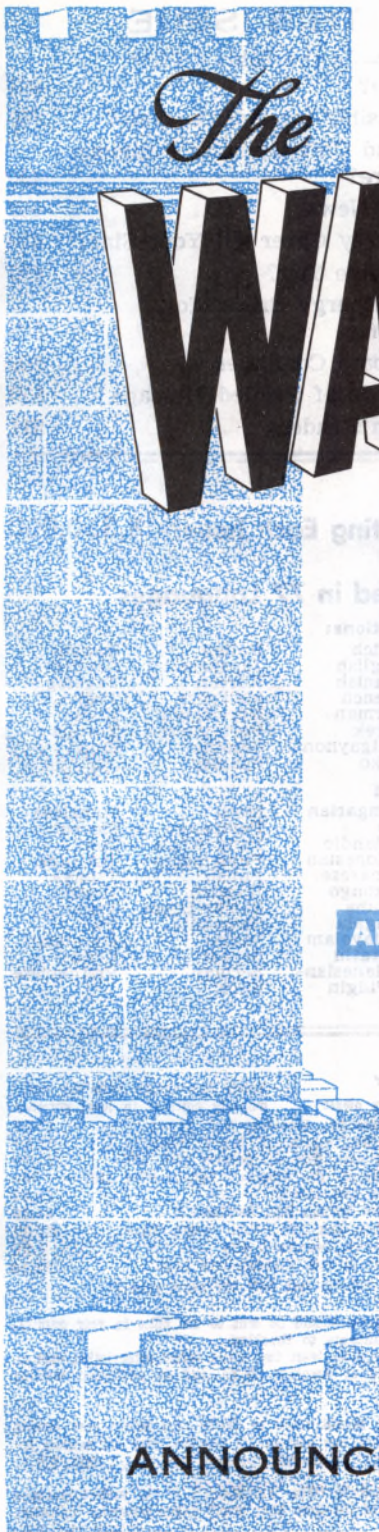




The **WATCHTOWER**

*How Merciful
Are You?*

Also in this issue

HOMOSEXUALITY

**—IS THE
BIBLE'S VIEW
REASONABLE?**

AUGUST 15, 1974

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

The WATCHTOWER

August 15, 1974
Vol. 95, Number 16

A watchtower enables a person to see far into the distance and announce to others what is coming. Can a magazine serve similarly in our day? Yes, from its first issue (July 1879) onward, *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's witnesses, has done just that.

How can it benefit you? Consider: Do you long for a better world, one of true justice and free from sorrow, hatred and war? Do you want to live at a time when genuine peace and love prevail among people of all races? Then this magazine can aid you. Using God's Word, the Bible, as its authority, it points out the clear evidence that the present wicked system of things will soon end, destroyed by God. But it also announces the coming in of a righteous new order. There, under the rule of God's kingdom, his heavenly government, people will enjoy life forever in true peace, health and happiness on a paradise earth.

Faithfulness to the Word of God lifts *The Watchtower* above the contradicting religious teachings and philosophies of men. It stays strictly neutral as regards political affairs. It wholeheartedly upholds the highest moral standard—that of man's Maker, Jehovah God. From this source, it shows solutions to the problems of daily life.

We know that many sincere persons would appreciate a discussion of these things in their own home with a qualified person. A minister of Jehovah's witnesses will be glad to call on you free of charge. To arrange for this, simply write the publishers of this magazine or contact Jehovah's witnesses locally.

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HOMOSEXUALITY

—Is the
Bible's View
Reasonable?

ARE you a homosexual? If so, you may feel that you are the object of much unfair discrimination and that you suffer unjustly because of what you consider to be a personal matter—the choice of sex partners. The world at large, in your opinion, may be very narrow in its outlook on homosexuality.

But there is an old saying that 'a sword cuts two ways.' So, one needs to be careful not to be guilty of the same bias that one sees in others. Have you taken time to examine carefully what the Bible has to say on the subject of homosexuality? Or, have you, as it were, cast the Bible aside as unworthy of your consideration?

You may know that more religious people than ever who claim to represent the Bible are speaking out in favor of homosexuality. For instance, "Father" Henry Fehren says in *U.S. Catholic* magazine that anti-homosexual views have been "based on misinterpretations of stray Biblical texts written for another age and culture." Echoing his words is Günther Hintze, a Lutheran Evangelical priest in Augustenborg, Denmark: "The Bible's view on this matter cannot have any validity for us today." And Jewish rabbi Philip Horowitz recently said in Cleveland, Ohio: "The modern homosexual would resent the fact that his behavior is considered immoral."

But why do these men turn away from the Bible? Notice, again, what they say: the Bible is for "another age," and is not "modern" or "for us today." The Bible is

considered out-of-date for use in dealing with this problem. But is that the case? Fair-minded persons interested in the truth and in the approval of God are willing to find out.

It is true that the Bible is a very old book. But that of itself does not disqualify it as a guide on personal moral matters like homosexuality; quite the opposite is the case. The Bible's very age contributes to its value as a moral guide. Why do we say this?

Well, for one thing, people are essentially the same now as they have ever been. Regardless of the time period when they lived, men have had the same basic physical and emotional needs. Logically, if the Bible is the Word of God by which men should direct their lives, is it not understandable that it would have a long history? Certainly. Thus the Bible's age is a factor in its favor and lends weight to what it says on homosexuality.

