an oath, or a curse. This may mean that those who wish to bind themselves in a solemn manner by an oath will, in effect, say: 'If I do not fulfill this promise, let me experience the punishment

17. Why do God's people today have good reason to cry out joyfully?
18. What will remain of those who have forsaken Jehovah, and what may be suggested by the use of their name in an oath?

that those apostates received.' It may even mean that their name will be used illustratively, like Sodom and Gomorrah, as a symbol of God's punishment of the wicked.

19 How different the lot of God's own servants will be! They will be called by another name. That signifies the blessed condition and honor they will enjoy back in their homeland. They will not seek a blessing from any false god or swear by any lifeless idol. Instead, when they bless themselves or swear an oath, they will do so by the God of faithfulness. (Isaiah 65:16, footnote) The inhabitants of the land will have reason for complete confidence in God, for he will have proved himself to be true to his promises.* Safe in their homeland, the Jews will soon forget the former distresses.

"I Am Creating New Heavens and a New Earth"

20 Jehovah now expands on his promise to restore a repentant remnant after their return from exile in Babylon. Through Isaiah, Jehovah says: ***"Here I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart." (Isaiah 65:17)*** Jehovah's promise of restoration is certain to be fulfilled, so he speaks of that future restoration as if it were already taking place. This prophecy was initially fulfilled in 537 B.C.E. when the Jewish

* According to Isaiah 65:16 in the Hebrew Masoretic text, Jehovah is "the God of Amen." "Amen" means "so be it," or "surely," and is an affirmation or guarantee that something is true or is bound to come true. By carrying out all that he promises, Jehovah shows that what he says is true.

19. How will God's servants be called by another name, and why will they have confidence in the God of faithfulness? (See also footnote.)
20. How was Jehovah's promise of "new heavens and a new earth" fulfilled in 537 B.C.E.?

remnant was restored to Jerusalem. What constituted the "new heavens" at that time? The governorship of Zerubbabel supported by High Priest Joshua and centered at Jerusalem. The restored Jewish remnant made up "a new earth," a cleansed society that submitted to such rulership and helped to reestablish pure worship in the land. (Ezra 5:1, 2) The joy of that restoration eclipsed all previous suffering; the former distresses were not even called to mind.—Psalm 126:1, 2.

21 Recall, however, that Peter echoed Isaiah's prophecy and showed that it had a future fulfillment. The apostle wrote: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:13) In 1914 the long-awaited new heavens came into existence. The Messianic Kingdom born in that year rules from heaven itself, and Jehovah has given it authority over all the earth. (Psalm 2:6-8) This Kingdom government, under Christ and his 144,000 corulers, is the new heavens.—Revelation 14:1.

22 What of the new earth? Following the pattern of the ancient fulfillment, the new earth will be made up of people who gladly submit to the rulership of the new heavenly government. Even now, millions of rightly disposed individuals subject themselves to this government and strive to follow its laws as found in the Bible. These ones come from all nationalities, languages, and races, and they work together to serve the reigning King Jesus Christ. (Micah 4:1-4) After the passing of the present wicked system of things, this group will form the nucleus of a new earth that will eventually be a globe-encircling

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21. What new heavens came into existence in 1914?
22. Who will make up the new earth, and how are people being prepared even now to become the nucleus of that arrangement?

society of God-fearing humans who inherit the earthly realm of God's Kingdom.—Matthew 25:34.

23 The book of Revelation describes a vision the apostle John saw of the coming day of Jehovah, when this system of things will be removed. After that, Satan will be abyssed. (Revelation 19:11–20:3) Following that description, John echoes the prophetic words of Isaiah, writing: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." The subsequent verses of the account of this glorious vision tell of the time when Jehovah God will radically change conditions on this earth for the better. (Revelation 21:1, 3-5) Clearly, Isaiah's promise of "new heavens and a new earth" will have a wonderful fulfillment in God's new world! Under the new governmental heavens, a new earthly society will enjoy a paradise that is both spiritual and physical. Comforting indeed is the promise that "the former things [sicknesses, suffering, and the many other woes humans face] will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart." Whatever we may remember at that time will not cause us the deep hurt, or pain, that now burdens the hearts of many.

24 Isaiah's prophecy continues: ***"Exult, you people, and be joyful forever in what I am creating. For here I am creating Jerusalem a cause for joyfulness and her people a cause for exultation. And I will be joyful in Jerusalem and exult in my people; and no more will there be heard in her the sound of weeping or the sound of a plaintive cry." (Isaiah 65:18, 19)*** Not only will the Jews rejoice

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23. What information do we find in the book of Revelation concerning "a new heaven and a new earth," and how will this prophecy be fulfilled?

24. Why will Jehovah rejoice over the restoration of Jerusalem, and what will no longer be heard in the streets of that city?

over being restored to their homeland but God himself will rejoice, for he will make Jerusalem beautiful—once again the center of true worship in the earth. The sound of weeping over calamity, which was heard in the streets of that city decades earlier, will be heard no more.

25 Today, too, Jehovah makes Jerusalem "a cause for joyfulness." How? As we have already seen, the new heavens that came into existence in 1914 will eventually include 144,000 corulers, who have a share in the heavenly government. These are prophetically described as "New Jerusalem." (Revelation 21:2) It is with regard to New Jerusalem that God says: "Here I am creating Jerusalem a cause for joyfulness and her people a cause for exultation." New Jerusalem will be used by God to shower untold blessings on obedient mankind. No more will be heard the sound of weeping or a plaintive cry, for Jehovah will satisfy "the requests of [our] heart."—Psalm 37: 3, 4.

26 Truly, there is every reason for us today to exult! Soon Jehovah will sanctify his illustrious name by destroying all opposers. (Psalm 83:17, 18) Then the new heavens will be in complete control. What wonderful reasons these are to exult and be joyful forever in what God is creating!

The Promise of a Secure Future

27 In the first fulfillment, what is life to be like for returning Jews under the new heavens? Jehovah says: *"No*

25, 26. (a) In our day, how does Jehovah make Jerusalem "a cause for joyfulness"? (b) How will Jehovah use New Jerusalem, and why can we today exult?

27. In what way does Isaiah describe the security that the returning Jews will enjoy in their homeland?

more will there come to be a suckling a few days old from that place, neither an old man that does not fulfill his days; for one will die as a mere boy, although a hundred years of age; and as for the sinner, although a hundred years of age he will have evil called down upon him." (Isaiah 65:20) What a beautiful picture of the security that the returning exiles will enjoy in their restored homeland! Untimely death will not claim a newborn, who is but a few days old. Neither will such a death take an older man who has not yet lived out a full life span.* How reassuring Isaiah's words are to the Jews who will return to Judah! Safe in their land, they need not worry that enemies will carry off their babes or slaughter their men.

