



The WATCHTOWER

APRIL 15, 1969
Semimonthly

Announcing
JEHOVAH'S
KINGDOM

GET TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE

WHY

**ALMIGHTY GOD
LAUGHS *at the* NATIONS**



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"YOU ARE MY WITNESSES," SAYS JEHOVAH.—Isa. 43:12

THE PURPOSE OF "THE WATCHTOWER"

Every watchtower has its purpose. It serves as an elevated place for a wide-awake person with sharp vision. It enables him to see far ahead into the distance and tell those below for whom he is a watchman what is drawing near, whether it is a danger against which to prepare or it is something good over which to be glad with strong faith and hope.

Because of having the name "The Watchtower" this magazine justly has to render a similar useful service to the people of all nations. This is an international magazine and makes no racial distinctions, for we are all facing a common world danger; we are all hoping for a common good.

Ever since "The Watchtower" began to be published in July of 1879 it has looked ahead into the future, always striving to aid its readers to advance in knowledge and to gain a clearer picture of the glorious new order of things that is in store for righteous mankind. No, "The Watchtower" is no inspired prophet, but it follows and explains a Book of prophecy the predictions in which have proved to be unerring and unfailing till now. "The Watchtower" is therefore under safe guidance. It may be read with confidence, for its statements may be checked against that prophetic Book.

Among the many nations of today there are hundreds of differing religions. Which one does this magazine present? Not the confused religions of Christendom, but the religion of the oldest sacred Book on earth. Which Book? The Sacred Bible of the Holy Scriptures, written by inspiration in the name of the Creator of heaven and earth, the only living and true God.

The sacred, nonpolitical purpose of "The Watchtower" is accordingly to encourage and promote study of the Holy Bible and to give our many readers the needed unsectarian help to understand that Book of true religion and infallible prophecy. Thus this magazine will be helping them to prove worthy of perfect life and happiness in God's promised new order under His everlasting kingdom of righteousness.



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"They will all be taught by Jehovah."—John 6: 45; Isaiah 54: 13

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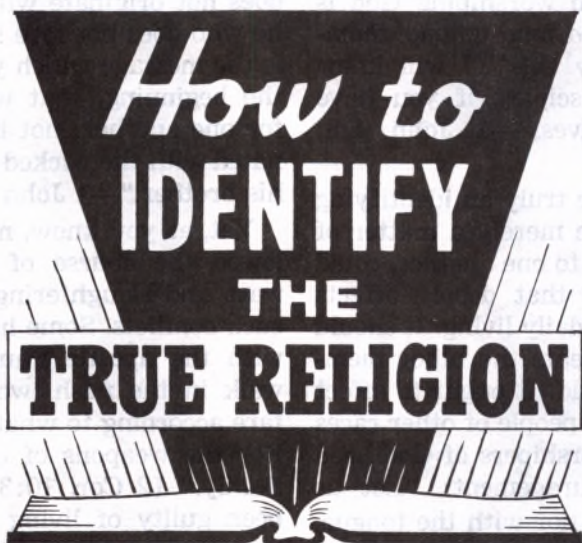
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LOGICALLY there must be just one true religion. This is in harmony with the fact that the true God is a God, "not of disorder, but of peace." (1 Cor. 14:33) Furthermore, Jesus Christ spoke of those who practice such religion as worshipping God "with spirit and truth," and truth is never at disagreement with itself.—John 4:23, 24.

But who are these true worshipers today? How can you identify them and know that their worship is indeed the one approved by God?

This cannot be decided simply on the basis of what people and organizations *claim* to be. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out that many would say to him: "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and expel demons in your name, and perform many powerful works in your name?" Yet he would say to them: "I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness." So being a true worshiper involves more than merely



our claims, or even our apparently commendable works. It means actually doing the will of the heavenly Father.—Matt. 7:21-23.

Jesus also said that false prophets would come in sheep's covering, while inside they would be like devouring wolves. However, he gave us a rule by which

we can distinguish between the true servants of God and the false ones, saying: "Really, then, by their fruits you will recognize those men."—Matt. 7:15-20.

A faithful follower of Jesus, the apostle Paul, also showed the need for caution. He warned that some men would appear to be ministers of righteousness and yet would be false Christians. Outwardly they may not seem bad. But when measured in the light of God's Word, the Bible, they are shown to be ministers of God's enemy, Satan, for their works are actually in opposition to God's will. (2 Cor. 11:13-15) Our following the lead of such false Chris-

tians could only result in our losing out on life eternal.

What, then, are some of the identifying marks of true worshipers of God? What are the fine fruits that they would produce?

LOVE AMONG THEMSELVES

The Bible tells us that "God is love." In harmony with this, Jesus showed that the most outstanding mark of those who follow his example in worshiping God is that *they would have love among themselves*. He said: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves."—1 John 4:8; John 13:35.

For such love to be truly an identifying mark, it could not be merely a matter of pretending to be nice to one another, could it? It must be love that deeply affects every aspect of one's daily living. It should influence how one treats the other members of one's household. It ought to affect one's attitude toward people of other races and nations. True worshipers of God heed the Scriptural encouragement: "Let us love, neither in word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth." (1 John 3:18) They show love by action, not only in word. They seek what is truly in the best interests of others.

Do the religious organizations with which you have been acquainted have this mark of identification? Do they instill in their members a love that is so strong that it remains true even in difficult times? What do they do, for example, when tension between worldly nations leads to war? The facts show that by far the majority of them have been willing for their members to go out on the battlefield and slaughter their fellow believers of another nationality at the command of worldly men.

Do you think such a course is according to God's Word and really reflects the spirit of God? Do you believe that it is in harmony with Jesus' command to "continue to love your enemies"? (Matt. 5:44) The Bible is quite clear relative to how true worshipers of God can be distinguished from false worshipers, saying: "The children of God and the children of the Devil are evident by this fact: Every one who does not carry on righteousness does not originate with God, neither does he who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should have love for one another; not like Cain, who originated with the wicked one and slaughtered his brother."—1 John 3:10-12.

Yet, as you know, not everyone has followed the course of supporting worldly wars and slaughtering fellow believers in such conflicts. Some have been able to say with the apostle Paul: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage warfare according to what we are in the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly." (2 Cor. 10:3, 4) They have not been guilty of living a lie by saying, "I love God," while hating their brother of another nationality.—1 John 4:20, 21.

Those who truly imitate Jesus, not only refrain from doing harm to others, but also manifest love in other ways. How? By their unity with fellow Christians in all lands, by the way they deal with their neighbors and by their loving efforts to help others to learn about God.—Gal. 6:10.

RESPECT FOR GOD'S WORD

Another mark of true religion and of those who practice it is *respect for God's Word*. God's Son when on earth set the pattern in this by showing the highest respect for the inspired Scriptures. He quoted them as the final authority on matters. He continually referred his hear-

ers to God's Word, encouraging them to read and apply it.—Matt. 19:4-6; Luke 24:44, 45.

Jesus also showed his deep respect for the Bible by living in accord with its teachings every day. The fulfillment of God's Word meant more to him than even his own life. (Matt. 26:53-56) Never did he downgrade the Bible; rather, he condemned those who failed to teach in harmony with it and who tried to weaken its force with their own teachings.—Mark 7:9-13.

What can we say in this regard about the many church organizations of Christendom today? When you hear or read statements by clergymen who refer to parts of the Bible as "myths," or who favor the theory of evolution over the Bible teaching of creation, would you say that they are encouraging respect for God's Word? Or when you read statements in which such church leaders argue that sex relations outside of marriage are not necessarily wrong, or that even homosexuality can be quite proper, would you say that they are encouraging people to use the Bible as their guide? They certainly are not following the example of God's Son and his apostles.—Matt. 15:18, 19; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:24-27.

Do the fruits manifest in the lives of the members of these churches show that they truly respect the Word of God? From your own experience, would you say that most people who go to a church building on Sunday apply Bible principles in their *homelife* and in their dealings with others on Monday and during the rest of the week?

God's Word shows that there are persons who may have the Bible and even study it but whose works prove that they disown the God they claim to know. "They publicly declare they know God," the Bible says, "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; John 5:39, 40) The form of worship that they practice is not pleasing to God, because they do not allow his Word to exercise genuine power in their lives.—2 Tim. 3:5.

At first one might reason that it is simply one minister who is wrong or certain church members who do not do right. But what if the minister who downgrades the Bible continues to hold his position? And what if the church members who do wrong continue to be in good standing? Then it is time to face the fact that the bad fruits identify the religious organization itself.

If that is true, you will, without exception, find that the teachings of the organization do not all line up with the Bible. If you are now associating with such a religious organization, the teachings of which are not completely in harmony with God's Word, then you have a serious problem. It is the problem of making a decision either to accept the truthfulness of the Bible or to reject it in favor of teachings the Bible does not support.

What you do, of course, must be your own decision. However, you should weigh matters carefully, since the decision you make will affect your standing with God and your prospects of eternal life in his new system.

SANCTIFY GOD'S NAME

A further requirement of true religion is that it must *sanctify God's name*. Why so? Because when Jesus Christ taught his followers how to pray, he showed them that this should be their first concern. "You must pray, then, this way," he said: "Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified."—Matt. 6:9.

This means holding the name of God sacred, treating it as something holy. Je-

Jesus himself certainly did this. He did not fail to use his Father's name, nor did he treat it as unimportant. To the contrary, in prayer to his Father, Jesus said: "I have made your name known to them and will make it known." (John 17:26) He knew that it is God's purpose for his name to be glorified in all the earth, and he set the example in proclaiming and honoring that name.—John 12:28; Isa. 12:4, 5.

Also, the Scriptures show that the main purpose for the existence of the congregation that God has called out of the world is to be "a people for his name." (Acts 15:14) If you are to gain salvation, you, too, must know and honor the name of God. That it is vital to publish God's name so that others can know and call upon Him for salvation is shown clearly by Romans 10:13, 14, which says: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.' However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach?"