THE EFFECTS OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The Bible is not oblivious to homosexual practices. Such things are specifically referred to several times in the Scriptures. For instance, we read at Romans 1:26, 27,



according to *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips:

"God therefore handed them over to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged the normal practices of sexual intercourse for something which is abnormal and unnatural. Similarly the men, turning from natural intercourse with women, were swept into lustful passions for one another."

But thereafter, most importantly, it accurately details the effects of homosexuality:

"Men with men performed these shameful horrors, receiving, of course, in their own personalities the consequences of sexual perversity."

Is the Bible's diagnosis given here actually correct? Homosexuals by their words and actions say Yes. They point to the instability of homosexual "marriages," of the promiscuity of searching for sex partners and of the dishonesty in trying to hide behind a facade of respectability while secretly carrying on homosexual activity. Not their enemies, but homosexuals themselves speak of the "dread of growing old alone." The hopelessness of their future, homosexual William Carroll observes, leads to "cynicism, despair and even suicide." Yes, homosexuals themselves admit that they receive "in their own personalities the consequences" of the homosexual way of life.

The Bible therefore accurately depicts the results of this practice. But why do these adverse traits appear in "their own personalities"? The apostle Paul says it is because they engage in that which is "abnormal and unnatural." Advocates of homosexuality say that what makes something "natural" or "unnatural" is purely subjective, and is a matter that must be decided by each person for himself. But is that really the case? Is it not obvious to virtually all persons that male and female are counterparts, opposites sexually? Is it not apparent that their sex organs were designed to "fit" together?

On the other hand, does it seem "natural" to you for two lesbians to come together sexually? One of the pair must often use some type of artificial substitute for a male organ to satisfy the other. And consider male homosexuals. Both may claim to be men, but must not one assume a female role in some sense? In the case of male and female homosexuals, one way or another, a substitute must be supplied for what the opposite sex supplies "naturally." How reasonable is that? The Bible correctly refers to the actions of homosexuals as "abnormal and unnatural."

The Bible therefore accurately depicts the results of this practice and informs us as to why these results appear. Consistently, would it not thereafter clearly condemn the practice? That would be reasonable.

So we read at 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10: "Make no mistake; no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion . . . will possess the kingdom of God." (*The New English Bible*) Or, as the verse is paraphrased in *The Living Bible*: "Homosexuals—will have no share in his kingdom."

Biblically speaking, the matter is quite clear, is it not? The Bible just plainly shows that homosexuality is wrong. The Scriptures are thus consistent, not just showing the bad effects of this practice, but also properly condemning what produces those ill effects.

But it has become fashionable among homosexuals to argue that primarily the apostle Paul, not Jesus Christ, spoke against homosexuality. How valid is that contention?

JESUS AND HOMOSEXUALITY

Well, to start with, those who so argue ignore the fact that the Bible refers to the words of Paul as part of 'Scripture' and thus beneficial for "setting things straight." (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 3:15, 16)

But an honest examination of the words of Jesus shows that he, too, did indeed speak against homosexuality.

He said, as recorded at Matthew 19:9 according to the *Revised Standard Version (RSV)*: "Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery." The Greek word for "unchastity" that Matthew here employs in penning Jesus' words is *por-nei'a*. *Por-nei'a* is related to the verb *por-neu'o*, meaning "to give one's self to unlawful sexual intercourse."

The best way to understand what is taken in by these terms is to find out how they are used in other places. A similar word appears in the Bible at Jude 7 in describing the sin of certain ancient cities: "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally [an intensive form of *por-neu'o*] and indulged in unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." (RSV) For what type of 'immorality' or *por-nei'a* were those at Sodom and Gomorrah condemned? The Bible narrative at Genesis 19:4, 5 answers:

"The men of Sodom, surrounded the house, from boy to old man, all the people in one mob. And they kept calling out to Lot and saying to him: 'Where are the men who came in to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may have intercourse with them.'"

These men of Sodom and Gomorrah were homosexuals. In fact, the English word "sodomy," which particularly means 'intercourse between two men,' is drawn from the name of the city of Sodom. The Bible would call their sin *por-nei'a*. Jesus said *por-nei'a* was so wrong morally that it was a basis for severing the marriage bond.

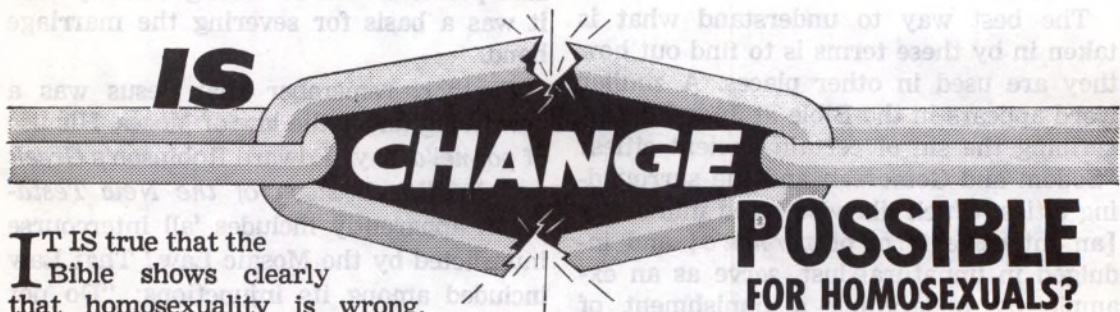
Further, remember that Jesus was a Jew living under the law of Moses. His use of *por-nei'a*, says Edward Robinson's *Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament*, apparently includes 'all intercourse interdicted by the Mosaic Law.' That Law included among its injunctions: "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence." (Lev. 18:22, *The Torah, The Five Books of Moses*, by the Jewish Publication Society of America)



God destroyed Sodom and nearby towns because of their unnatural sexual practices.
Is it reasonable to think that God has changed his view?