28 What do Jehovah's words tell us about life in the coming new world? Under God's Kingdom, every child will have the prospect of a secure future. Never will death claim a God-fearing man in his prime. On the contrary, obedient mankind will be safe, secure, able to enjoy life. What of any who choose to rebel against God? Such ones will lose the privilege of life. Even if the rebellious sinner is "a hundred years of age," he will die. In such a case, he will be "a mere boy" compared to what he could have become—a man with endless life.

29 Jehovah continues his description of the conditions

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* *The Jerusalem Bible* renders Isaiah 65:20: "No more will be found the infant living a few days only, or the old man not living to the end of his days."

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28. What do we learn from Jehovah's words about life in the new world under his Kingdom?

29. (a) God's obedient people will have what joys in the restored land of Judah? (b) Why are trees a fitting illustration of longevity? (See footnote.)

that will prevail in the restored land of Judah: ***"They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build and someone else have occupancy; they will not plant and someone else do the eating. For 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 65:21, 22)*** After returning to the desolate and no doubt houseless and vineless land of Judah, God's obedient people will have the joy of living in their own homes and of eating the fruitage of their own vineyards. God will bless their work, and they will have long lives—like the days of a tree—in which to enjoy the fruits of their labors.*

30 In our day, there has been a fulfillment of this prophecy. Jehovah's people came forth from spiritual exile in 1919 and began restoring their "land," or realm of activity and worship. They built congregations and cultivated spiritual fruitfulness. As a result, even now Jehovah's people enjoy a spiritual paradise and God-given peace. We can be sure that such peace will continue into the physical Paradise. We cannot even begin to imagine what Jehovah will accomplish with the willing hearts and hands of his worshipers in the new world. What a joy it will be to build your own home and then to live in it! Under Kingdom rule, there will be no shortage of satisfying work. How rewarding it will be always to "see

* Trees are a fitting illustration of longevity, for they are among the most enduring living things known. For example, an olive tree produces fruit for hundreds of years and may live up to a thousand years.

30. What happy situation do Jehovah's servants enjoy today, and what will they enjoy in the new world?

good" for the fruits of your own labors! (Ecclesiastes 3: 13) Will we have ample time to enjoy to the full the work of our hands? Yes, indeed! The unending lives of faithful humans will be "like the days of a tree"—*thousands* of years, and more!

31 Jehovah describes more blessings that await the returning exiles: ***"They will not toil for nothing, nor will they bring to birth for disturbance; because they are the offspring made up of the blessed ones of Jehovah, and their descendants with them." (Isaiah 65:23)*** Those restored Jews will be blessed by Jehovah, so they will not labor in vain. Parents will not bring forth children merely for these to suffer an early death. The former exiles will not be alone in enjoying the blessings of the restoration; their offspring will be with them. So eager is God to fulfill his people's needs that he promises: ***"It will actually occur that before they call out I myself shall answer; while they are yet speaking, I myself shall hear."—Isaiah 65:24.***

32 How will Jehovah fulfill these promises in the coming new world? We will have to wait and see. Jehovah has not provided all the details, but we can be sure that faithful humans will never again "toil for nothing." The great crowd of Armageddon survivors and any children who may be born to them will have the prospect of a very long and satisfying life—everlasting life! Those who come back in the resurrection and who choose to live in harmony with God's standards will also find joy in the new world. Jehovah will hear and respond to their needs, even anticipating them. Indeed, Jehovah will open his hand and satisfy the proper "desire of every living thing." —Psalm 145:16.

31, 32. (a) What blessings will the returning exiles enjoy? (b) In the new world, what prospect will faithful humans have?

33 How far-reaching will the promised peace and security be? Jehovah concludes this portion of the prophecy: ***"'The wolf and the lamb themselves will feed as one, and the lion will eat straw just like the bull; and as for the serpent, his food will be dust. They will do no harm nor cause any ruin in all my holy mountain,' Jehovah has said."*** **(*Isaiah 65:25*)** When the faithful Jewish remnant return to their homeland, they will be under Jehovah's care. A lion will, in effect, eat straw like a bull, for the lion will do no harm to the Jews or their domestic animals. This promise is sure, for it concludes with the words, "Jehovah has said." And his word always comes true!—Isaiah 55:10, 11.

34 Jehovah's words are finding a thrilling fulfillment among true worshipers today. Since 1919, God has blessed the spiritual land of his people, transforming it into a spiritual paradise. Those coming into this spiritual paradise make remarkable changes in their lives. (Ephesians 4:22-24) With the help of God's spirit, individuals who at one time had beastlike personalities—who perhaps exploited or otherwise victimized their fellowman—make progress in taming undesirable traits. As a result, they enjoy peace and unity of worship with fellow believers. The blessings now enjoyed by Jehovah's people in their spiritual paradise will extend into the physical Paradise, where the peace prevailing among humans will be matched by peace with the animals. We can be sure that in God's due time, his original commission to mankind will be properly carried out: "Subdue [the earth], and have in subjection the fish of the sea and the flying

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33. When the Jews return to their homeland, in what sense will the animals be at peace?

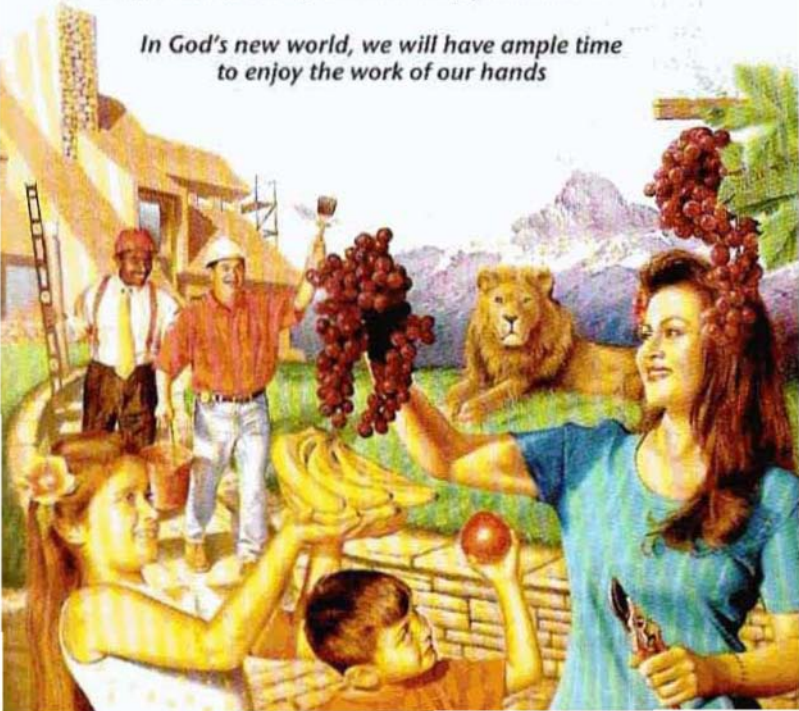
34. What thrilling fulfillment do Jehovah's words have today and in the new world?

creatures of the heavens and every living creature that is moving upon the earth."—Genesis 1:28.