Now, stop and ask yourself: What religious group is most prominently known for publishing the name of God, as Jesus did? The churches in general avoid the use of the name Jehovah; and, though some of them say that they favor the form "Yahweh," they seldom use that form of God's name either. Some have even gone to the extent of removing God's name from their versions of the Bible. For example, the *Revised Standard Version*, which is now distributed with the backing of both Protestants and Catholics, omits the name Jehovah completely, although it appears in the original Hebrew text nearly seven thousand times.

Are these organizations measuring up to this requirement of true religion? Really, what group does bear witness to the name

of God, as did Jesus, who is called in the Bible "the Faithful Witness"? (Rev. 1:5; Isa. 43:10-12) If you were to talk to your neighbors and refer repeatedly to Jehovah, using his sacred name, with what organization do you think they would associate you? That is not a difficult question to answer. There is only one people that notably follow Jesus' example in this regard.

PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF GOD

True worshipers also *proclaim the kingdom of God as man's true hope*. They could not do otherwise and be pleasing to Jehovah God, because he has clearly stated that the Kingdom is his provision for governing the earth. In fact, concerning this very time in which we live the Bible says: "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite."—Dan. 2:44; 7:13, 14.

Jesus set the example in proclaiming God's kingdom. He went from one end of the land to the other "preaching and declaring the good news of the kingdom of God." (Luke 8:1) He and his apostles did this by going from village to village and "from house to house." (Acts 20:20) Jesus also foretold the following for these "last days": "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come."—Matt. 24:14.

Today we often hear religious leaders speaking on behalf of political organizations such as the United Nations and praying for them. But who are doing the preaching of the good news about God's kingdom as Jesus foretold? If someone comes to your door or to your neighbor's

door and you hear him talking about God's kingdom as mankind's true hope, with what organization do you associate that person? Do the ministers of your religion carry on the ministry in that way? This is a principal activity of those who actually do the will of the heavenly Father in imitation of his Son Jesus.—1 Pet. 2:21.

KEEP SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD

Yet another requirement of true religion is that it keep *separate from the world and its affairs*. The Bible, at James 1:27, shows that, if our worship is to be clean and undefiled from the standpoint of God, we must keep ourselves "without spot from the world." This is an important matter, for, "whoever . . . wants to be a friend of the world is constituting himself an enemy of God."—Jas. 4:4.

You can appreciate why this is so serious when you remember that God's Word points out that the ruler of the world is God's chief adversary, Satan the Devil. (John 12:31) Thus, the apostle John wrote: "We know we originate with God, but the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one."—1 John 5:19.

Do the facts show that the churches in your community take this to heart? Are the clergy, as well as the members of the congregations, really "no part of the world," as Jesus said that his true followers would be? (John 15:19) Or are they deeply involved in the world's affairs, in its nationalism, its politics and its class struggles?

You do not need someone else to answer these questions for you. The activities of the churches are widely publicized, and you know what is going on in them. If there are people in your community who, because of their religion, refrain from such activities, you no doubt know who they are too.

IDENTIFYING THE TRUE RELIGION

Now, after reviewing these identifying marks of the true religion that God has provided for us in his Word, what do we conclude? The question at issue is not whether a certain religious group appears to meet one or two of these requirements, nor whether *some* of its doctrines conform to the Bible. Far more than that, the true religion must measure up in *all* these respects and its teachings must all be in full harmony with God's Word. Only in this way can such religion truly be pleasing to Jehovah God.

There are not many religions meeting these requirements laid down in God's Word. There is just one. As the Bible clearly says: "One body there is, and one spirit, even as you were called in the one hope to which you were called; one Lord, one faith." (Eph. 4:4, 5) Yes, there is only "one faith," that is, only one faith that is recognized and approved by Almighty God.

Who, then, are the ones who form the body of true worshipers today? On the basis of the evidence, which is known or available to persons in all parts of the earth, we do not hesitate to say that they are the Christian witnesses of Jehovah. For you to share that conviction, you need to get well acquainted with them. The best way is to attend their meetings at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. In this way you can observe for yourself how the organization functions and the way in which those associated with it apply God's Word in their own lives. Since God assures us that practicing true religion brings great contentment now and opens up the way for eternal life in his new system of things, it surely will be worth your while to make such an investigation. (Deut. 30:19, 20) You have our warm invitation to do so. Why not investigate now?

WHY ALMIGHTY GOD LAUGHS *at the* NATIONS

**"The very One sitting in the heavens
will laugh; Jehovah himself will
hold them in derision."—Ps. 2:4.**

DO YOU enjoy a good laugh? The ability to laugh is one of the innumerable things that differentiate man from animals, birds and fish. Man was created to do one of the things that his Creator can do, and that is to laugh. It is now time for God to laugh. Is he laughing at you? Or, are you laughing with him? How can you know which is the case? What is it that amuses God your Creator and provokes him to laughter? What would it mean for God to laugh at us? Rather than be laughed at by our Creator, how can we today enjoy a good laugh with him and dismiss the worries that the world situation tends to cause?

² None of the nations of earth considers it a laughing matter, that is, the present world situation and the future outlook. Would you laugh, could you laugh, when business prosperity (what there is of it) is constantly threatened and is so uncer-

tain because of shaky foundations? When the cost of running governments and the burdens of national debt increase? When the increasing number of nations cannot get along together as one big, closely knit family but national groups are all suspicious of one another, vying with one another in rivalries, arming militarily against one another, oppressing one another, embarrassing one another, spying on one another, seeking advantage over one another? When discontent of the peoples is rising and spreading so that governments find it hard to control the peoples? When the uprightness of men in office cannot be trusted and the loyalty of public servants and subordinates cannot be relied upon? When awesome regard for rightful authority wanes and resort to violent action is frequent and the rate speeds up of the committing of crimes?

³ Really, is it a laughing matter when the fight against poverty gets tougher for the governments? When the means of

1. What enjoyable thing is it now time for God to do, and what questions arise for us in that connection?
2, 3. Why do the nations consider the world situation and the future outlook no laughing matter?

carnal warfare become more gruesome? When nuclear warfare is held back only by the fear of receiving back like for like and wrecking civilization and destroying all the earth's inhabitants? When religious restraints no longer have any force to deter men from any kind of wrongdoing? No; when viewed objectively, all these things constitute no laughing matter.

⁴ Whether they are rank materialists or not, all people will have to agree that the nations have brought themselves into this state of affairs. Recorded human history down to the present day tells us that. But it has been all so unnecessary! Why so? Because a world remedy has been prepared and offered, and the nations refuse to accept it and thus take the only way out. The matter would be funny, if it were not so serious.

⁵ In the course that has been taken by the nations they are not wise. They look to themselves for the solution of their problems. They are certainly not looking to heaven. They rely upon the wisdom of their own wise men, statesmen and diplomats. But where has it got them by this year 1969? To the brink of self-destruction, not just by means of war but also by other powerful means. They are not disposed to turn back. They are too proud, too self-confident, too concerned with their own nationhood and sovereignty, too sophisticated and "realistic" to look beyond what is visible and material for the needed help. They look to the things created, instead of to the Creator *himself*. What today shows that the nations believe in a Creator? The Creator is ignored, the One who has kept all the universe in good order and with benefit to us on the earth. In comparison with the whole universe, our earth, which is

a part of it, is so tiny! Reasonably, then, our earth should not be able to present too big a problem for him to straighten out.

⁶ Material science being the god of the nations in this Brain Age, they have no faith in an invisible God Almighty. If they have no faith in Him now, how could we expect a sudden burst of faith on the part of nations in the near future, when the worst comes and they are obliged to acknowledge their own helplessness and that of modern science? And yet it is only logical to believe that the Creator of the earth and of man upon it would have a remedy for man's ills, an adequate remedy, the only remedy. For at least nineteen centuries the nations have had the means to know that the Creator, the true God, does have the one needed remedy.

⁷ However, when nations stubbornly continue to turn down God's provision, what ordinarily could we expect to result from this? Nothing less than that the nations would oppose God the Creator, fight against Him and against his means of saving the human race. This is according to the rule stated over nineteen centuries ago by a wise man whom Christendom claims to be "the Son of God": "He that is not on my side is against me, and he that does not gather with me scatters." (Matt. 12:30) If a man prefers and chooses his own plans and rejects God's arrangement, how can he do God's will and work peacefully with God? He cannot do so. There is no room for mere coexistence in this case, God and man doing each his respective will side by side. God's will affects every man without exception. So how could a selfish man do anything else but work apart from God, differ from God

4. Who have brought the nations into this state of affairs, and why has it all been so unnecessary?

5. Under the circumstances, why have the nations not been wise in their course of action?

6. In the future will the nations have a sudden burst of faith in the Creator, and yet what is it reasonable to believe about him?

7. Why in this case can there be no coexistence between God and man, each doing his own respective will side by side?

and, in fact, fight against God? He puts himself above God as wiser than God and more capable, knowing better what is finest for his own self. Human history and experience prove this to be a fact.

⁸ Secular human history has been written by uninspired men of this world. They would not point out that God has had an accurate history written by men whom he inspired, in order to furnish a warning for mankind to heed. Yet a history of this kind, a history inspired by God and written by means of faithful men in his service, does exist and is to be found in the Holy Bible, the Sacred Scriptures. The Bible is a history about man that sets forth God's dealings with him down till nineteen hundred years ago. It also prophesies concerning God's further dealings with man after that time till now and for a thousand years into the future. Certainly it is of the highest importance to man to know what God the Creator has been doing in the thousands of years of man's history. That is just what his written Book, the Bible, specializes on. Secular, worldly history does not do so. It exalts man, not God.

⁹ The Bible reveals that God the Creator has had dealings with individual men, with individual families and with whole nations. It is not just a book of past history, dead history, rotting in the grave now for nineteen hundred years. Rather, from its very beginning the Bible has always been a forward-looking book, and this is so because it has been outstandingly a book of divine prophecy. Besides its direct prophecies for the future, many of the events that the Bible keeps a record of have been recorded because they are prophetic illustrations of future events,

not excluding events of our day. In this remarkable fact lies the vital importance of the Holy Bible. It is the one Book that we dare not overlook or brush aside today. We do not propose to do so in our discussion here, although the nations have done so to their own confusion. By our not ignoring, but heeding, the inspired, prophetic Bible, we shall not make ourselves a laughingstock to God. We shall not have God laugh at us, as he now does at the nations of the world.