Por-nei'a, the word used by Jesus, obviously embraced this command of God.

Also, it should be noted that homosexuality had been condemned by God *before* the law of Moses was even given. The account about Sodom and Gomorrah, referred to earlier, proves this fact; those cities were destroyed by God over 400 years before the law of Moses came into existence. Jesus was aware of that.—Luke 17:28, 29, 32.



IT IS true that the Bible shows clearly that homosexuality is wrong. But Jehovah, the God of the Bible, is considerate of mankind's weaknesses. He is a God of love. So he does not cast aside as totally irredeemable any person—as long as that individual strives diligently to conform to His will.

The Scriptures show that the homosexual, to gain God's approval, must make a change. But the Bible also reveals that such a change is possible. The apostle Paul refers to some persons who had been homosexuals and then says, in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "And yet that is what some of you *were*. But you have been washed clean." They had *changed*!

However, many homosexuals argue that they cannot change. They are, in effect, saying that the Bible is wrong. Some assert, "I cannot help it; I was born a homosexual." Or, they may say that homosexuality is the result of their rearing. There are, no doubt, many social and emotional factors involved in a person's turning from heterosexual to homosexual relationships,

Beyond doubt, therefore, Jesus did in fact condemn all such 'unchaste' practices as homosexuality. As reason would indicate to us, the Bible is consistent on this matter. Paul's words are backed up by the authority of the Son of God.

But, according to the Bible, what course is open to homosexuals? Are they simply condemned and, as it were, dropped eternally from God's favor? That would not seem reasonable; let us see.

and the root causes of homosexuality may not be known. But no one should fatalistically argue that 'I cannot help it.' Why?

Because the bulk of available information agrees with the Bible: Homosexuals **CAN** change. Nothing but the person himself forces an individual to remain homosexual. Does that statement sound too strong to you? Well, consider the evidence.

WHY THEY DO NOT CHANGE

As one reads material on the subject or talks to homosexuals, one is struck by this fact: Homosexuals *want* to be homosexuals. An article largely sympathetic to the homosexual movement appeared in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 14, 1972. Notice the writer's observations:

"Behind all of this, one senses the unspoken fear that some factor might be found in research that would make it seem possible to change a gay into a straight. They wouldn't want this. They are happy in

their gayness. They don't want to be straight.

"Lena Hardin, who is coordinator with Mike McConnell of Gay House's speaking bureau, put it this way: 'The only advantage to being straight is that you no longer would be different. Other people's concepts and considerations of you would be altered. And, to tell you the truth, it's not all that valuable. I still want to be what I am.'"

Notice, no appeal to being 'born homosexual' or with a 'poor family background.' The individuals involved just plainly say: "I still want to be what I am."

THINKING TRANSFORMED

Since a person chooses to be homosexual, it is his thinking that has been affected, urging him to make that sexual preference. Reasonably, the Bible agrees that this is at the base of the problem. Paul writes about homosexuals, that "God gave them up to a disapproved mental state, to do the things not fitting." (Rom. 1:26-28) Such individuals have come to reason from the heart in a wrong way, developing perverted desires.—Matt. 15: 18-20.

What the Bible says in this respect accords with the facts revealed by homosexuals. Thus an American explains the process by which his reasoning was won over to the homosexual viewpoint: "Homosexuality is the product of very complicated conditioning over an extended period of time . . . [Homosexuals] deliberately go through a brainwashing experience—I'm gay and I'm proud. I'm beautiful.' This is reverse therapy."

This thinking is at the core of the homosexual problem. One could stop being homosexual only if one no longer thought like a homosexual and no longer had their desires. The Bible, in 1 Corinthians 6:11, shows that such a change in thinking is possible. Then why is it that more do not change?

An interviewer for the Long Island (New York) Press asked a converted homosexual this same question. In answer, the man said:

"In the first place, there's the widespread belief that it's impossible. Second, thousands of unhappy homosexuals have no resources to get into expensive therapy. Third, fear of exposure inhibits a lot of men."

Though many psychiatrists and others have given the impression that a person cannot change, this man's experience shows otherwise. He admits to knowing six other men who have also changed.

Such adjustments admittedly are not easy to make. Why? Because not just one's pattern of thinking has developed in a certain way, but one's body has come to crave something abnormal. As a person's pattern of reasoning is adjusted back to that which is entirely natural, so must his whole way of life. Slowly, the old ways must be replaced with new ones.