35 How grateful we are for Jehovah's promise to create "new heavens and a new earth"! That promise had a fulfillment in 537 B.C.E. and is having a further fulfillment today. These two fulfillments point the way to a glorious future for obedient mankind. Jehovah has kindly given us, through Isaiah's prophecy, a glimpse of what he has in store for those who love him. Truly, we have every reason to heed Jehovah's words: "Be joyful forever in what I am creating"!—Isaiah 65:18.

35. Why do we have every reason to "be joyful forever"?

In God's new world, we will have ample time to enjoy the work of our hands



Jehovah Blesses Pure Worship

Isaiah 66:1-14

IN THE final chapter of Isaiah, some of the major themes of this prophetic book are brought to a resounding climax, and a number of important questions are answered. Among the themes that are highlighted are Jehovah's loftiness, his hatred for hypocrisy, his determination to punish the wicked, and his love and concern for the faithful. Moreover, the following questions are answered: What distinguishes true worship from false? How can we be sure that Jehovah will bring retribution upon hypocrites who pretend to be holy while oppressing God's people? And how will Jehovah bless those who remain faithful to him?

The Key to Pure Worship

2 To begin with, the prophecy emphasizes Jehovah's grandeur: ***"This is what Jehovah has said: 'The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where, then, is the house that you people can build for me, and where, then, is the place as a resting-place for me?'"*** **(*Isaiah 66:1*)** Some believe that the prophet is discouraging the Jews from rebuilding the temple to Jehovah when the nation is restored to its homeland. Not so; Jehovah himself will command that the temple be rebuilt.

1. What themes are highlighted in the final chapter of Isaiah, and what questions are answered?
2. What pronouncement does Jehovah make concerning his grandeur, and what does this pronouncement not imply?

(Ezra 1:1-6; Isaiah 60:13; Haggai 1:7, 8) What, then, does this passage mean?

3 First, we might consider why the earth is described as Jehovah's "footstool." This is not a derogatory term. Among all the billions of celestial bodies in the universe, the earth alone is given this special designation. Our planet will stand forever as unique, for it is here that Jehovah's only-begotten Son paid the ransom, and it is here that Jehovah will vindicate his sovereignty by means of the Messianic Kingdom. How fitting that the earth be called Jehovah's footstool! A king might use such a stool for ascending to his lofty throne and thereafter as a resting-place for his feet.

4 Of course, a king would not reside upon his footstool, nor does Jehovah reside upon this earth. Why, even the vast physical heavens cannot contain him! Far less so could any mere building on the earth accommodate Jehovah so as to serve literally as a house for him. (1 Kings 8:27) Jehovah's throne and his resting-place are located in the spirit realm, which is the sense of the expression "the heavens" as used at Isaiah 66:1. The next verse drives the point home: ***"'Now all these things my own hand has made, so that all these came to be,' is the utterance of Jehovah." (Isaiah 66:2a)*** Picture Jehovah making a sweeping gesture as he points out "all these things" —everything in heaven and on earth. (Isaiah 40:26; Revelation 10:6) As the Grand Creator of all the universe, he deserves to have more than a mere building devoted to

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3. Why is it fitting that the earth is described as Jehovah's "footstool"?

4. (a) Why is it impossible for any building on earth to be a resting-place for Jehovah God? (b) What is meant by the phrase "all these things," and what must we conclude about worship of Jehovah?

him. He deserves more than merely an outward form of worship.

5 What kind of worship is fitting for the Universal Sovereign? He himself tells us: ***"To this one, then, I shall look, to the one afflicted and contrite in spirit and trembling at my word." (Isaiah 66:2b)*** Yes, essential to pure worship is a right heart attitude on the part of the worshiper. (Revelation 4:11) The worshiper of Jehovah must be "afflicted and contrite in spirit." Does this mean that Jehovah wants us to be unhappy? No, he is "the happy God," and he wants his worshipers to be joyful as well. (1 Timothy 1:11; Philippians 4:4) However, all of us sin frequently, and we must not take our sins lightly. We ought to be "afflicted" by them, saddened that we miss the mark of Jehovah's righteous standards. (Psalm 51:17) We need to show that we are "contrite in spirit" by repenting, fighting against our sinful tendencies, and praying to Jehovah for forgiveness.—Luke 11:4; 1 John 1: 8-10.

6 In addition, Jehovah looks to those 'trembling at his word.' Does this mean that he wants us to quake with fear whenever we read his pronouncements? No, rather, he wants us to view what he says with awe and reverence. We sincerely seek his counsel, using it for guidance in all the affairs of life. (Psalm 119:105) We may 'tremble,' too, in the sense that we fear the very thought of disobeying God, of polluting his truth with human traditions, or of treating it lightly. Such a humble attitude is essential to pure worship—but, sadly, it is a rarity in today's world.

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5. How do we show that we are "afflicted and contrite in spirit"?
6. In what sense should true worshipers 'tremble at God's word'?

Jehovah Hates Hypocritical Worship

7 As Isaiah contemplates his contemporaries, he is well aware that few have the disposition that Jehovah seeks in his worshipers. For this reason, apostate Jerusalem deserves her impending judgment. Note how Jehovah views worship taking place in her: ***"The one slaughtering the bull is as one striking down a man. The one sacrificing the sheep is as one breaking the neck of a dog. The one offering up a gift—the blood of a pig! The one presenting a memorial of frankincense is as one saying a blessing with uncanny words. They are also the ones that have chosen their own ways, and in their disgusting things their very soul has taken a delight."—Isaiah 66:3.***

8 These words remind us of Jehovah's words recorded in the first chapter of Isaiah. Jehovah there told his wayward people that their formal acts of worship not only failed to please him but actually caused his righteous anger to intensify because the worshipers were hypocritical. (Isaiah 1:11-17) Similarly, Jehovah now likens their offerings to heinous crimes. Their sacrificing a costly bull would no more appease Jehovah than would their murdering a human! Other sacrifices are likened to the offering up of a dog or a pig, animals that are unclean under the Mosaic Law and certainly unfit for sacrifice. (Leviticus 11:7, 27) Does Jehovah allow such religious hypocrisy to go unpunished?

9 Jehovah now says: ***"I myself, in turn, shall choose ways of ill-treating them; and the things frightful to them***

7, 8. How does Jehovah view formal worship by religious hypocrites?

9. How have most Jews responded to reminders from Jehovah through Isaiah, and what will be the inevitable result?

I shall bring upon them; for the reason that I called, but there was no one answering; I spoke, but there were none that listened; and they kept on doing what was bad in my eyes, and the thing in which I took no delight they chose." **(*Isaiah 66:4*)** Isaiah is no doubt able to utter these words with heartfelt conviction. For many years he has been Jehovah's instrument, 'calling' and 'speaking' to His people. The prophet knows all too well that, by and large, no one has been listening. Because they have kept on doing bad, retribution is inevitable. Jehovah will indeed choose their punishment and bring frightful events upon his apostate people.