ALMIGHTY GOD HAS LAUGHED IN TIMES PAST

¹⁰ Nineteen centuries ago God Almighty had a good laugh at the nations of those days. This was in connection with the greatest fight of man against God in all human history until that time. Because of its prophetic meaning for our very own day, let us now turn to the Bible account of that event and then line it up with the course of events in twentieth-century history. Just as in our own day, the city of Rome, Italy, figured prominently in the news of that day in the first century of our Common Era. There was then no Vatican City in the midst of Rome dominating the worldwide realm of Roman Catholicism. The pagan emperor of the Roman Empire was still the Pontifex Maximus in religious circles, and at this particular time the emperor who was serving in the pontificate was Tiberius Caesar, the successor to Augustus Caesar, who had died on August 19 of the year 14 C.E. It was time for a change. At least, so a small group of persons thought in a certain pocket in the eastern part of the Roman Empire, which then encircled the Mediterranean Sea. A change did come—that was to affect our day.

8. How does secular human history compare with God's inspired history, the Holy Bible?

9. In what remarkable fact does the vital importance of the Bible lie, and how shall we keep from making ourselves a laughingstock to God?

10. Nineteen centuries ago when God had a good laugh at the nations, what city figured prominently in world affairs, and in what section did some men think it was time for a change?

¹¹ Out of the desert over there in the Middle East came a voice proclaiming a new government. It was the voice of a man of the desert. His name had a kindly meaning, for it meant "Jah Is Gracious." (Luke 1:59-80) It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius Caesar, or the spring of 29 C.E., that this man of the desert, John by name, began to proclaim this new government. (Luke 3:1, 2) John was the son of a priest, but there is no record that he ever served as priest like his father at the temple in Jerusalem, the religious capital of the Roman province of Judea. John's God, the gracious Jah or Jehovah, had more important work for him to do than serve at an earthly, material temple. Jehovah God had purposely raised up this John to act as a herald and forerunner of the ruler of the new government. So it was that at God's own fixed time John made his appearance on the public stage and began proclaiming: "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." (Matt. 3:1, 2) Since it was to be "of the heavens," that kingdom promised to be a righteous government, which the people needed to have back there no less than we do today.

¹² "But how can the heavens govern?" hardheaded, materialistic people of today will ask. Well, if they would read the Bible they would soon find out how "the heavens" have expressed themselves in a world-shaking way in the past and will do so in the fast-approaching future. Man's shooting seventeen-ton rockets into outer space gives him no power or supremacy over "the heavens" of which John spoke. Man today thinks of heavens without considering God, but by the use of the inspired expression "the heavens," John

meant the Almighty God. The "kingdom of the heavens" that he proclaimed was "the kingdom of God." That is why that kingdom had to be a good, righteous, perfect government. That is why the people had to be prepared for the coming of that government. In harmony with this fact, the Almighty God sent John to dip or immerse repentant persons bodily in water in symbol of their repentance over their sins committed against Almighty God. —Matt. 3:4-6; Mark 1:4-15.

¹³ No, indeed! The "kingdom of the heavens" that John heralded was no imaginary government, but was a government just as real and "activist" and personally managed as any political government of today, in London, Paris, Moscow, Peking, Washington, Rome, or elsewhere on earth. Hard-line political rulers of today may not appreciate that fact, but they will be made to do so before very long. They are not supermen any more than was Nebuchadnezzar, emperor of Babylon on the Euphrates River in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. Yet this mighty ruler of the Babylonian Empire was reduced to the level of a beast of the field for seven years in order that, as the prophet Daniel said to him, "you know that the heavens are ruling." Here "the heavens" meant the Supreme Being, for, just before Nebuchadnezzar was struck down with beast-like madness he was told from the heavens that seven years would pass over him in this beastlike state "until you know that the Most High is Ruler in the kingdom of mankind, and that to the one whom he wants to he gives it." After his miraculous recovery Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that fact.—Dan. 4:25-37.

¹⁴ John was just as realistic about mat-

11. Where and by whom did a new government then begin to be proclaimed?

12. What question do people ask about a government "of the heavens," but what did John the Baptist mean by the "kingdom of the heavens"?

13. How was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made to realize that the rule of "the heavens" was real and personally managed?

14, 15. Was it for preaching the "kingdom of the heavens" that John was imprisoned, and who took up this preaching thereafter?

ters as political rulers of today are. He was not misleading people with a fond unrealizable dream. About a year after he began his proclaiming and baptizing he was put in prison by Herod Antipas, the district ruler of Galilee, but not for proclaiming "the kingdom of the heavens." It was for insisting on right morals in this ruler who claimed to be subject to the law of John's God, Jehovah. (Matt. 14: 1-5) Hardheaded political rulers back there did not think that a kingdom, if it was "of the heavens" or "of God," was going to interfere with their visible earthly kingdoms. However, this imprisonment stopped John's public proclamation of God's kingdom. But after his imprisonment began, his Kingdom proclamation was taken up by a man whom he had baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, about six months before his imprisonment. That man was a carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee, and his name was Jesus, the foster son of Joseph. So we read of this Jesus:

¹⁵ "Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. Further, after leaving Nazareth, he came

and took up residence in Capernaum . . . From that time on Jesus commenced preaching and saying: 'Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.' " —Matt. 4:12-17; Mark 1:14, 15.

MAKING THEMSELVES LAUGHABLE

¹⁶ Just about three years after this, District Ruler Herod Antipas and his soldier guard were making fun of Jesus, who was charged with attempting to make himself king instead of Tiberius Caesar. (Luke 23:8-12) This was only part of the evidence that nations were beginning to make their own selves laughable. When nations begin to deal mirthfully with the Son of God and to poke fun at him, it is really themselves that they make laughable. That is what they were doing back there when they ridiculed Jesus. At the time that John the Baptist immersed Jesus of Nazareth, he witnessed evidence from heaven that this Jesus was the Son of God. John afterward testified to people:

¹⁷ "I viewed the spirit coming down as a dove out of heaven, and it remained upon him. Even I did not know him, but the very One who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'Whoever it is upon whom you see the spirit coming down and remaining, this is the one that baptizes in holy spirit.' And I have seen it, and I have borne witness that this one is the Son of God."—John 1:32-34.

¹⁸ In testimony of that fact, John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said to his listen-



Rulers are not supermen any more than was Nebuchadnezzar; after living like a beast he learned that "the heavens are ruling"

16, 17. (a) When District Ruler Herod Antipas got ahold of Jesus, whom did he really make laughable, and why? (b) How did John the Baptist bear witness that this was the Son of God? 18. (a) Why did Jesus not have to do any political campaigning? (b) How did his enemies try to involve him in politics regarding the imperial tax?

ers: "See, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Jesus the Son of God was anointed with God's holy spirit to be the coming king in the "kingdom of the heavens." He was anointed with that divine spirit to proclaim that "kingdom of the heavens" to the people for their comfort and guidance. This is what he did. (Luke 4:16-21; 8:1; Acts 10:38) He engaged in no political campaigning up and down the land, trying to win popular votes. He did not have to do this, for he was already elected, chosen, anointed by his heavenly Father, Jehovah God, to be the king in the heavenly Messianic kingdom of God. The many religious enemies whom he made tried to involve him in worldly politics, at least once when they asked him whether it was right for Jews under God's law to pay tax to Caesar, whose empire over them they resented. Jesus adroitly squelched all revolutionary talk by answering: "Pay back, therefore, Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Matt. 22:15-22) What Jesus told others to do, he himself did. He paid the head tax to Caesar as belonging to Caesar. He was no revolutionary.

¹⁹ Was Jesus' own nation in favor of the "kingdom of the heavens" that he preached? No, with the exception of a comparatively small remnant. Tens of thousands of Jews and Jewish proselytes heard him, but relatively few believed on him as the long-promised Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One. After three years of teaching and preaching by him the people came to him and said: "How long are you to keep our souls in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us outspokenly." But Jesus left them to come

to their own conclusions, leaving it up to their faith. At that time they were ready to stone him. (John 10:22-31) But from among those who believed on him and followed him as the Messiah or Christ he chose twelve apostles. These also, after being trained, he sent out to preach: "The kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." (Matt. 10:1-7) Later he sent out seventy other followers to proclaim the same message. (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-11) All together, eighty-two preachers of God's kingdom—but no guerrilla army armed with swords, lances, bows and arrows. How strange! Could an independent government be introduced and put in power over the nation of Israel by preaching? It is enough to make us laugh.

²⁰ Once, though, it did not seem so laughable. This was after three years of such preaching. It was early spring of the year 33 of our Common Era, and up to that time the imperial Roman government over the Jews had done nothing about this Jesus Christ and his band of Kingdom preachers. But the religious leaders of Jerusalem had become frightened at him. Sometime before the passover of that year Jesus Christ performed one of his most remarkable miracles—raising from the dead a man who had been dead and buried for four days. Because of this there was much popular excitement, and the religious leaders said among themselves: "What are we to do, because this man performs many signs? If we let him alone this way, they will all put faith in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:1-48) But now on Nisan 9, or five days before the passover, Jesus rode as if in a coronation ceremony into Jerusalem while the jubilant crowds shouted: "Blessed is he that comes in Jehovah's

19. After Jesus taught and preached for three years, how did the Jews show their attitude toward the "kingdom of the heavens"? (a) In the way that he sent his active followers into the field, how did Jesus show he was no revolutionary?

20. How do we know whether the religious leaders laughed after the resurrection of Lazarus and after Jesus' triumphal ride into Jerusalem?

name, even the king of Israel!" Because of such surprising popular support for Jesus as the Messianic King of Israel, the religious Pharisees became still more disturbed and said among themselves: "You observe you are getting absolutely nowhere. See! The world has gone after him!"—John 12:10-19.

²¹ So the religious leaders tried to get somewhere by having Jesus the Messiah killed on the following Passover day, Nisan 14. The charge for having him executed to death they took out of the realm of religion and put it into the realm of politics. They thus implicated political representatives of the imperial Roman government over Palestine. Condemning him first themselves on religious grounds, they brought him before the Roman governor of the province of Judea. On what charge? On that of political sedition. When questioning the accused Jesus, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate said to him: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered you up to me. What did you do?" (John 18:12-35) During the trial Pontius Pilate learned that Jesus was from the province of Galilee, which was then under jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist. Seeking for a way out, Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, then at Jerusalem.