HOW ONE HOMOSEXUAL CHANGED

A homosexual male, an actor, who eventually settled in New York city, tells how he made the change. This man was thoroughly homosexual. Let him explain the about-face he has made and the effort on his part that has been involved:

"I had been a homosexual since the age of eight; by the time I was twenty-three years old I came to be in absolute, unquestioned servitude to my flesh. Like many homosexuals I tried to salve my conscience and the seriousness of my immorality by saying, as do many sophisticates of this world, that I was 'gay.' But the simple truth of the matter is I was a pervert. I can still recall at least 150 males with whom I repeatedly engaged in every kind of sexual perversion. I do not say this to try to excite or 'turn on' anyone who may have homosexual tendencies but to illus-

trate the level to which I had fallen. Actually, by the gay world's standards, I might have been considered only a moderate homosexual since I engaged in immorality with less than three different men each day.

"Secretly I knew that my homosexuality was wrong. And when, a few years ago, I was invited to a meeting of Jehovah's witnesses, I began to reinforce this conviction about the error of the homosexual course. Additionally, I liked what I heard from the Witnesses. The idea of living forever in a paradise earth really appealed to me. It was so pleasant, so relieving. I had always wondered why the world is the way it is, with so much hate, greed and selfishness in it. I wondered what hope there was for the future. Jehovah's witnesses gave me the answers. But even at that I did not immediately change my homosexual way of life; I knew that would be difficult, as I enjoyed it very much. Further, I was continuing my acting career, including taping my TV shows. I was making a lot of money and that, too, would not be easy to give up.

"However, in 1969 I was working in New York city and went to the 'Peace on Earth' Assembly of Jehovah's witnesses at Yankee Stadium. During the concluding remarks I was really brought face to face with reality. The speaker directed his remarks to those who were not Jehovah's witnesses, saying: 'You know you want to be in God's new order. So why don't you come along with us, and gain life in that new order?' The simple truth of those words hit home. I did want life. I did love Jehovah's people. From that moment on I began to make changes in my life. It was a question of either serving Jehovah and living or staying 'gay' and dying.

"To say that from then on I never had

a homosexual experience again would really sound nice. But, unfortunately, it would be a lie. I did slip after that. But I did not give up. I detested what I had done and made a firmer resolve that I would not repeat the immorality again. Few persons probably can ever appreciate the fight I had—the terrible agony, day and night, as the 'flesh' cried out for satisfaction sexually. In time I won the fight, but not in my own strength. Continually I went to God in prayer and asked for his help, and he did help me. However, I took action in harmony with my prayers.

"I resigned from all acting engagements, even though it meant giving up many material comforts and much public exposure as an actor. I realized that the atmosphere in the field of acting is simply not conducive to practicing true Christianity or any decent morality. In time I completely left off all homosexual practices and was accepted for baptism by Jehovah's witnesses.

"In the meantime I have married a fine Christian woman, and we enjoy true happiness and contentment in Jehovah's wonderful marital arrangement. Also, I am a ministerial servant in one of the congregations of Jehovah's witnesses. But particularly what brings me pleasure is that I now have a clean conscience, and I know that I am living a life that is pleasing to Almighty God."

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE TO CHANGE

The man accepted the challenge to change. In time, he took the step that the Bible recommends as proper for those who lack sexual self-regulation, namely, honorable marriage. (1 Cor. 7:1, 2, 9) However, no homosexual should think that marriage of itself will solve his problem. There are many so-called "bisexuals" who, though married, also carry on secret af-

fairs with persons of the same sex. A "bisexual" is still a homosexual and needs to make changes.

Similarly, sometimes married or single men will tell counselors that they are no longer homosexuals since they have left off actual physical contact with others. But they should examine themselves honestly and fairly. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* defines a homosexual as "a person who in fantasy or reality habitually prefers sexual relations with a person of the same sex." Thus, a male who *regularly harbors desires* for other males is yet a homosexual in his heart. (Compare Matthew 5:27, 28.) That is what he really wants. He must yet work to elevate his thinking.—Phil. 4:8, 9.

But, as noted in the experience related above, no one should think that he can make a complete change to a Christian way of life in his own strength. He must look to Jehovah God for help. Jehovah has given the Christian congregations of his Witnesses to assist any person who genuinely desires to lead a morally upright life. At no charge they will teach any sincere person what the Bible says and provide personal help that such ones need to make adjustments.

God has also given his holy spirit for those who want to clean up their lives. Even if on occasion a person has a temporary setback in his struggle to overcome a habitually ingrained practice like homosexuality, we have God's assurance that His spirit will sustain him if he honestly keeps trying to do what is right. Like the sinner David, who was a king of Israel, such a person can pray, confident that Jehovah hears him: "May you purify me from sin with hyssop, that I may be clean; may you wash me, that I may become whiter even than snow. Conceal your face

from my sins, and wipe out even all my errors. Create in me even a pure heart, O God, and put within me a new spirit, a steadfast one. Do not throw me away from before your face; and your holy spirit O do not take away from me."—Ps. 51: 7, 9-11.

As a person works to change his thinking, he will want to show good sense and make certain practical adjustments in his way of life. For instance, depending on his case, he may choose different employment, or a new location in which to live. He may also find it advantageous to adjust his clothing and grooming as well as the way he acts, talks and walks.—Ps. 119:66.