10 Modern-day Christendom has similarly practiced things in which Jehovah takes no delight. Idolatry flourishes in her churches, unscriptural philosophies and traditions are exalted from her pulpits, and the quest for political power has led her ever deeper into a spiritually adulterous relationship with the nations of the world. (Mark 7:13; Revelation 18:4, 5, 9) As was the case with ancient Jerusalem, Christendom's just retribution —a "frightful" thing—is coming inexorably upon her. Among the reasons for her certain punishment is the way she has treated God's people.

11 Isaiah continues: ***"Hear the word of Jehovah, you men who are trembling at his word: 'Your brothers that are hating you, that are excluding you by reason of my name, said, "May Jehovah be glorified!" He must also appear with rejoicing on your part, and they are the ones***

10. What do Jehovah's dealings with Judah tell us about his view of Christendom?

11. (a) What adds to the sin of the apostates in Isaiah's day? (b) In what sense do Isaiah's contemporaries exclude faithful ones 'by reason of God's name'?

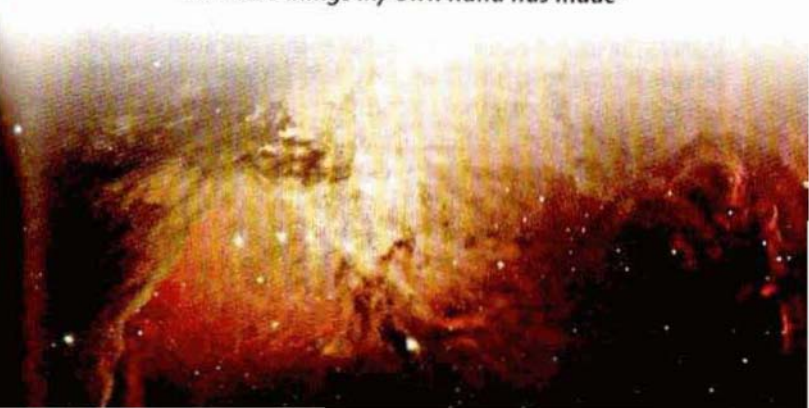
that will be put to shame.'" **(*Isaiah 66:5*)** Isaiah's "brothers," his own countrymen, bear the God-given responsibility of representing Jehovah God and submitting to his sovereignty. Their sin in failing to do so is grave indeed. But what adds to their sin is that they hate men who are faithful and humble, such as Isaiah. These apostates hate and exclude the faithful because these represent Jehovah God truthfully. In that sense the exclusion is made 'by reason of God's name.' At the same time, these false servants of Jehovah claim to represent him, piously using such religious-sounding phrases as "May Jehovah be glorified!"*

12 The hatred that false religion has for adherents of

* Today many in Christendom refuse to use Jehovah's personal name, even removing it from numerous Bible translations. Some deride God's people for using his personal name. Yet, many of these individuals make pious use of the expression "Hallelujah," which means "Praise Jah."

12. What are some examples of persecution of faithful servants of Jehovah by religious hypocrites?

"All these things my own hand has made"



pure worship is nothing new. It is a further fulfillment of the prophecy at Genesis 3:15, which foretold long-standing enmity between Satan's seed and the Seed of God's woman. Jesus told his anointed followers in the first century that they too would suffer at the hands of their fellow countrymen—exclusion from the synagogues and persecution even to the point of death. (John 16:2) And what of modern times? At the beginning of "the last days," God's people saw that similar persecution lay ahead. (2 Timothy 3:1) Back in 1914, *The Watch Tower* quoted Isaiah 66:5, noting: "Nearly all the persecutions that have come to God's people have come from professed Christians." The same article also said: "We do not know but that they may go to the extreme in our day—to kill socially, to kill ecclesiastically, perhaps to kill physically." How true those words turned out to be! Not long after they were published, clergy-instigated persecution reached a fever pitch during World War I. But Christendom was put to shame, just as foretold. How?

A Swift and Sudden Restoration

13 Isaiah prophesies: ***"There is a sound of uproar out of the city, a sound out of the temple! It is the sound of Jehovah repaying what is deserved to his enemies." (Isaiah 66:6)*** In the original fulfillment of these words, "the city" is Jerusalem, where Jehovah's temple is located. The "sound of uproar" implies the tumult of war, which is heard in the city when the invading Babylonian armies assault it in 607 B.C.E. What, though, about the modern-day fulfillment?

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13. In the original fulfillment, what is the "sound of uproar out of the city"?

14 These words in Isaiah harmonize with two other prophetic utterances, the one recorded at Ezekiel 43:4, 6-9 and the other at Malachi 3:1-5. Both Ezekiel and Malachi foretell a time when Jehovah God comes to his temple. Malachi's prophecy shows that Jehovah comes to inspect his house of pure worship and to act as a Refiner, rejecting those who misrepresent him. Ezekiel's vision depicts Jehovah as entering the temple and demanding that all traces of immorality and idolatry be removed.* In the modern-day fulfillment of these prophecies, there was an important spiritual development in 1918 in connection with Jehovah's worship. Jehovah and Jesus evidently made an inspection of all of those claiming to represent pure worship. That inspection led to the final casting off of corrupt Christendom. For Christ's anointed followers, the inspection meant a brief period of refinement followed by a swift spiritual restoration in 1919.—1 Peter 4:17.

15 This restoration is aptly pictured in the following verses of Isaiah: ***"Before she began to come into labor pains she gave birth. Before birth pangs could come to her, she even gave deliverance to a male child. Who has heard of a thing like this? Who has seen things like these? Will a land be brought forth with labor pains in one day? Or will a nation be born at one time? For Zion has come***

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* The expression "the carcasses of their kings," used at Ezekiel 43:7, 9, refers to idols. Jerusalem's rebellious leaders and people had polluted God's temple with idols and, in effect, had made kings of them.

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14. (a) What did Malachi foretell about Jehovah's coming to His temple? (b) According to Ezekiel's prophecy, what resulted when Jehovah came to his temple? (c) When did Jehovah and Jesus inspect the spiritual temple, and how were those claiming to represent pure worship affected?

15. What birth is foretold, and how is this fulfilled in 537 B.C.E.?

into labor pains as well as given birth to her sons." (Isaiah 66:7, 8) For the exiled Jews in Babylon, these words find a thrilling first fulfillment. Zion, or Jerusalem, is again pictured as a woman giving birth, but what an unusual birth! It is so swift, so sudden, that it happens before birth pangs can begin! This is an apt picture. The rebirth of God's people as a distinct nation in 537 B.C.E. is so swift and sudden that it seems miraculous. Why, from the time that Cyrus frees the Jews from captivity to the time that a faithful remnant are back in their homeland is merely a matter of months! What a contrast to the events leading up to the original birth of the nation of Israel! In 537 B.C.E., there is no need to petition a resistant monarch for freedom, no need to flee from a hostile army, no need to sojourn for 40 years in the wilderness.