²² Thinking that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead, Herod Antipas was interested in seeing Jesus. He hoped to be entertained by a miracle or two on Jesus' part. Jesus refused to comply and say or do anything in self-defense. Let the priests and scribes accuse him all they wanted to. So Herod took it as a joke. The Bible record says: "Then Herod to-

gether with his soldier guards discredited him, and he made fun of him by clothing him with a bright garment and sent him back to Pilate. Both Herod and Pilate now became friends with each other on that very day; for before that they had continued at enmity between themselves."—Luke 23:1-12.

²³ Afterward, when Pontius Pilate gave in to religious pressure and turned over Jesus to his Roman soldiers to be killed on an execution stake, the Messiah or Christ of Jehovah God came in for more ridicule and fun-making. "Then," as Matthew 27:27-31 tells us, "the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's palace and gathered the whole body of troops together to him. And disrobing him, they draped him with a scarlet cloak, and they braided a crown out of thorns and put it on his head and a reed in his right hand. And, kneeling before him, they made fun of him, saying: 'Good day, you King of the Jews!' And they spit upon him and took the reed and began hitting him upon his head. Finally, when they had made fun of him, they took the cloak off and put his outer garments upon him and led him off for impaling."

²⁴ While Jesus was hanging on the stake, passersby kept speaking abusively of him and wagging their heads at him and taunting him. "In like manner also the chief priests with the scribes and older men began making fun of him and saying: 'Others he saved; himself he cannot save! He is King of Israel; let him now come down off the torture stake and we will believe on him. He has put his trust in God; let Him now rescue him if He wants him, for he said, "I am God's Son."'"—Matt. 27:39-43.

21, 22. (a) How did the religious leaders implicate the Roman government in the trial and execution of Jesus? (b) How did Herod Antipas handle the matter of Jesus when it was referred to him?

23. How did Jesus then come in for ridicule from the soldiers of Rome?

24. How did the religious leaders make fun of the impaled Jesus?

²⁵ Thus Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, died as a laughingstock. The next day after his death and his burial in a nearby tomb, the chief priests and Pharisees showed their contempt and also their purpose to prevent any possible disappearance of Jesus' body from the tomb, by saying to Pontius Pilate: "Sir, we have called to mind that that impostor said

25. By taking what precautions respecting the entombed Jesus could the religious leaders now laugh in glee?

while yet alive, 'After three days I am to be raised up.' Therefore command the grave to be made secure until the third day, that his disciples may never come and steal him and say to the people, 'He was raised up from the dead!' and this last imposture will be worse than the first." Again the Roman governor played into their hands and commanded them to seal the tomb and station a guard there. (Matt. 27:62-66) How the religious leaders could now laugh in glee!

MAKING MEN AND NATIONS

A Laughingstock

WHAT about Almighty God, as he observed derision and discredit heaped

upon his Son whom he had anointed to preach the "kingdom of the heavens" and to be the reigning King in that Messianic government? Did God laugh? Could he laugh? Yes! Not, of course, at all the reproach that fell upon his own name and that fell upon his royal representative, his terribly suffering Son Jesus the Messiah, but at the most extreme measures and efforts of mere puny human creatures to defeat the will and purpose of the Almighty, Supreme One of the universe. On the third day, when his angel descended in glory and broke the seal and rolled away the stone from before Jesus' tomb, frightening the soldier

guard almost to death, whose turn was it to laugh? The chief priests and their religious associates did not laugh at the report made by the soldier guard. They bribed the soldiers to say: "His disciples came in the night and stole him while we were sleeping." (Matt. 28:2-4, 11-15) But the true facts about the resurrection of Jesus Christ got out to the public anyhow, by the testimony of true witnesses, more than five hundred of them. Well, then, who did laugh, if anybody? Almighty God did!

² Fifty-one days after the combined religious-political efforts to block the Messianic kingdom by killing Jesus Christ,

1. (a) Did Almighty God laugh at all the reproach and discredit heaped upon his suffering Son, or at what? (b) When attempt was made to suppress the news of the resurrection of Jesus, who was it that laughed?

2, 3. (a) When and how did Almighty God bring the facts of the case to the knowledge of the general public? (b) What did Peter say in testifying that Almighty God had foiled the plot against Jesus?

Almighty God began bringing the facts of the case to the knowledge of the general public. It was on the festival day of Pentecost, Sivan 6 (Jewish calendar), of the year 33 C.E. that Almighty God poured out his holy spirit upon one hundred and twenty faithful followers of Jesus Christ, who had seen him by means of his materializations visibly to them since his resurrection from the dead. More than three thousand Pentecostal feasters gathered together to hear these one hundred and twenty witnesses testify in many languages by the miraculous power of the holy spirit about the "magnificent things of God." A leading witness, the Christian apostle Peter, got up and frankly told the crowd how God Almighty had foiled the plot of religionists and politicians against his anointed Son, the Messiah. Peter said:

* "Jesus the Nazarene, a man publicly shown by God to you through powerful works and portents and signs that God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know, this man, as one delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you fastened to a stake by the hand of lawless men and did away with. But God resurrected him by loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to continue to be held fast by it. . . . This Jesus God resurrected, of which fact we are all witnesses. Therefore because he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the promised holy spirit from the Father, he has poured out this which you see and hear. Actually David did not ascend

to the heavens, but he himself says, 'Jehovah said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet."' [Psalm 110:1] Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled." —Acts 1:12 to 2:36.

* It was no laughing matter for the religious leaders of Jerusalem when about three thousand of the crowd whom Peter and his fellow witnesses addressed believed the good news about the resurrected, heavenly exalted Messiah, Jesus, and got baptized and became his followers. (Acts 2:37-47) It was no laughing matter for those same religious leaders when the preaching about Jesus the Messiah

4. (a) Why did the religious leaders have no reason to laugh at the events of the day of Pentecost, 33 C.E.? (b) How did they handle the case of the two apostles, Peter and John, preaching Jesus and the resurrection in the temple?



It was God who laughed when He raised Jesus from the dead. His angel opened the tomb, scaring the guards almost to death

was carried right on into their temple in Jerusalem, particularly by the apostles Simon Peter and John the son of Zebedee. Especially the religious sect of the Sadducees disliked the preaching of the resurrection, the means by which Almighty God defeated the efforts of the religious and political enemies to do away forever with the promised Messiah, the Christ. They had the apostles Peter and John arrested, jailed and put on trial for their conduct. Finally the Jewish Court felt obliged to release the two apostles, but only after threatening them. Here now came the proof that God was laughing at the persecutors of the faithful followers of his Son the Messiah. How do we know?

By what followed this official mistreatment of Christian apostles. Did the religious authorities have reason to laugh over the effect of their fanatical handling of the matter, at how the Christians reacted to such official action? How could they? The record tells us: "After being released they [that is, Peter and John] went to their own people and reported what things the chief priests and the older men had said to them. Upon hearing this they with one accord raised their voices to God and said: 'Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them, and who through holy spirit said by the mouth of our forefather David, your servant, "Why did nations become tumultuous and peoples meditate upon empty things? The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one." Even so, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with men of nations and with peoples of Israel were in actuality

gathered together in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, in order to do what things your hand and counsel had foreordained to occur. And now, Jehovah, give attention to their threats, and grant your slaves to keep speaking your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand for healing and while signs and portents occur through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'"

What followed could provoke no mirth or laughter among Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate and the religious rulers of Jerusalem, for we read: "And when they had made supplication, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were one and all filled with the holy spirit and went speaking the word of God with boldness."—Acts 3:1 to 4:31.

Because of the boldness of these Christian disciples in the first century C.E. Almighty God could laugh derisively at the opposition to his Messiah and faithful followers of his Messiah. God did laugh, for the second Psalm, from which the disciples quoted in their prayer to Almighty God, foretold that He would laugh. Just as the disciples in their prayer commented on the fulfillment of the first two verses of the inspired psalm written by King David of ancient Jerusalem, so the following verses of the same psalm must have then been undergoing fulfillment. Here is where the laugh comes in, for verses two through six of Psalm Two say: "The kings of earth take their stand and high officials themselves have massed together as one against Jehovah and against his anointed one, saying: 'Let us tear their bands apart and cast their cords away from us!' The very One sitting in the heavens will laugh; Jehovah himself will

5, 6. (a) Why could not the religious leaders now laugh at the immediate effect that their mistreatment of Peter and John had upon Jerusalem Christians? (b) Why did Jehovah's answer to the Christians' prayer provide the rulers no cause for mirth?

7. From the application that the disciples made in prayer of two verses of Psalm Two, how do we know that Jehovah was then laughing at the opposition to Christ and his followers?

hold them in derision. At that time he will speak to them in his anger and in his hot displeasure he will disturb them, saying: 'I, even I, have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain.'"

* All the antics of politicians and religious leaders on earth could not alter the actual situation. Opposition and persecution against the followers of the Messiah could not alter the divine arrangement of Almighty Jehovah. In spite of all this he had his resurrected Messiah at his right hand in heaven, upon the celestial Mount Zion, or height of government. So he could laugh derisively at his opposers on earth. He had reason to be angry with them and to speak to them in his hot displeasure. Years later, Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist and ridiculer of Jesus Christ, was banished by Rome to the province of Gaul, and his nephew, Herod Agrippa, was smitten suddenly with a plague and eaten up by worms. (Acts 12:1-23) According to secular history, Pontius Pilate later fared badly at the hands of the Roman Empire. In the year 70 C.E. the Jewish nation suffered the grief of having Titus, the future emperor of Rome, destroy their holy city Jerusalem and its temple and desolate the province of Judea. But Jesus the Messiah continued to reign on the heavenly Mount Zion over his followers on earth, strengthening them to keep on preaching God's kingdom despite persecution by Rome and Israelites.