In some cases, owing to the nature of a person's past, it is conceivable that the total emotional, physical and social effects of homosexuality will not be wiped out for many years, maybe not ever in this present system of things. But a person should never give up his fight. If progress sometimes seems slow, persist and rely on Jehovah's spirit; this will in time yield good results.

Therefore, the real question before those faced with the problem of homosexuality is not, 'Is the Bible's view reasonable?' The Bible's view is indeed very reasonable. Rather, the potent question before them is: Do I really *want* to change and will I accept the challenge of doing so?

IN COMING ISSUES

- **By Faithfulness Keep Living.**
- **Is There a United Body of True Christians?**
- **The United Nations—How Strong a World Force?**

What is Behind CHRISTENDOM'S RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE?



SURPRISING as it may seem to many, the architecture of this world's religions does not have noble origins. It has much in common with a building project undertaken many centuries ago in defiance of God's purpose for mankind to spread about in the earth.—Gen. 11:4.

This happened not long after the global flood in the days of Noah. A considerable number of the human family settled in the plains of Shinar along the Euphrates River. (Gen. 11:2) There they began building a city, Babel, and a tower. That tower was doubtless a ziggurat, to be used in the worship of false gods. Says the *Encyclopædia Judaica*:

"Scholars agree that the edifice referred to in Genesis 11 is clearly a *ziggurat*, or Mesopotamian temple tower. The *ziggurat* . . . was the central feature of the great temples which were built in all important Mesopotamian cities."—Vol. 4, p. 23.

The one who instigated the building of Babel and its tower was doubtless the man Nimrod, a great-grandson of Noah. This is suggested by the fact that, according to the Bible, 'the beginning of Nimrod's kingdom came to be Babel.' (Gen. 10:9, 10) Furthermore, Jewish tradition, recorded by Josephus of the first century C.E., links Nimrod with this project. We read: "He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power. . . . Now the multitude were very ready to follow the

determination of Nimrod, and to esteem it a piece of cowardice to submit to God; and they built a tower."

The Creator, Jehovah God, frustrated the plans of Babel's builders. He confused their language and forced them to scatter. (Gen. 11:7-9) Nevertheless, this did not put a stop to the building of lofty structures for worship. Observes the book *Error's Chains: How Forged and Broken*:

"The sacred buildings [of Chaldea] appear to have been often built in the form of a pyramid, with steps or stages, forming a series of terraces, each smaller than the one beneath it. This is the traditional style of buildings of the Tower of Babel. The same tendency to build high sacred buildings is seen in the pagodas of India, Burma and China, in the Mohammedan towers, like the Koutub Minar, and the spires of Christian churches [italics ours]. The object at the first seems to have been the getting nearer to the heavenly bodies, the object of their worship."

Thus even in its architecture Christendom has not escaped coming under non-Christian influence. This influence has distorted basic Christian truth. Regarding the design of Christendom's religious buildings, André Biéler, in his book *Architecture in Worship*, writes: "The constructors passively submit to all kinds of hidden pressures, to conventions, to unconscious custom and to religious traditions which are quite foreign to the Christian faith." How has this come about?

In the case of the early Christians, there was little danger of their wanting to build temples like the one once situated on Jerusalem's Mount Moriah. They knew that this temple had served God's purpose

and, in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, had been destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.—Matt. 24:1, 2.

Another force, however, exerted pressure upon professing Christians. Writes André Biéler: "Oriental and Graeco-Roman pagan cults continually led Christianity astray." Ancient pagan cults put the emphasis on the things seen. The temples were designed to fill the worshipers with awe and wonderment. The deity, represented by an image, was regarded as residing in the sanctuary. A special place was set aside for the priests alone.

True worship, on the other hand, does not depend upon any fixed location nor upon the presence or use of visible things. As Jesus Christ explained to a Samaritan woman: "The hour is coming when neither in this mountain [Gerizim] nor in Jerusalem will you people worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know . . . Nevertheless, the hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth, for, indeed, the Father is looking for suchlike ones to worship him." (John 4:21-23) Similarly, the apostle Paul told the Athenians: "The God that made the world and all the things in it . . . does not dwell in hand-made temples."—Acts 17:24.

These truths soon became distorted, as professed Christians yielded to pagan influence. In the centuries following the death of the apostles of Jesus Christ impressive edifices were built. These buildings were much more than just places for professed Christians to assemble. Like the pagan temples, the buildings themselves were designed to fill the worshipers with reverential awe and came to be regarded as sanctuaries, houses of God.

The worshipers lost sight of the fact that the word "church," as used in the Bible, applied, not to a building, but to people. They no longer appreciated that

material temples, cathedrals and like edifices in themselves were not sacred to God. They did not understand the truth that spirit-anointed Christians on earth make up a temple that God inhabits by "spirit."—1 Cor. 3:16, 17.

Christendom's religious architecture distorted truth in yet another way. The interiors of cathedrals and churches were designed in such a way as to separate the priestly or clergy class from the laity. In the special area set aside for them, priests performed ritualistic ceremonies at the altar. Greater sanctity was thus attached to one group of professed Christians than to another. This contradicted the truth that all of God's devoted servants are "holy," all are "brothers."—Matt. 23:8-10.