16 In the modern-day fulfillment, Zion represents Jehovah's heavenly "woman," his heavenly organization of spirit beings. In 1919 this "woman" rejoiced to see the birth of her anointed sons on earth as an organized people, "a nation." That rebirth was swift and sudden.* In just a matter of months, the anointed as a group went from a state of deathlike inactivity to one of vibrant, active life in their "land," their God-given realm of spiritual activity. (Revelation 11:8-12) By the autumn of 1919, they even announced the publication of a new journal to complement *The Watch Tower.* Called *The Golden Age*

* The birth here prophesied is not the same as the one described at Revelation 12:1, 2, 5. In that chapter of Revelation, the "son, a male," pictures the Messianic Kingdom, which went into operation in 1914. However, the "woman" of both prophecies is the same.

16. In the modern-day fulfillment of Isaiah 66:7, 8, what does Zion picture, and how have her offspring undergone a rebirth?

(now *Awake!*), that new publication was evidence that God's people were revitalized and once again organized for service.

17 No force in the universe could prevent this spiritual rebirth. The next verse vividly says as much: ***"'As for me, shall I cause the breaking through and not cause the giving birth?' says Jehovah. 'Or am I causing a giving birth and do I actually cause a shutting up?' your God has said."*** **(*Isaiah 66:9*)** Just as the process of birth is inevitable once it has begun, so the rebirth of spiritual Israel, once begun, was unstoppable. True, there was opposition, and there will likely be more opposition in the future. But only Jehovah can put a stop to what he begins, and he never does that! How, though, does Jehovah treat his revitalized people?

Jehovah's Tender Care

18 The next four verses paint a touching picture of Jehovah's tender care. First, Isaiah says: ***"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be joyful with her, all you lovers of her. Exult greatly with her, all you keeping yourselves in mourning over her; for the reason that you will suck and certainly get satisfaction from the breast of full consolation by her; for the reason that you will sip and experience exquisite delight from the teat of her glory."*** **(*Isaiah 66:10, 11*)** Jehovah here uses the illustration of a woman nursing her infant. When a baby feels the pangs of hunger, it wails insistently. But when it is drawn close to its mother's

17. How does Jehovah assure his people that nothing can prevent him from carrying out his purpose regarding spiritual Israel?

18, 19. (a) What touching illustration does Jehovah use, and how does it apply to his exiled people? (b) How have the anointed remnant today benefited from loving nourishment and care?

breast for feeding, its grief turns to happy contentment and satisfaction. In a similar way, the remnant of faithful Jews in Babylon will rapidly be brought from a state of mourning to one of happiness and satisfaction when the time of release and restoration comes. They will be joyful. Jerusalem's glory will be renewed as it is rebuilt and reinhabited. In turn, the city's glory will embrace its faithful inhabitants. Once again, they will be nourished spiritually by means of an active priesthood.—Ezekiel 44: 15, 23.

19 Spiritual Israel too was blessed with abundant nourishment after the restoration in 1919. Since then the flow of spiritual food dispensed through "the faithful and discreet slave" has been steady. (Matthew 24:45-47) This has indeed been a time of consolation and joy for the anointed remnant. But there have been further blessings.

20 The prophecy continues: ***"This is what Jehovah has said: 'Here I am extending to her peace just like a river and the glory of nations just like a flooding torrent, and you will certainly suck. Upon the flank you will be carried, and upon the knees you will be fondled.'"*** **(*Isaiah 66:12*)** Here the image of nursing is combined with the picture of an abundant flow of blessings—"a river" and "a flooding torrent." Jerusalem will be blessed not only with abundant peace from Jehovah but also with "the glory of nations," which flows to and blesses God's people. This means that people of the nations will flood to Jehovah's people. (Haggai 2:7) In the ancient fulfillment, a number of people from various nations did indeed attach themselves to Israel, becoming Jewish proselytes.

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20. How has Jerusalem been blessed with "a flooding torrent," both in ancient and in modern times?

However, a far greater fulfillment has occurred in our own time when "a great crowd . . . out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues"—truly a flooding torrent of humanity—has attached itself to the remnant of spiritual Jews.—Revelation 7:9; Zechariah 8:23.

21 Isaiah 66:12 also speaks of expressions of maternal love—fondling a child upon the knees and carrying him upon the flank. In the next verse, a similar thought is expressed with an interesting shift in perspective. ***"Like a man whom his own mother keeps comforting, so I myself shall keep comforting you people; and in the case of Jerusalem you will be comforted." (Isaiah 66:13)*** The child is now "a man," an adult. But his mother has not lost her desire to comfort him in a time of distress.

22 In this appealing way, Jehovah illustrates the strength and tenderness of his love for his people. Even the strongest maternal love is but a dim reflection of Jehovah's deep love for his faithful people. (Isaiah 49:15) How vital it is that all Christians reflect this quality of their heavenly Father! The apostle Paul did, and thus left a fine example for elders in the Christian congregation. (1 Thessalonians 2:7) Jesus said that brotherly love would be the chief identifying mark of his followers.—John 13:34, 35.

23 Jehovah expresses his love in action. Thus, he continues: ***"You will certainly see, and your heart will be bound to exult, and your very bones will sprout just like tender grass. And the hand of Jehovah will certainly be made known to his servants, but he will actually denounce his enemies." (Isaiah 66:14)*** A Hebrew-language

21. In an appealing word picture, what kind of comfort is foretold?
22. How does Jehovah show the tenderness and strength of his love?
23. Describe the happy state of Jehovah's restored people.

grammarian suggests that the expression "you will certainly see" implies that wherever the returning exiles look in their restored land, "joy now meets their eye." They will indeed exult, thrilled beyond words that they have been restored to their beloved homeland. They will feel rejuvenated, as if their bones were growing strong again, invigorated like grass in the springtime. All will know that this blessed state has come about, not by any human effort, but by "the hand of Jehovah."

24 Do you recognize the hand of Jehovah at work among his people today? No human could possibly have brought about the restoration of pure worship. No human could conceivably have caused the flood of millions of precious people from all nations to join the faithful remnant in their spiritual land. Only Jehovah God can do such things. These expressions of Jehovah's love give us reason for profound joy. May we never take his love for granted. Let us continue to 'tremble at his word.' Let us resolve to live by Bible principles and to find delight in serving Jehovah.