9 That second Psalm, which had a phenomenal fulfillment in the first century C.E., had a historical background that foreshadowed just such a fulfillment. Psalm Two was composed in the eleventh

century B.C.E. and was based on the international situation that obtained then. David of Bethlehem, an earthly ancestor of Jesus Christ, had been anointed to be king over all twelve tribes of Israel and had captured the enemy stronghold on Mount Zion that dominated the city of Jerusalem. There King David established his throne, transferring it from the southern city of Hebron. When the nearby nation of the Philistines heard of this, the city kings of the Philistines massed their armies and tried to unseat King David and to keep from being bound by bands and cords by this new king of Israel. But Almighty God tolerated no interference by those pagan Philistines. So he gave David two miraculous victories over them and crushed them into subjection to King David.—2 Sam. 5:1-25.

10 Jehovah then inspired victorious David to write the second Psalm and to say that Jehovah would laugh at all the kings and nations who would vainly imagine that they could keep Jehovah's anointed king David from reigning over all the Promised Land from Mount Zion as his capital. Despite all the international tumult and protest and opposition Jehovah kept his anointed king David reigning on the holy mountain of Zion to the end of his forty years of rule. All this is historically important, for the anointed David was not only an outstanding ancestor of Jesus the Anointed but also a prophetic figure of him. As the name David means "Beloved," so Jesus is the Beloved One of Jehovah God.—Matt. 3:17; 17:5.

DIVINE LAUGHTER IN THIS TWENTIETH CENTURY

11 King David reigned on Mount Zion three thousand years ago, and could laugh

8. (a) Why did Jehovah have reason to laugh at the opposers? (b) How, in the cases of Herod, Pilate and the Israelites, did Jehovah speak to them in his displeasure?

9. How did that second Psalm have a historic background that foreshadowed this fulfillment in the first century C.E.?

10. (a) In Psalm Two what did Jehovah indicate he would do for King David? (b) Why is this historically important?

11. In the face of those ancient fulfillments of Psalm Two, what questions do we now ask about it?

with Jehovah God against his enemies. David's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, was on earth as a man nineteen centuries ago. Now we are in the spring of the year 1969 C.E. Are the events and circumstances of this twentieth century causing history to repeat itself by another fulfillment of Psalm Two? Is Jehovah God the Almighty again laughing at the political nations of this system of things? Yes! Why?

¹² Did you ever hear of "the times of the Gentiles," or, "the appointed times of the nations"? Jesus Christ spoke of them in connection with the city of Jerusalem, the walls of which in his day took in Mount Zion. He said: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations, until the appointed times of the nations are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) Those "appointed times of the nations" were not to go on forever on earth; they must be fulfilled or completed at some time. When? In June of 1967, when the Israelis won the six-day war over the Arabs and took possession of East Jerusalem, including the old walled city? No! for those Gentile Times had already ended years before, in 1914 C.E., the opening year of World War I. Decades before 1914 C.E., careful Bible students had calculated this date by means of the Bible timetable and Bible prophecy. From world events and conditions since that momentous year, it is unmistakable that something ended, an era ended, for the Gentile nations in 1914. Secular historians may say that the age of peace and security for the nations ended in that year, but, according to Jesus, what ended in 1914?

¹³ This, the appointed times for the Gentile (non-Jewish) nations to trample on Jerusalem. (Luke 21:24) No, not on the

literal Jerusalem of Jesus' day, but on what Jerusalem represented as the location of the government of God's anointed king. That is to say, the "Jerusalem" that was no longer to be trampled on by the Gentiles was the kingdom of God as carried on by an anointed king of the royal family of David. In the year 607 B.C.E., when David's descendant, King Zedekiah, was dethroned and his royal domain, Jerusalem and the land of Judah, was desolated, the Gentiles began trampling on "Jerusalem" in this sense. Jesus Christ was also a royal descendant of David, and, in the year 33 C.E., the "friend of Caesar," namely, Pontius Pilate, yielded to the demands of the religious leaders and handed Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be put to death on a stake. That was a further trampling on Jerusalem by the Gentile nations.—John 19:12.

¹⁴ Jehovah God Almighty raised up his Beloved Son from the dead and exalted him to His own right hand in heaven, but was the kingdom of God in the hand of this royal descendant and successor of King David at once set up at that time? No! (Acts 1:6, 7) Jesus Christ had to wait in heaven until God's fixed time arrived for those Gentile Times for trampling on Jerusalem to be fulfilled, terminated. (Heb. 10:12, 13) God's prefixed date was the year 1914 C.E. In that year, 2,520 years after ancient Jerusalem and Judah were first desolated by the Gentile Babylonians, the end came to the Gentile Times for trampling on Jerusalem or on the right of God's kingdom to rule over the earth by means of God's Anointed One, a descendant of King David. Then God's Messianic kingdom must be restored, this time, not on earth, but in

12. (a) When did Jesus mention the Gentile Times, and when did they end? (b) What do secular historians say ended for the nations in that year?

13. (a) According to Jesus, what really did end in 1914 C.E.? (b) In 33 C.E. what further trampling on "Jerusalem" by the Gentiles took place in effect?

14. (a) Why did not the Messianic kingdom of God come to power at the time of the exaltation of the resurrected Jesus to heaven in 33 C.E.? (b) What change in heaven and earth did the year 1914 C.E. then mark?

heaven. Then, instead of letting the Gentile nations trample on what was symbolized by Jerusalem, the Gentile nations themselves must be trampled on, must be made the footstool of the Anointed King of God's Messianic kingdom. (Ps. 110: 1, 2) Thus the year 1914 C.E. marked a change for both heaven and earth!

¹⁵ The Gentile nations, including the Republic of Israel, have no reason to be ignorant of this. Twentieth-century history shows why, for since the very year of 1914 C.E. notice has been served on all nations concerning the establishment of God's Messianic kingdom in the heavens. Not in vain did Jesus Christ say, in Matthew 24:14: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come." What if the Gentile nations, particularly the nations of Christendom, had accepted that witness and had realistically conformed to it, yielding their sovereignty over to God's heavenly Messianic kingdom, in the same way that Jehovah's Christian witnesses have done? Would conditions and world trends be different on earth from what they are today? Yes! For all of God's promises to those who submit to his Beloved Son, the enthroned Messianic King Jesus Christ, would have been fulfilled to them. History would not brand them as the shameless persecutors of true Christians bearing witness to the Kingdom since 1914.

¹⁶ The sad and frightening conditions and trends on earth today speak for themselves, testifying to the fact that, since the end of the Gentile Times in 1914 and despite the worldwide witness to the King-

dom as given in all the inhabited earth by Jehovah's Christian witnesses, the Gentile nations, including Christendom and Jewry, have chosen their own way, not God's way. They have stubbornly refused to yield over their sovereignty to God's rightful Ruler for the earth, his Messiah or Christ. They have continued to carry on their power struggle for world domination, even to the extent of fighting two world wars and threatening now the whole human race with a third. For world peace and security they have chosen to look to their League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, considering it as the only practical substitute for God's heavenly Messianic kingdom, a thing that their faithless hearts cannot visualize or appreciate.

¹⁷ Since the end of the Gentile Times in 1914 the big, universal issue is, Jehovah God's Messianic kingdom or domination of all the earth by Gentile nations, which? Will the Gentile nations win out? Can they win out? Let them, if they can, suppress the worldwide proclaimers of God's Messianic kingdom, let them do whatever else they can in opposition to the Kingdom, yet they cannot unseat Jehovah's anointed King, his Christ, now enthroned on the heavenly Mount Zion. They cannot prevent the heavenly Messianic kingdom from making them Christ's footstool, to be crushed out of existence. God Almighty laughs at them derisively. Today all nations are in tumult because of choosing their own way, hence fighting against God's way. By pushing and propagandizing for their own schemes the national groups are meditating upon empty things, muttering empty things that will prove to be hollow. Bible history, Bible prophecy, foretold this.—Ps. 2:1-6; Acts 4:25, 26.

15. (a) Why have the Gentile nations no reason to be ignorant of all this? (b) How would it have made a difference on earth if the nations, particularly those of Christendom, had accepted and conformed to the Kingdom witness?

16. What do world conditions and trends indicate has been the course of the nations since 1914 C.E.?

17. (a) Since the Gentile Times ended in 1914, what has been the big issue before us? (b) Do all that they are permitted to do, what can the nations not undo or prevent on God's part?

¹⁸ Already the nations are eating the fruitage of their anti-Messianic course since the end of the Gentile Times in 1914. The wise course would have been to study God's Word the Bible and heed its counsel to the kings and judges of the earth, to "kiss" the Beloved Son of God as willing subjects of him and then to serve Jehovah God under his Messianic government. (Ps. 2:10-12) But, instead, they chose to follow human wisdom as glorified by modern science and technology. Their worldly wisdom will not be justified by its fruitage, its outcome. Disaster faces them. Disaster will catch up with them, as it did with the Philistines in King David's day and as it did with religious and political persecutors in the days of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Then the heartiest laughter will peal forth on the part of divine wisdom, just as foretold:

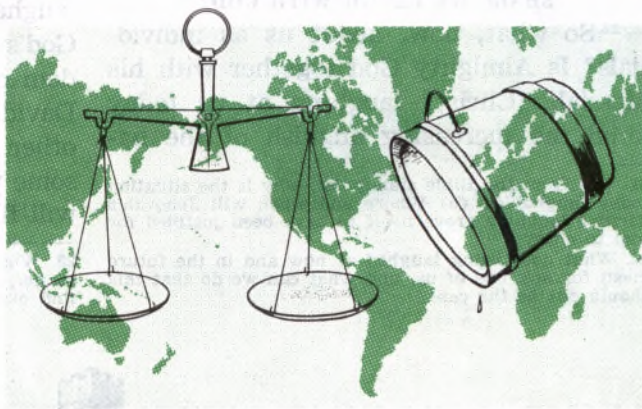
¹⁹ "True wisdom itself keeps crying aloud . . . Because I have called out but you keep refusing, I have stretched out my hand but there is no one paying attention, and you keep neglecting all my counsel, and my reproof you have not accepted, I also, for my part, shall laugh at your own disaster, I shall mock when what you dread comes, when what you dread comes just like a storm, and your own disaster gets here just like a stormwind, when distress and hard times come upon you. At that time they will keep calling me, but I shall not answer; they will keep looking for me, but they will not find me, for the reason that they hated knowledge, and the fear of Jehovah they did not choose. They did not consent to my counsel; they

disrespected all my reproof. So they will eat from the fruitage of their way, and they will be gluttoned with their own counsels. For the renegading of the inexperienced ones is what will kill them, and the easygoingness of the stupid is what will destroy them."—Prov. 1:20-32.