Furthermore, most of Christendom's places of worship, like the pagan temples, continue to be adorned with images or pictures. Generally, some representation of Jesus, or perhaps just a cross, is placed somewhere in or on the edifice. As the majority teach that Jesus is the "second person" of a "triune God," they are really imitating the ancient pagans who placed images or representations of the gods in their temples.

How can this knowledge benefit you? The design of places of worship can be an aid in identifying the people who represent true Christianity today. One should expect true Christians to place the emphasis, not on imposing edifices, but on people. The meeting place should be designed in a way that suggests that all assembling together form just one congregation of brothers and sisters. Neither the interior nor the exterior should be adorned with images and icons that are viewed as sacred. The architecture should harmonize with the fact that instruction from God's Word is the truly important thing. Do the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's witnesses measure up to these requirements? Why not visit them and see for yourself?

Insight on the News

● A "downstairs pub" has been set up in St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., serving beer, wine and soft drinks for an hour or so after Sunday services and on weeknights after church meetings. The rector of the church says he got the idea after finding a pub in an Anglican church in London and one in a Roman Catholic church in Belgium.

Church "Pubs"

Church members have named the pub "The Winged Lion" and on its recent anniversary joined in singing a chorus of "happy birthday, dear pub." One member said of the pub, "It's become the center of parish life." If the downstairs pub is the "center" of life for the church, one cannot help but wonder what goes on upstairs.

● The world faced an unusual period of instability during the first half of 1974. Major changes suddenly took place in the governments of France, England, Canada, West Germany, Portugal, Israel, Italy and Argentina, creating a 'crisis of leadership.' As an article in the New York "Times" commented: "There is a feeling that another page has been torn off the calendar of history and that this is the start of a fresh, unfamiliar sheet."

Unstable Times

But the instability was perhaps most painfully evident in the economic field. The shakiness was brought on by an explosion of world oil prices, galloping inflation and the uneasy shifting of values of national currencies. People in many lands worried about their financial security for the future, and a feeling of general distrust prevailed. No one knows what the American dollar, the French franc, the Italian lira, the Japanese yen or the British pound will be worth in years to come.

With mankind's problems so interlinked and intertwined, world economists admit frank puzzlement as to where the solution lies. The chief European correspondent for "The Wall Street Journal," Ray Vicker, says: "The truth is nobody really knows where the world is heading today, politically, economically or financially. There never has been a time when so many imponderables hung over markets and over those elements which control actions

of markets. So there are no real havens anywhere, no matter how men might seek them."

Christ Jesus foretold that our generation would be a time of "anguish of nations, not knowing the way out." But he also said of his true followers seeing such times, "Lift your heads up, because your deliverance is getting near."—Luke 21:25, 28.

● Lausanne, Switzerland, was the site of an International Congress of World Evangelization during July 16-25. Two thousand seven hundred Protestant evangelists were invited from 150 countries. This fall, Roman Catholic bishops meet in Rome to discuss the theme: "The Evangelization of the Modern World."

Emphasis on Evangelizing

Evangelizing (from the Greek word for "good news") means to proclaim the gospel or good news and today implies also making disciples of those accepting the good news.

The recent focus on evangelizing by the churches is notable. Why? Because they have given it so little attention in the past. For example, in discussing a drop of some 100,000 in Presbyterian membership during the past four years, national moderator Dr. Clinton Marsh said the decline was not due to the church's heavy involvement in social reform efforts. "The problem," he said, "lies with the members. They have been doing too little evangelism."

A similar view was taken by U.S. Catholic bishops. In a "position paper" they said that there was a "general admission of the fact that enthusiasm, zeal, and a spirit of sacrifice to spread the gospel were not more noticeably present in the modern church than in the past."

The fact of the matter is that the religious leaders themselves have shown little "enthusiasm, zeal, and a spirit of sacrifice" for evangelizing. Among first-century Christians, the spreading of the good news of God's kingdom was a part of their daily lives. It still is among Jehovah's Christian witnesses, as is well known by people in over 208 countries and island groups. The recent emphasis on evangelizing by Christendom's churches, however, is another case of 'too little, too late.'

IS God's mercy limitless? Has he been represented in the true light by many as a God of such compassion and all-embracing love that he extends open arms to everyone, no matter what manner of life a person may be living? For example, as stated by a religious professor in a journal published by the faculty of a theological seminary: "If the Church is true to her calling she must declare boldly that homosexuals are persons, made in the image of God, for whom Christ died, and that by God's grace they who were no people are God's people, for once they had not received mercy but now they have received mercy." Does God's mercy cover someone who persists in practicing such things? Another clergyman thinks so, as he wrote on the same subject in a church magazine published "with ecclesiastical approval": "If God does not abhor, but rather loves, the homosexual with the nature he was created with we can do no less. And this means that we must accept the homosexual as he is." Does God accept him as he is?

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² A careless reading of the Bible might

1. How far do some persons claim that God's mercy extends?
2. What practice of Jesus might cause some persons to misunderstand Jesus' attitude toward sinners, yet how did Jesus answer his critics?

DOES GOD'S MERCY

Cover All Your Sins?

"Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, . . . pardoning error and transgression and sin, but by no means will he give exemption from punishment."—Ex. 34:6, 7.

cause some to agree with the views expressed by these religious leaders. They may have in mind such experiences of Jesus Christ as that recorded in Matthew, the ninth chapter. "While he was reclining at the table in the house, look! many tax collectors and sinners came and began reclining with Jesus and his disciples. But on seeing this the Pharisees began to say to his disciples: 'Why is it that your teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners?' Hearing them, he said: 'Persons in health do not need a physician, but the

ailing do. Go, then, and learn what this means, 'I want mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came to call, not righteous people, but sinners.'"—Matt. 9:10-13.

MERCY NOT A CONDONING OF SINS

³ Would this not, in casual reading, appear to indicate that Jesus approved of sinners in that he was willing to associate with them, and criticized the Pharisees for objecting to it? Note, however, Jesus' introductory statement: "Persons in health do not need a physician, but the ailing do." Would this not rather suggest that Jesus'

3. What do Jesus' own words in answer to his critics show as to his attitude toward sinners, and how did his deeds demonstrate this further?

reason for associating with them was to cure them and not simply to accept them in the ailing condition in which he found them as sinners? Jesus did exercise mercy, even as he admonished others in his Sermon on the Mount, saying, "Happy are the merciful, since they will be shown mercy." (Matt. 5:7) However, Jesus' exercise of mercy toward sinners was not a condoning of their sins. Rather, it operated in the same compassionate manner as toward those who were physically ill. On one occasion a leper caught sight of Jesus and he fell upon his face and begged him, saying: "Lord, if you just want to, you can make me clean." And so Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying: "I want to. Be made clean." Immediately the man's leprosy vanished from him. Sometimes he told the one who was ill simply to pick up his bed and walk. But in other instances he said instead: "Your sins are forgiven you."—Luke 5:12, 13, 20.

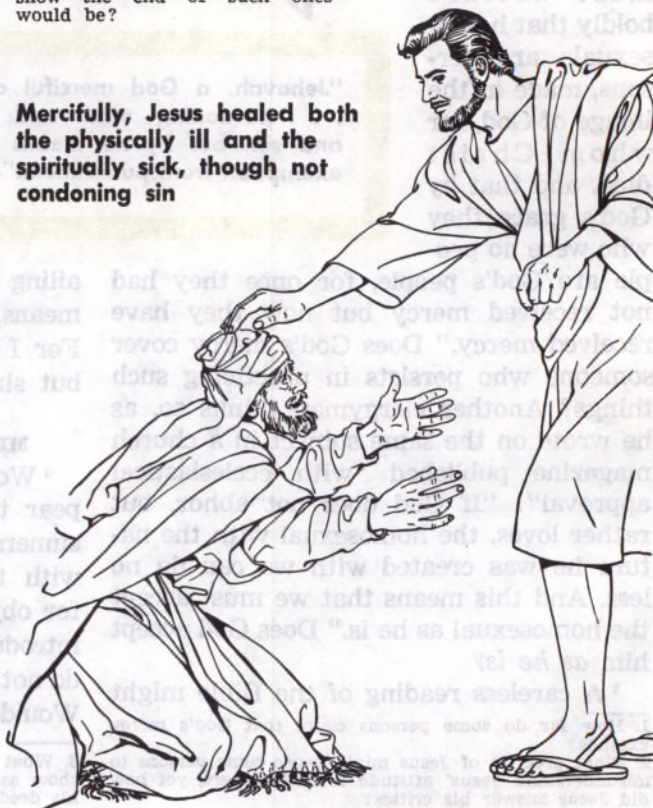
⁴ Thus it is evident that Jesus was not accepting people in their sins as *they were*. Rather, one of the most important aspects of his ministry was to cure men of their spiritual illnesses, enabling them to be accepted by God because of their changed way of life. (1 Pet. 3:12; Mal. 3:18; Acts 10:34, 35) Jesus' disciples had no distorted view of God's mercy. For example, the apostle Paul wrote to approved Christians in Corinth about twenty-two years after Jesus had success-

fully finished his earthly ministry: "What! Do you not know that unrighteous persons will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be misled. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with men, nor thieves, nor greedy persons, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit God's kingdom. And yet that is what some of you *were*. But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God."—1 Cor. 6:9-11.

⁵ John, an apostle of Jesus and one whom Jesus especially loved, characterized sin and those who practice it in these words and showed what the end of such ones would be: "Everyone who practices sin is also practicing lawlessness, and so sin is lawlessness. You know too that that one

5. With what words did John characterize sin and those who practice it, and what did he show the end of such ones would be?

Mercifully, Jesus healed both the physically ill and the spiritually sick, though not condoning sin



4. (a) What was one of the most important aspects of Jesus' ministry? (b) How did the apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, show the true relationship of sinners to God's mercy?

[Jesus] was made manifest to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. Everyone remaining in union with him does not practice sin; no one that practices sin has either seen him or come to know him. Little children, let no one mislead you; he who carries on righteousness is righteous, just as that one is righteous. He who carries on sin originates with the Devil, because the Devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was made manifest, namely, to break up the works of the Devil.”—1 John 3:4-8.