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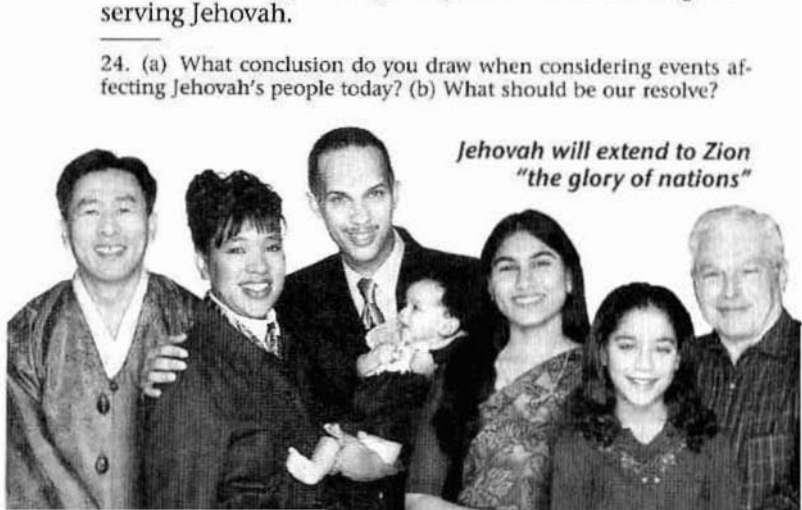
24. (a) What conclusion do you draw when considering events affecting Jehovah's people today? (b) What should be our resolve?



Jehovah will extend to Zion "the glory of nations"

A Light for the Nations

Isaiah 66:15-24

JEHOVAH is the Source of light, "the Giver of the sun for light by day, the statutes of the moon and the stars for light by night." (Jeremiah 31:35) On this basis alone, he should be acknowledged as the Source of life, since light means life. If the earth were not constantly bathed in the warmth and light of the sun, life as we know it would be impossible. Our planet would be uninhabitable.

2 Hence, it is of utmost concern to us that Jehovah, looking forward to our day, foretold a time of darkness, not light. Under inspiration, Isaiah wrote: "Look! darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups." (Isaiah 60:2) Of course, these words had to do with spiritual, not physical, darkness, but their seriousness should not be underestimated. Life eventually becomes impossible for those without spiritual light, just as it does for those deprived of light from the sun.

3 During these dark times, we cannot afford to ignore the spiritual light that Jehovah makes available to us. It is essential that we look to God's Word to light up our roadway, reading the Bible daily if possible. (Psalm 119: 105) Christian meetings provide opportunities for us to encourage one another to remain on "the path of the

1, 2. Why is light vital, and what sort of darkness covers the earth today?
3. In these dark times, where can we turn for light?

righteous ones." (Proverbs 4:18; Hebrews 10:23-25) The strength that we derive from diligent Bible study and wholesome Christian association helps us to avoid being swallowed up in the darkness of these "last days," which will culminate in the great "day of Jehovah's anger." (2 Timothy 3:1; Zephaniah 2:3) That day is coming on apace! It will come as surely as a similar day came upon the inhabitants of ancient Jerusalem.

Jehovah 'Takes Up the Controversy'

4 In the concluding verses of Isaiah's thrilling prophecy, Jehovah graphically describes events leading up to the day of his anger. We read: ***"Jehovah himself comes as a very fire, and his chariots are like a storm wind, in order to pay back his anger with sheer rage and his rebuke with flames of fire. For as fire Jehovah himself will for a fact take up the controversy, yes, with his sword, against all flesh; and the slain of Jehovah will certainly become many."—Isaiah 66:15, 16.***

5 Those words should help Isaiah's contemporaries realize the seriousness of their situation. The time is approaching when the Babylonians, as Jehovah's executioners, will come against Jerusalem, their chariots stirring up clouds of dust just like a storm wind. What a fear-inspiring sight that will be! Jehovah will use the invaders to carry out his own fiery judgments against all unfaithful Jewish "flesh." It will be as if Jehovah himself were fighting against his people. His "sheer rage" will not

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4, 5. (a) In what way does Jehovah come against Jerusalem? (b) Why may we conclude that only a relatively small number will survive the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E.? (See footnote.)

be turned back. Many Jews will fall as "the slain of Jehovah." In 607 B.C.E., this prophecy is fulfilled.*

6 Is Jehovah justified in 'taking up the controversy' against his people? Certainly! Many times in our discussion of the book of Isaiah, we have seen that the Jews, though supposedly dedicated to Jehovah, have been steeped in false worship—and Jehovah has not been blind to their actions. We see this again in the following words of the prophecy: ***"'Those sanctifying themselves and cleansing themselves for the gardens behind one in the center, eating the flesh of the pig and the loathsome thing, even the jumping rodent, they will all together reach their end,' is the utterance of Jehovah." (Isaiah 66:17)*** Are those Jews "sanctifying themselves and cleansing themselves" in order to prepare themselves for pure worship? Clearly not. Rather, they are engaging in pagan purification rites in special gardens. Thereafter, they greedily devour the flesh of the pig and of other creatures considered unclean under the Mosaic Law.—Leviticus 11:7, 21-23.

7 What a disgusting situation for a nation in a covenant relationship with the only true God! But consider: A comparably disgusting situation exists today among the religions of Christendom. These similarly claim to serve God, and many of their leaders make a pretense of piety. Yet, they sully themselves with pagan teachings and

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* Regarding the situation after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, Jeremiah 52:15 speaks of "some of the lowly ones of the people and the *rest of the people that were left remaining in the city.*" Commenting on this, *Insight on the Scriptures,* Volume 1, page 415, states: "The expression 'that were left remaining in the city' apparently indicates that great numbers had died from famine, disease, or fire, or else they were slaughtered in the war."

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6. What reprehensible practices take place in Judah?
7. How does Christendom resemble idolatrous Judah?

traditions, proving themselves to be in spiritual darkness. How great that darkness is!—Matthew 6:23; John 3:19, 20.

'They Will Have to See My Glory'

8 Does Jehovah take notice of Christendom's reprehensible actions and false teachings? Read the following words of Jehovah, as recorded by Isaiah, and see what you conclude: ***"As regards their works and their thoughts, I am coming in order to collect all the nations and tongues together; and they will have to come and see my glory."*** **(*Isaiah 66:18*)** Jehovah is aware of and prepared to judge not only the works but also the thoughts of those who profess to be his servants. Judah professes to believe in Jehovah, but her idolatrous works and pagan practices belie that claim. It is to no avail that her citizens "purify" themselves according to pagan rites. The nation will be cut down, and when that occurs, it will be in full view of her idol-worshiping neighbors. These will 'see Jehovah's glory' in that they will witness the events and be forced to admit that Jehovah's word has come true. How does all of this apply to Christendom? When she meets her end, many of her former friends and business partners will be forced to stand by and watch helplessly as Jehovah's word is fulfilled.—Jeremiah 25:31-33; Revelation 17:15-18; 18:9-19.