²⁰ For many years, yes, since the close of World War I in 1918, the Gentile nations have been warned that they are on the march to Armageddon for the "war of the great day of God the Almighty." (Rev. 16:14, 16)* Neither the League of Nations nor the United Nations has slowed down the march; they have rather speeded up the pace, for they have backed up nationalism and the dominating of earth by the Gentile nations instead of by the Messianic kingdom of Almighty God. The choice of the nations is for war—not war among themselves, but war unitedly against God the Sovereign of the universe and Creator of our earth.

* See the book *Deliverance*, published by the Watch Tower Society in May of 1926, and Chapter 12 entitled "The Final Battle."

20. Of what march have the nations been warned since the end of World War I in 1918, and for which war have they made a choice?



The nations choose war with God, but the laugh is on them; to God they are as dust on a scale and a drop from a bucket

18. (a) What would have been the wise course for the nations, as counseled in Psalm 2:10-12? (b) What wisdom have they followed, and what is foreshadowed to overtake them?
19. What will "true wisdom" then do and say?

²¹ When we see that this is the real situation today, it becomes laughable. The laugh is on the nations, for they are but as the drop from a bucket and as the fine dust on the scale pans in comparison to Almighty God the Creator. (Isa. 40:15) They are simply asking for destruction. They will get it—at the climax of this universal dispute at Armageddon. (Rev. 19:11-21) Laughing defiantly at the nations at their all-out showdown fight for world domination, Almighty God will send his Messianic King Jesus Christ into battle action against them and destroy those Gentile challengers of God's rightful domination of the earth. His Messiah will win the battle, to the everlasting vindication of the universal sovereignty of Almighty God. God's defiant laughter at the nations will have been justified as the proper thing for him to indulge in. Then the Messianic kingdom, the "good news" of which has been preached world wide by Jehovah's witnesses in spite of international opposition, will take over full control of the earth and all of mankind's eternal interests. It will forever bless all the wise and obedient ones of humankind.

SHALL WE LAUGH WITH GOD?

²² So what, now, about us as individuals? Is Almighty God together with his Messiah (Christ) laughing at us today amid the increasing anguish of the na-

21. (a) From the Bible standpoint, why is the situation today laughable? (b) Where and when will Jehovah's derisive laughter prove itself to have been justified for him to enjoy?

22. What does being laughed at now and in the future mean for any one of us, and what can we do that this should not be the case?

tions? Will he laugh triumphantly over us after gaining victory at Armageddon? It is for each one of us to decide whether this should be the case or not. To be laughed at means our destruction, preceded by a lot of unnecessary discomfort, distress and trouble now. What sane, right-minded person wants to be laughed at under such circumstances as those? We do not have to be! Let the nations of the world keep on acting unwisely, but let us not do so. We can heed the wisdom that comes down from above, the heavenly wisdom, this true wisdom.

²³ After telling how she will laugh in the day of distress upon those who have ignored her, true wisdom ends up by saying: "As for the one listening to me, he will reside in security and be undisturbed from dread of calamity." (Prov. 1:33) Is that not a desirable state in which to be? In it we have no reason to fear anything calamitous or dreadful from the hand of Almighty God, the All-Wise One. Instead, his countenance will beam upon us with divine approval. His protection will be assured to us during the "war of the great day of God the Almighty." Having this, we shall survive the destruction of the laughed-at nations and be ushered into God's righteous new order under his kingdom of the Beloved Messiah, the Greater David. There we shall join with one another in laughter over all the pure, wholesome pleasures with which Almighty God will fill our lives.

23. What does true wisdom promise to those listening to her, and why is that a desirable state in which to find ourselves?





Get to **KNOW YOUR BIBLE**

against the Bible than against any other book. Preservation of the Bible, in the face of every conceivable effort to destroy it, is one of the strongest proofs that the Bible is indeed the Book of Jehovah, just as it is written: "The grass becomes withered, and the flower falls off, but the saying of Jehovah endures forever."
—1 Pet. 1:24, 25.

ONE AUTHOR—MANY WRITERS

HOW fortunate you are if you have a Bible! Even more fortunate if you know something about it, for many people do not even know when, how, why or by whom it was written. Your greatest pleasure and profit, however, comes when you read with understanding this most important of all books.

This Book of books is the oldest in existence. It has reached the greatest circulation of any, and still is the "world's best seller." No other book has been translated into so many languages, more than 1,300, more than the average person has ever heard of. Actually, the Bible is a whole library of little books bound together, sixty-six in number. In the *King James Version* there are 1,189 chapters with 31,173 verses containing 773,746 words.

But what makes the Bible the most unique of all books is its divine authorship—it is the inspired Word of Jehovah, given for man's instruction and guidance. And yet, more enemies have waged war

Do not confuse the two, authorship and writership. A book may be credited to a certain author, yet, by means of dictation, the actual writing be done by a number of secretaries. This is how it was with the Bible. Its authorship is rightly credited to Jehovah God, who by means of his holy spirit *inspired* about forty human secretaries to write the information down. "All Scripture is inspired of God," and this includes the writings of the apostles along with "the rest of the Scriptures." (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16) Paul in writing to Timothy here used the Greek word *Theo-pneu-stos*, literally meaning "God-breathed," a term translated "inspired of God." So when God's spirit or invisible active force became operative upon the Bible writers so they could record what Jehovah dictated, it was as if God was *breathing* upon them to empower and bear them along in the task. Hence, it is written, "prophecy was at no time brought by man's will, but men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit."
—2 Pet. 1:21; John 20:21, 22.

In still another illustrative way this unseen holy spirit of God is spoken of as his

"finger." That is why men, upon seeing Moses perform a supernatural feat, exclaimed, "It is the finger of God!" (Ex. 8:18, 19; compare with Jesus' words at Matthew 12:22, 28; Luke 11:20.) It was "God's finger," the active force of God, that carved the Ten Commandments in the stone tablets.—Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10.

So it was an easy matter for Jehovah to pick men from among shepherds, farmers, fishermen and tentmakers, or to choose one who was a priest, king, prophet, physician or tax collector, to write at His dictation. Whether the writer was schooled in the courts of Pharaoh or was just an "unlettered and ordinary" man in scholastic training, was unimportant to the Great Author. (Acts 7:22; 4:13) Sometimes these men of God simply repeated Jehovah's words verbatim, but at other times God's active force put the divine thoughts into their minds and then allowed them their own choice of words. This colored the pages of the Bible with a beautiful rainbow of individual writing traits and a diversity in styles—songs, prayers, prose, poetry—while at the same time superboneness in theme and unity in purpose was maintained throughout.

Thus the Bible, reflecting as it does the mind and will of Jehovah, far surpasses anything mere men could author. It is written in simple, easy-to-understand language that can be translated into practically any tongue. Scholars admire it as a masterpiece of simple, yet powerful, descriptive words like "God," "man," "life," "death," "fire," "ice," "sing," "cry," "stop," "run."

Another feature of the Bible that demonstrates its single authorship is the systematic orderliness of the book as a whole. It is not a scramble of unrelated fragments from the pens of many men. Rather, the many subjects discussed are highly unified and interconnected, reflecting the

mind of the Creator-Author himself. Throughout, the Bible proves to be an organizational book, whether the subject matter pertains to the patriarchal families, the nation of Israel, the Davidic kingdom or the Christian congregation.

GET TO KNOW IT, FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION

You may think it difficult to learn where the different Bible books are located, or to tell who wrote them. Not so. It is a comparatively easy matter. This is because the books, in the most popular versions, are arranged in the following rather systematic order.

The first three-fourths of the Bible, containing thirty-nine books from Genesis to Malachi (the "Old Testament"), is properly called the "Hebrew Scriptures," since for the most part it was originally written in that language. It may be subdivided as follows: (1) *Historic* (seventeen books), Genesis to Esther; (2) *Poetic* (five books), Job to Song of Solomon; (3) *Prophetic* (seventeen books), Isaiah to Malachi. These, of course, are rather general divisions, for in each of the three sections portions of the other two are to be found.

In the *historic* section Moses wrote the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), which are sometimes called the *Pentateuch*, meaning "fivefold volume." These are followed by the books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, seventeen in all. The five *poetic* books include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. Among the seventeen books in the *prophetic* section are the "major" prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah (who also wrote Lamentations), Ezekiel and Daniel, and the twelve "minor" prophets of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,

Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The last twenty-seven books of the Bible, Matthew to Revelation (the "New Testament"), were written in Greek and hence are called the "Christian Greek Scriptures." They also are in a logical order according to subject matter: (1) the five historical books consisting of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), and the Acts of Apostles; (2) the twenty-one letters or epistles; (3) the Revelation. The twenty-one letters include fourteen by Paul (Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews), and seven others named after their writers (James, First and Second Peter, First, Second and Third John, and Jude).

Please note that none of the so-called Apocrypha books, those of doubtful origin, are included in this catalog of inspired books. A comparison of the sixty-six with the apocryphal writings will show why the latter are excluded. They do not bear credentials demonstrating divine inspiration. Canonicity does not depend on ancient origin, reverence by many, or on the acceptance or rejection by some council, committee or community. The voices of non-inspired men are valuable only as witnesses to what God himself has already endorsed, guarded and protected as canonical.

The most conclusive testimony supporting the thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures is the unimpeachable word of Jesus Christ and the writers of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Jesus, for example, did not complain that the Apocrypha was missing from the Hebrew canon, which he certainly would have done if someone had tampered with it to "take away from" what was inspired of God. (Deut. 4:2;

Rev. 22:18, 19) No, Jesus accepted the Hebrew canon as he found it.—Luke 24:44.