9 Does Jerusalem's destruction in 607 B.C.E. mean that Jehovah will no longer have witnesses on earth? No. Outstanding integrity-keepers, such as Daniel and his three companions, will continue to serve Jehovah even as exiles in Babylon. (Daniel 1:6, 7) Yes, the chain of faithful witnesses of Jehovah will remain intact, and at the end of 70

8. (a) What will befall both Judah and Christendom? (b) In what sense will the nations 'see Jehovah's glory'?
9. What good news does Jehovah declare?

years, faithful men and women will leave Babylon and return to Judah to restore pure worship there. That is what Jehovah alludes to next: ***"I will set among them a sign, and I will send some of those who are escaped to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, those drawing the bow, Tubal and Javan, the faraway islands, who have not heard a report about me or seen my glory; and they will for certain tell about my glory among the nations."—Isaiah 66:19.***

10 The host of faithful men and women who return to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. will serve as an astonishing sign, evidence that Jehovah has delivered his people. Who would have dreamed that the captive Jews would one day be free to pursue pure worship at Jehovah's temple? In a comparable way in the first century, the ones serving "as signs and as miracles" were anointed Christians, to whom meek ones wanting to serve Jehovah flocked. (Isaiah 8:18; Hebrews 2:13) Today anointed Christians, prospering in their restored land, serve as an astonishing sign in the earth. (Isaiah 66:8) They are living evidence of the power of Jehovah's spirit, attracting meek ones whose hearts impel them to serve Jehovah.

11 How, though, after the restoration in 537 B.C.E., will men of the nations who have not heard a report about Jehovah come to know him? Well, not all faithful Jews will return to Jerusalem at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Some, like Daniel, will remain in Babylon. Others will scatter to the four corners of the earth. By the fifth century B.C.E., there were Jews living throughout the Persian

10. (a) In what sense will faithful Jews liberated from Babylon serve as a sign? (b) Who today serve as a sign?

11. (a) After the restoration, how will it be that those of the nations come to learn about Jehovah? (b) How was Zechariah 8:23 initially fulfilled?

Empire. (Esther 1:1; 3:8) No doubt some of them told their pagan neighbors about Jehovah, for many from those nations became Jewish proselytes. Such was evidently the case with the Ethiopian eunuch, to whom the Christian disciple Philip preached in the first century. (Acts 8:26-40) All of this took place as an initial fulfillment of the words of the prophet Zechariah: "It will be in those days that 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) Indeed, Jehovah sent out light to the nations!—Psalm 43:3.

Bringing "a Gift to Jehovah"

12 After Jerusalem is rebuilt, Jews who are scattered far beyond their homeland will look to the city along with its restored priesthood as the center of pure worship. Many of them will travel long distances to attend the annual festivals there. Under inspiration, Isaiah writes: ***"'They will actually bring all your brothers out of all the nations as a gift to Jehovah, on horses and in chariots and in covered wagons and on mules and on swift she-camels, up to my holy mountain, Jerusalem,' Jehovah has said, 'just as when the sons of Israel bring the gift in a clean vessel into the house of Jehovah. And from them also I shall take some for the priests, for the Levites.'"—Isaiah 66:20, 21.***

13 Some of those "brothers out of all the nations" were present on the day of Pentecost when holy spirit was poured out on Jesus' disciples. The account reads: "There were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, reverent men, from every nation of those under heaven." (Acts 2:5) They came

12, 13. In what way will "brothers" be brought to Jerusalem beginning in 537 B.C.E.?

Anointed Gifts for Jehovah From All Nations

In 1920, Juan Muñiz left the United States for Spain and then journeyed on to Argentina, where he organized congregations of anointed ones. From 1923 on, the light of truth shone on honesthearted ones in West Africa when missionary William R. Brown (often called Bible Brown) set out to preach the Kingdom message in such places as Sierra Leone, Ghana, Liberia, The Gambia, and Nigeria. That same year Canadian George Young went down to Brazil and then traveled on to Argentina, Costa Rica, Panama, Venezuela, and even the Soviet Union. At about the same time, Edwin Skinner sailed from England to India, where he labored for many years in the harvest work.

to Jerusalem to worship according to Jewish custom, but when they heard the good news about Jesus Christ, many exercised faith in him and were baptized.

14 Does this prophecy have a modern-day fulfillment? Yes, indeed. Following World War I, Jehovah's anointed servants discerned from the Scriptures that God's Kingdom had been set up in heaven in 1914. Through careful Bible study, they learned that additional Kingdom heirs, or "brothers," were to be gathered. Intrepid ministers traveled to "the most distant part of the earth," using all

14, 15. (a) How did anointed Christians gather more of their spiritual "brothers" after World War I, and how were these brought to Jehovah as a "gift in a clean vessel"? (b) In what way did Jehovah "take some for the priests"? (c) Who were some anointed Christians involved in the gathering of their spiritual brothers? (See box on this page.)

manner of conveyance, in search of prospective members of the anointed remnant, most of whom came out of Christendom's churches. When these were located, they were brought in as a gift to Jehovah.—Acts 1:8.

15 The anointed ones who were gathered in the early years did not expect Jehovah to accept them as they were before coming to a knowledge of Bible truth. They took steps to cleanse themselves of spiritual and moral defilements so that they could be presented as a "gift in a clean vessel," or as stated by the apostle Paul, "a chaste virgin to the Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:2) In addition to rejecting doctrinal error, the anointed ones had to learn how to remain strictly neutral in the political affairs of this world. In 1931, when his servants had been cleansed to an appropriate degree, Jehovah graciously granted them the privilege of bearing his name as Jehovah's Witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10-12) In what way, though, did Jehovah "take some for the priests"? As a group, these anointed ones became part of "a royal priesthood, a holy nation," offering sacrifices of praise to God.—1 Peter 2:9; Isaiah 54:1; Hebrews 13:15.

The Ingathering Continues

16 The full number of that "royal priesthood" is 144,000, and in time, the gathering of them was completed. (Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1) Was that the end of the ingathering work? No. Isaiah's prophecy continues: "***'Just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making are standing before me,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'so the offspring of you people and the name of you people will keep standing.'***" **(*Isaiah 66:22*)** In the initial fulfillment of those words, Jews who return from Babylonian captiv-

16, 17. Who are "the offspring of you people" after World War I?

ity will begin raising children. Thus, the restored Jewish remnant, "the new earth," under the new Jewish administration, "the new heavens," will become firmly established. However, the prophecy has had a most remarkable fulfillment in our day.

17 "The offspring" that the nation of spiritual brothers produces are the "great crowd," who have the hope of everlasting life on earth. They come "out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues," and they stand "before the throne and before the Lamb." These ones "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9-14; 22:17) Today the "great crowd" are turning from spiritual darkness to the light

Some Jews at Pentecost were 'brothers brought out of all the nations'

that Jehovah provides. They exercise faith in Jesus Christ, and like their anointed brothers and sisters, they strive to remain spiritually and morally clean. As a group they continue serving under Christ's direction and will "keep standing" forever!—Psalm 37:11, 29.