No other book was so long in preparation as the Bible. Moses started writing in 1513 B.C.E., and after him during the next thousand or more years some thirty other writers and compilers (including Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah) contributed to the Hebrew canon. The books of Nehemiah and Malachi were completed sometime after 443 B.C.E. Bible writing was then suspended for nearly 500 years until the apostle Matthew penned his historic Gospel account. It was nearly sixty years after that when John, the last of the apostles, completed the Bible canon around 98 C.E. This means that altogether, some 1,610 years were consumed in the writing of the Bible. It should also be noted that all the co-writers of the Bible were Hebrews, for it was such descendants of Abraham that were "entrusted with the sacred pronouncements of God."—Rom. 3:2.

HOW IT WAS PRESERVED FOR YOU

Even though none of the original manuscripts of the Bible are known to exist, yet Jehovah saw to it that copies were made. Some of these were translations or versions. In fact, the first book of any consequence to be translated into another language was the Hebrew Scriptures. Today there are more than 1,700 handwritten copies in various languages of the Hebrew Scriptures, the oldest of which are of the second and first centuries B.C.E. Most of these manuscripts were made by professional copyists who prided themselves on the accuracy of their reproductions. Ezra was just such a man, "a skilled copyist in the law of Moses, which Jehovah the God of Israel had given." (Ezra 7:6) There are also more than 13,-

600 papyrus and vellum manuscripts of the Christian Greek Scriptures, the whole or in part, dating from the second to the fifteenth century.

More than nineteen hundred years after Ezra's day the invention of the European printing press became a reality; it is an interesting fact, the first book to come off the Gutenberg press was the Bible. The printing press indeed opened the floodgates for the duplicating of the Bible in the common languages of the people, until today the distribution of this Book of books has reached up toward three billion copies.

Such a phenomenal circulation, however, has been accomplished in spite of the most vicious opposition from many quarters, even popes and councils prohibiting Bible reading under penalty of excommunication and death. Down through the centuries the Bible's struggle to survive cost the lives of thousands of Bible lovers, while at the same time thousands of copies of the Book were committed to bonfires lighted by the ignorant and intolerant. This alone should fire you with a desire to know what this Book contains, this Book that, not only raised such fanatical opposition, but made so many willing to die that the Bible might live.

CONTENTS OF YOUR BIBLE IN BRIEF

No other book reveals the past, explains the present and foretells the future like the Bible. After all, only He who knows the end from the beginning could give this information. (Isa. 46:10) It opens with a sweeping account of earth's preparation for habitation by plant and animal life, and gives the details on the creation of man and woman in their paradise

garden of Eden. (Genesis, chapters 1 and 2) In the next chapter we are told of the sin and disobedience, the trial, the sentence of death, and the prophecy concerning 'the seed of the woman,' which is bound up with the principal theme of the entire Bible, namely, the sanctification and vindication of Jehovah's word and name.—Gen. 3:15.

Over two thousand years later this promise of a "seed" was renewed to

Abraham. (Gen. 22:18) Some eight hundred years more and hope in the promise was strengthened by the assurance given to King David. (2 Sam. 7:12, 16) Another one thousand one hundred years (now more than 4,000 years after the Edenic prophecy), the Promised Seed, Jesus Christ, appeared. (Luke 1:31-33; 3:21-23; Gal. 3:16) Bruised by Satan, the Serpent, in death, Jesus provided the ransom price for mankind, and was then resurrected to await the appointed time to destroy Satan forever. So in the last book of the Bible the grand theme announced in the first book is brought to its glorious climax as God's triumphant Kingdom rule restores the paradise that was lost.—Rev. 11:15; 12:1-12, 17; 19:11-16; 20:1-3, 7-10; 21:1-5; 22:3-5.

Were it not for the Bible we would not know of the great issue that was raised in Eden, and that explains why God has permitted the wicked to exist for nearly 6,000 years. Without the Bible we would know nothing about Jehovah, not even his name, which occurs 7,199 times in the *New World Translation*, not counting the abbreviated form of "Jah." Without the Bible we would not know of Christ's ransom sacrifice, the nearness of Armageddon, or the requirements that must be met

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

- "Serve Jehovah with Rejoicing."
- "Taking Pleasure in the House of My God."
- "Get Out from Among Them."
- Social Events Need Christian Moderation.

in order to live forever in or under God's Kingdom rule.—John 3:16, 36; 17:3.

The better you get to know your Bible the more you will appreciate that it is a very practical book in this "time of the end." It gives you sound counsel on how to make your mind and personality over so you will not be conforming to this system of things that will soon be destroyed. (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23, 24; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 3:5-10) You can learn to live now as you will *have* to live if you live at all under the rule of God's kingdom. You can learn to cultivate the fruitage of God's spirit—"love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, self-control."—Gal. 5:22, 23; Col. 3:12-14.

So fundamentally complete is the Bible's code of laws, that if there were no other regulations, it could easily serve as the only book of rules for a whole nation. For by following only the Bible everyone would be obliged to love, worship and obey Jehovah; and toward his fellowman everyone would exercise justice and loving consideration. Everyone would be industrious too. Results? No drunkenness, no selfishness, no fornication! No lying, stealing or cheating! No warring against and killing of fellow creatures! What a practical and wonderful way of life even now in this hate-torn, emotionally explosive world! Jesus summed up all the laws of the Bible in two great commandments: *love God* and *love neighbor*. Love is the fulfillment of all the laws of God.—Matt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:9, 10.

KNOW YOUR BIBLE BY READING IT

Having such a grand Author, and with contents of such supreme importance, the Bible is truly one of the best companions you can have. As Abraham Lincoln said:

"I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man." Or in the words of Patrick Henry: "The Bible is worth all other books which have ever been printed." Henry van Dyke described the Book this way:

"Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the heart of man. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life. The wicked and the proud tremble at its warnings, but to the wounded and penitent it has a mother's voice. It has woven itself into our dearest dreams; so that Love, Friendship, Sympathy, Devotion, Memory, Hope, put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech. No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own."

What about you? If you too are to treasure the Bible above all other books, then you must personally read and study it. Jehovah's witnesses, without cost or obligation on your part, will be happy to show you how to study it systematically. Just tell the next Witness who calls that you want such a free home Bible study. Soon you will appreciate the Bible as a "lamp shining in a dark place." (2 Pet. 1:19; Ps. 119:105) Be like the man whose "delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in his law he reads in an undertone day and night" and you too will prosper. (Ps. 1:1, 2; Josh. 1:8) To you Jehovah's laws, reminders, orders, commandments and judicial decisions as found in the Bible will become "sweeter than honey," and you will value the wisdom derived therefrom as something "more to be desired than gold, yes, than much refined gold," for it will mean your very life.—Ps. 19:7-10; Prov. 3:13-18.



THEY LEARNED THE TRUTH ABOUT

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

HIS mother was visiting him. As she was sitting down she spotted a copy of the *Watchtower* magazine in his bookcase. She jumped up, ran across the room, grabbed it and shouted, "Where did you get this trash? These people do not believe in Christmas! Do not ever get mixed up with anyone that does not believe in Christmas!" Why did this mother react this way? Well, she was sincerely seeking to protect her son and his wife from what she thought was wrong doctrine and from persons whom she thought would mislead them into error. However, did this mother know all the facts? Did she really know why Jehovah's witnesses do not celebrate certain holidays?

Let us see what happened. After a few minutes of excitement, her son, who was studying the Bible with Jehovah's witnesses, managed to calm her down. Then sitting down together he patiently discussed several Bible truths with her all afternoon. His mother then invited him and his wife to her home for supper and they went. Afterward they talked about God's truth until late that night. During the next weekend there were more discussions, and by the time the son met with the Witnesses for his study his mother and sister were with him and ready to learn more.

Now both of them asked for a subscription for the magazine that they used to call "trash." They also obtained a copy of the *New World Translation of the Holy*

Scriptures and confessed that they had never seen or even touched a Bible before that evening.

Why did these persons change? They learned the truth about Jehovah's witnesses. Now they knew that Christ never commanded his followers to celebrate his birth and that Christmas was rooted in paganism. And upon what did the mother base her formerly prejudiced views? She later confessed that she had developed a hatred for Jehovah's witnesses because she did not know why they refrained from celebrating certain holidays. This blinded her until she learned the facts. Now she told her grandson that there will be no celebrating of Christmas in her home.

INVESTIGATING FOR ONESELF

Sometimes persons hear things about Jehovah's witnesses that are not true. These slanderous remarks can blind them or make them fearful of the Witnesses. However, not all gullibly believe what they hear. Such ones want to learn for themselves if what they are being told is true. In this way they have learned the truth about Jehovah's witnesses. For example, a married couple had been studying the Bible with the Witnesses for several months. The wife wrote to her father about the things they were learning. What did her father reply? "My dear daughter, do not have anything to do with Jehovah's witnesses; why, they are Communists!"

"Communists?" roared the husband.

"They can't be, I just do not believe it! Communists do not believe in the Bible."

"Well, sweetheart," answered his wife, "we do not want to get involved, do we?"

"Look!" said the husband, "I will settle this once and for all time. I will call the F.B.I. [Federal Bureau of Investigation]."

He dialed the number and a voice on the other end of the line answered, saying, "This is the F.B.I. Lieutenant R—— here!"

"Sir," said the husband, "I am studying the Bible with Jehovah's witnesses and I have been told that they are Communists, are they?"

The voice answered loud and clear, "Well, no sir! They have been labeled everything but what they are. They are good, honest folks and we give them a clean bill of health!"

"Well, thank you, Lieutenant R——," replied the husband, "I surely appreciate this information because I am going to become one of them." Not too long after this revealing phone call this young man and his wife were baptized. Yes, they learned for themselves the truth about Jehovah's witnesses. They were not content to let others do their thinking for them.

CONDUCT OF WITNESSES REVEALS TRUTH ABOUT THEM

Some persons think that Jehovah's witnesses are just like any other religion in Christendom. They feel that they are out to make money from their members. However, the conduct of the Witnesses has *often* dispelled this erroneous idea. Here is how one person learned the truth about them in this matter:

"In the early 1950's my father, who was a retired engineer, was living in Chicago. He was spending much of his money to help remodel a building into a Kingdom Hall. I was deeply disturbed about this almost to the point of being bitter.

I felt that another religion had hooked an old man and was heartlessly draining him of all his savings. Whenever I visited Dad I would speak to him about all the time and money he was spending on that Kingdom Hall. He would smile and begin telling me about what was going to happen to 'this system of things.' Of course, I did not understand what he was talking about and neither was I interested.

"Well, one day in 1958, I received a phone call telling me that Dad was very sick. As he lived alone, my wife and I planned to leave our home and move in with Dad to look after him. I remember going to his home that day. Two women who are Jehovah's witnesses were there looking after him. They were the kindest, most gentle women I had ever met. Later on, my wife started to scrub the kitchen floor. She was about eight months pregnant. The presiding minister of the local congregation of Jehovah's witnesses was there at the time. To my utter amazement, he took the brush from her, rolled up his sleeves, got down on his hands and knees and began scrubbing the kitchen floor.

"Two weeks later Dad died. The presiding minister gave the funeral discourse, and I was truly surprised at the things I heard. I wanted to hear more and to find out what made these people the way they are. My wife and I began to study the Bible with them, and eleven months later she told me that she wanted to be baptized. I did not tell her that I too had decided to dedicate my life to the wonderful God whose spirit moves people to such kindnesses. Three months later I was baptized. How happy Dad would be if he could know that a few years later I became the assistant presiding minister in the congregation to which he belonged!" Truly, Christian conduct helped these persons to learn the truth about Jehovah's witnesses.

THE CLERGY HAVE UNWITTINGLY HELPED

There have been occasions when the clergy's efforts to stop Jehovah's witnesses have helped opposers to learn the truth about them. Yes, they have unwittingly shown opposers that the Witnesses are teaching the truth from God's Word the Bible. Consider this case that happened in Wisconsin:

"My wife was a devout Catholic, having attended Catholic schools through college. When one of the Witnesses called as he promised, she ran out of the house. After he left, she returned with a no-other-religion-around-here attitude. I had to drive to a neighbor's home to learn the Bible, and what I learned I told my wife. She would tell the priest and he, in turn, would laugh and ridicule Jehovah's witnesses. 'The end of the world,' he laughed — 'they have been preaching that for ages! Someday they might be right!'

"This last comment started my wife thinking and moved her to press him for proof that the Witnesses were wrong. He promised to do this, and he gave her some books on philosophy. Since our study had to be moved to my home, I asked my wife to invite the priest. She agreed. He never came, but she listened in on our discussion while waiting for the priest and found it quite interesting. Still she was determined to have the priest defend her faith and finally had to arrange a meeting at his home.

"During our discussion he vainly tried to prove the Trinity, but the Bible verses proved otherwise. When I asked him about John 17:20-22, he replied red-faced, 'I am not prepared to answer that.'

" 'All your life a priest [forty years],' I said, 'and you are not prepared. We have studied with Jehovah's witnesses only *three months*, and we are prepared.'

"Then came the real surprise. My wife turned to the priest and said, 'I am

through with your church.' She decided this, knowing that her relatives would severely oppose her." Yes, she came to realize who taught the truth of the Bible.

Another incident in which a clergyman unwittingly helped someone to learn the truth about Jehovah's witnesses happened in Spain. A man began to study the Bible with the Witnesses, but his wife staunchly opposed this because she considered them to be "Protestants." She tried everything to stop her husband from studying with them. She had her Catholic relatives try to dissuade him and threatened to call the police when the Witness would come for the study. This did not stop him, for he arranged to study with the Witness in another place. He progressed rapidly.

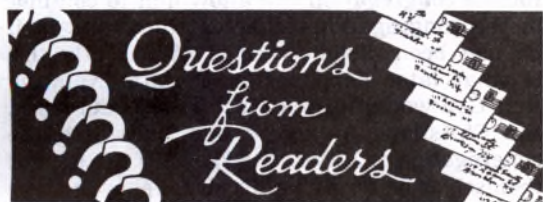
The wife now threatened to leave him and take the children with her, and she did. But after two weeks she returned. After this the man's relatives came to visit him. They too were studying the Bible with the Witnesses and attending their meetings in the town where they lived. On Sunday they all wanted to go to the meeting in the locality, and they persuaded the wife to come and learn the truth about the Witnesses. She agreed to go with them.

Unbeknown to them, it was on that day that the local priest had learned where the Witnesses were having their meetings, and he informed the police in order to stop them. The police came and arrested everyone, including the opposed wife. *She tried* hard to convince them that she was not one of Jehovah's witnesses but that she was, in fact, very much opposed to them. The police thought that she was making up this story to avoid arrest.

She was put in prison with the rest of the Witnesses, and, as it turned out, this was the very thing that made her realize that Jehovah's witnesses are true Chris-

tians and that the priest had acted in a very unchristian manner. Immediately after she was released from prison with the rest of the Witnesses, she asked them to study the Bible with her, and she made arrangements to attend all their meetings. She progressed rapidly and soon was spending many hours a month teaching others the truths of the Bible.

Yes, when honest-hearted persons learn the truth about Jehovah's witnesses their lives are affected. They want to share in the work that the Witnesses are doing today. Many persons who formerly opposed God's servants are now in their ranks exulting in the hope of worshiping the only true God forever in a paradise earth where only true religion will prevail.



● Does John 20:23 mean that some humans are authorized to forgive sins?—F. M., U.S.A.

It is to be noted at the outset that what we are considering are sins against God or a breaking of one of God's laws such as by stealing, lying or committing sexual immorality. Occasionally someone may "sin" against a Christian by acting rudely, gossiping about him or in some other way personally transgress against the Christian. The Bible urges us to be forgiving in such cases. (Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 4:8) But what about serious sins against God in heaven?

The occasion of the statement at John 20:23 was an appearance of Christ to "the disciples" following his resurrection. After telling them that he was sending them forth, and indicating that they would soon receive holy spirit, Jesus said: "If you forgive the sins of any persons, they stand forgiven to them; if you retain those of any persons, they stand retained."—John 20:21-23.

While this verse alone might seem to be saying that the apostles could forgive sins, we cannot ignore the testimony of the rest of the Bible. We need to be like the noble-minded Bereans in "carefully examining the Scriptures" to see what is so.—Acts 17:11.

When King David sinned, from whom did he seek forgiveness? In his time there were God-ordained Jewish priests serving at the tabernacle. Still, David wrote: "I said: 'I shall make confession over my transgressions to Jehovah.' And you yourself [God] pardoned

the error of my sins." (Ps. 32:5) Did Jesus change this when he came? No, for he taught us to pray: "Our Father in the heavens, . . . forgive us our debts [or trespasses]." (Matt. 6:9, 12) And that is how Jesus' disciples understood the matter. They knew that it was not some man, but God, who could 'forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'—1 John 1:9.

How, then, were the disciples to whom Jesus addressed the words at John 20:23 involved in the matter of forgiveness? A comment Christ made earlier sheds light on this. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus explained what one should do if his spiritual brother sinned against him. The final step was for the matter to be heard by the spiritually older men of the congregation. (Jas. 5:14, 15) If the sinner refused to repent of his serious sin, he was to be expelled from the congregation. Was it a matter of some men deciding to forgive or retain his sins? No, they would simply be acting in accord with what they could conclude would already have been done in heaven. How would they know this? By what God has revealed in his Word on such matters.—2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

This is evident from Jesus' next words: "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (Matt. 18:18, *New American Standard Bible*; see also NW, Ro, *The New Testament* by C. B. Williams) Though some Bible versions render this verse in a way that suggests that the heavenly action occurs after the earthly decision, noted Bible translator Robert Young said that it literally should be: "shall be that which has been bound (already)."

Hence, if a Christian was lying, for example, and when the older men of the congregation met with him about it he refused to repent of

his dishonest course, God's view, as revealed in his Word, would already be known. If a sinner would repent, God would forgive him. (Isa. 55:7) And Jehovah would forgive one who sinned unintentionally. But he would not forgive an intentional, unrepentant sinner. (Num. 15:22-31) Knowing this, the representatives of the congregation could decide from the facts and the sinner's attitude how to deal with him. And since they know from the Bible what God's view is, their decision about whether to expel from the congregation one who had sinned should be what God had already decided in heaven.

That the above is how Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 were understood by first-century Christians is plain from 1 Corinthians, chapter five. There was a willful, unrepentant sinner in the Corinthian congregation. Could the older men of that congregation or even the apostle Paul personally 'forgive the sins of that person' or 'retain the sins of that person'? No, but because they knew God's estimation of such an unrepentant sinner, they were obliged to expel him from the congregation, demonstrating to all that evidently his sins were being

"retained" on him by God and not forgiven.

While Matthew 18:18 and John 20:23 may have been spoken directly to the apostles, it is clear from what Paul wrote the Corinthians that the spiritually older men in each congregation were to apply Jesus' words. This can also be seen in the messages to the congregations in Pergamum and Thyatira. (Rev. 2:12-16, 20-24) Christ held it against those congregations that they did not expel wrongdoers, thus binding on earth what was already bound in heaven.

But when a sinner does repent, those acting for the congregation can allow him to continue in the congregation, or accept him back in if he had been disfellowshipped. Apparently this is what later happened in Corinth. Knowing that God would forgive such a one, Paul urged the Christians to accept him back into the congregation. (2 Cor. 2:6-8) They would not themselves be forgiving his sins; Jehovah alone could do that. But by acting in accord with the principles in God's Word they could conclude that his sins were forgiven by God in heaven. Thus, John 20:23 would be true: "If you forgive the sins of any persons, they stand forgiven to them."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

"In all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." (Matt. 24:14) In 200 lands around the earth, and in 165 languages, Jehovah's witnesses are giving this witness about the established kingdom of God. What a prophet Jesus was to foresee such earth-wide preaching! Jesus' prophecy is really an invitation to enter the work of giving a witness worthy of the Kingdom. Will you respond? To help interested persons do so, Jehovah's witnesses during the month of April will be offering them a year's subscription for the magazine that announces Jehovah's kingdom, *The Watchtower*, with three booklets, for just \$1.

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May 11: Making Men and Nations a Laughingstock. Page 239. Songs to Be Used: 1, 84.

FIELD MINISTRY

Some nineteen hundred years ago Jesus Christ foresaw the greatest preaching work in all history. He foretold that his true followers would preach the good news of God's kingdom