18 These hard-working men and women with an earthly hope know that while it is vital to remain morally and spiritually clean, more is involved in pleasing Jehovah. The ingathering work is in full swing, and they want to have a share in it. The book of Revelation prophesies concerning them: "They are before the throne of God; and they are rendering him sacred service day and night in his temple." (Revelation 7:15) Those words remind us of the second-to-last verse in Isaiah's prophecy: ***"'It will certainly occur that from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath all flesh will come in to bow down before me,' Jehovah has said." (Isaiah 66:23)*** This is happening today. "From new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath"—that is, regularly, every week of every month—anointed Christians and their companions, the great crowd, come together to worship Jehovah. They do this by, among other things, attending Christian meetings and engaging in the public ministry. Are you one of those who regularly 'come and bow down before Jehovah'? Jehovah's people find great joy in doing this, and those of the great crowd look forward to the time when "all flesh"—all living humans—will serve Jehovah "from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath" for all eternity.

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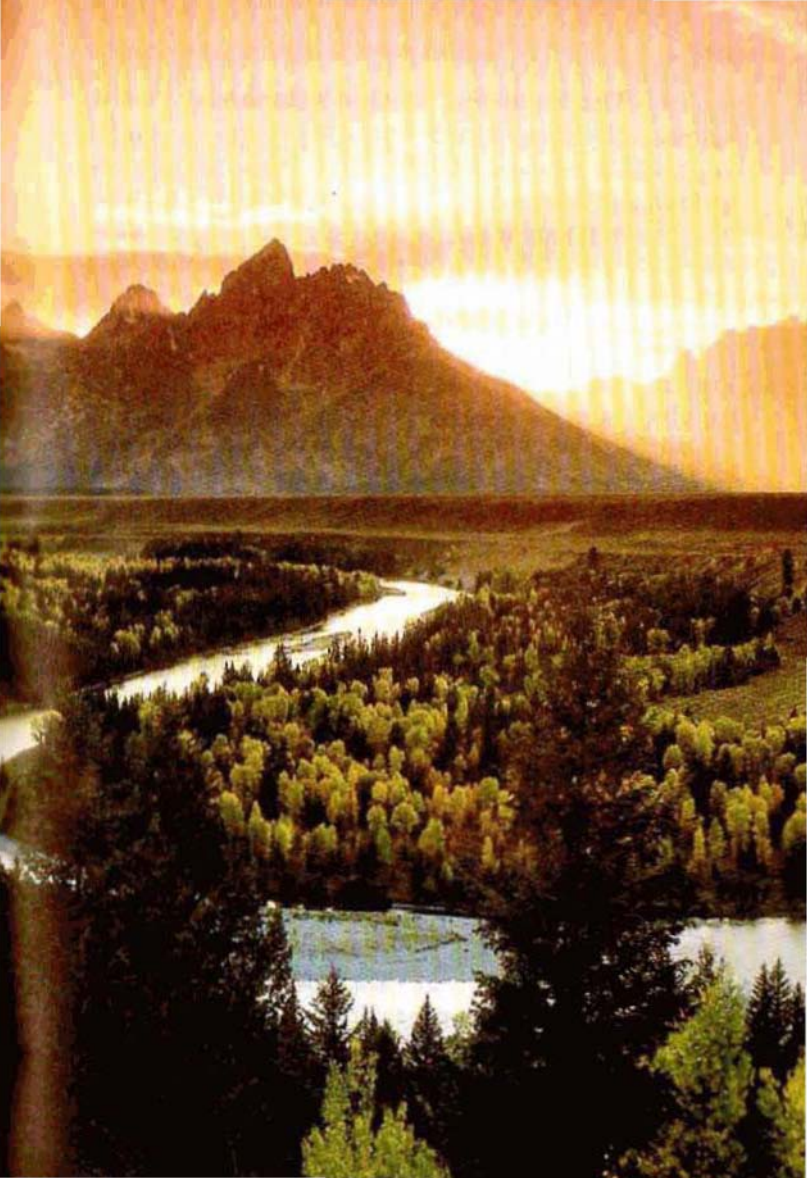
18. (a) How have members of the great crowd conducted themselves like their anointed brothers? (b) How do the anointed and their companions worship Jehovah "from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath"?



The Final End of God's Enemies

19 One verse remains in our study of Isaiah's prophecy. The book concludes with these words: ***"They will actually go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that were transgressing against me; for the very worms upon them will not die and their fire itself will not be extinguished, and they must become something repulsive to all flesh." (Isaiah 66:24)*** Jesus Christ likely had this prophecy in mind when he encouraged his disciples to simplify their lives and put Kingdom interests first. He said: "If your eye makes you stumble, throw it away; it is finer for you to enter one-eyed into the kingdom of God than with two eyes to be pitched into Gehenna, where their maggot does not die and the fire is not put out."—Mark 9:47, 48; Matthew 5:29, 30; 6:33.

20 What is this place called Gehenna? Centuries ago, the Jewish scholar David Kimhi wrote: "It is a place . . . adjoining Jerusalem, and it is a loathsome place, and they throw there unclean things and carcasses. Also there was a continual fire there to burn the unclean things and the bones of the carcasses. Hence, the judgment of the wicked ones is called parabolically Gehinnom." If, as this Jewish scholar suggests, Gehenna was used for the disposal of refuse and carcasses of those deemed unworthy of burial, fire would be a suitable means of eliminating such refuse. What the fire did not consume, the maggots would. What a fitting picture of the final end of all of God's enemies!*

21 With such a reference to corpses, fire, and worms, is

* Since dead *carcasses,* not live people, are consumed in Gehenna, this place is not symbolic of eternal torment.

19, 20. What purpose did Gehenna serve in Bible times, and what does it symbolize?

21. For whom does the book of Isaiah conclude on a positive note, and why?

it not true that Isaiah's thrilling prophecy concludes on a gruesome note? God's avowed enemies would undoubtedly think so. But to God's friends, Isaiah's description of the everlasting destruction of the wicked is most heartening. Jehovah's people need this assurance that their enemies will never again have the upper hand. Those enemies, who have caused God's worshipers so much affliction and have brought so much reproach on his name, will be everlastingly destroyed. Then, "distress will not rise up a second time."—Nahum 1:9.

22 As we conclude our study of the book of Isaiah, we certainly appreciate that this Bible book is not dead history. On the contrary, it has a message for us today. When we reflect on the dark times in which Isaiah lived, we can see the similarities between that period and our day. Political unrest, religious hypocrisy, judicial corruption, and oppression of the faithful and the poor characterized Isaiah's time, and it characterizes ours. Faithful Jews in the sixth century B.C.E. must have been grateful for Isaiah's prophecy, and we today are comforted as we study it.

23 In these critical times when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the national groups, all of us are deeply grateful that Jehovah, through Isaiah, has provided light for all mankind! That spiritual light means nothing less than everlasting life for all who wholeheartedly accept it, regardless of their national origin or ethnic background. (Acts 10:34, 35) May we, then, keep on walking in the light of God's Word, reading it daily, meditating upon it, and cherishing its message. This will be to our own eternal blessing and to the praise of Jehovah's holy name!

22, 23. (a) Explain some of the ways that you have benefited from your study of the book of Isaiah. (b) Having studied the book of Isaiah, what is your resolve, and what is your hope?