NO EXEMPTION FOR PRACTICERS OF SIN

⁶ Those who would gain or who would continue to enjoy God’s approval should note well Paul’s words to the Galatian congregations: “Do not be misled: God is not one to be mocked. For whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap; because he who is sowing with a view to his flesh will reap corruption from his flesh, but he who is sowing with a view to the spirit will reap everlasting life from the spirit.” (Gal. 6:7, 8) God does forgive sins and looks with mercy and compassion upon the children of Adam who were born in sin. (Ps. 51:5) However, the true God revealed himself to Moses as “Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, . . . pardoning error and transgression and sin, *but by no means will he give exemption from punishment.*” (Ex. 34:6, 7) Even in the case of King David, with whom Jehovah had made a covenant for the kingdom, God made no exception. David was punished for his sins, but because he was repentant he was also mercifully forgiven. However, Jehovah’s forgiveness does not extend to those who deliberately violate the righteous principles upon which his own throne is established, nor to those who make sinning a way of life. (Compare Hebrews 1:8, 9.) On the contrary. His position is

6. What is Jehovah’s expressed position toward those who commit sin?

one of active hostility toward such ones and they can by no means escape the judgment he has reserved for them.

⁷ This should not lead us to conclude that Jehovah is not a God of patience and long-suffering. According to his own testimony, in dealing with the nation of Israel in times past, he says: “I take delight, not in the death of the wicked one, but in that someone wicked turns back from his way and actually keeps living.” (Ezek. 33:11) And, even though some of the wicked take unwise advantage of his patience, even scoff at the warning that one day his long-suffering will come to an end, he continues to put up with it in order that those who are of honest heart may turn to him and be saved.—2 Pet. 3:3, 4, 9, 15; Rom. 2:4.

⁸ All mankind, even the wicked, benefit from God’s mercy. He does not withhold from them the things necessary for life. Jesus cited this quality of Jehovah’s undeserved kindness as an example to us, reminding us that our heavenly Father “makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous.” (Matt. 5:45) And when Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s law by eating of the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and bad in the Garden of Eden, mercy toward their unborn offspring prompted Jehovah to allow them to live until children had been born.

⁹ Many have accepted the continuing undeserved kindness and long-suffering of Jehovah and have not missed its purpose, but, on the other hand, countless millions since Adam’s day have used this intervening time period, the period of Jehovah’s forbearance, as an opportunity to live in opposition to God and to practice all man-

7. What proper view should be taken of Jehovah’s mercy, yet how do some view it?

8. How does Jehovah’s long-suffering benefit all mankind?

9. How have countless millions of persons used the period of Jehovah’s long-suffering, and how will it turn out for them in the end?

ner of unrighteous acts contrary to God's stated will for his creatures. (2 Cor. 6:1; Rom. 1:28-32) But God is no more bound to put up with them indefinitely than he was obligated to Adam and Eve, who went down into everlasting death in due time, just as Jehovah had decreed for them. (Gen. 3:19; 5:5) The time period of Jehovah's forbearance is nearing an end. When it concludes, Jehovah's angelic hosts will enter into their assigned work of execution, and Jehovah's mercy will not cover those who are found still engaged in their lawless acts, who have not turned around and received the mark of true disciples of Jesus Christ. (Ezek. 9:5, 6) When that time arrives, will God's mercy cover all your sins?

CONTINUED VIGILANCE REQUIRED

¹⁰ If you have not yet come to know and to accept as a way of life the righteous decrees of Jehovah, you have no time to lose. You must act quickly if you are to stand before Jehovah's executorial forces with the mark of true Christian identification. There are many, though, who read these pages who have already recognized their sinful condition before God and who have repented of this bad way and turned around, accepting God's provision for reconciliation, God's indescribable gift to mankind, the sacrifice of his dear Son. Does this, then, guarantee for them the continued favor of God, his unchanging mercy exercised in their behalf? Those who have dedicated themselves to God and symbolized this act by water baptism know that continued vigilance is required. (1 Cor. 10:12) Knowing they are imperfect, they are aware of the conflict within themselves, so that with the flesh they are slaves to sin's law though with the mind they are slaves to God's law. (Rom.

7:25) They know there is comparative gravity of wrongdoing and that sins can take a variety of forms—sins against mankind, sins against God and Christ, sins against one's own body, sins in sharing in the sins of others, and many other such offenses. However, they take comfort in these words of John: "If anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world's. And by this we have the knowledge that we have come to know him, namely, if we continue observing his commandments. He that says: 'I have come to know him,' and yet is not observing his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this person. But whoever does observe his word, truthfully in this person the love of God has been made perfect. By this we have the knowledge that we are in union with him. He that says he remains in union with him is under obligation himself also to go on walking just as that one walked."—1 John 2:1-6.

¹¹ Those on the way to life rely in confidence on God's mercy expressed through Jesus Christ and will endeavor to walk in the way of that One. But even though they avoid the gross sins that would obviously take them out from under God's mercy, they know that there are many acts of commission or omission that can seriously endanger their standing with God. They know, for example, that Jesus did not attribute bad things to his disciples, yet he cautioned them against abuse of certain everyday activities that could cause them to lose out on the way to life. Jesus said: "Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day [of

10. (a) How should those who are dedicated and baptized view the continued mercy of God in their behalf?
(b) What comfort can they take in the words of John at 1 John 2:1-6?

11. How can we show from Jesus' words that the abuse of even everyday activities can cause us to lose out on the way to life?

God's meting out judgment] be instantly upon you as a snare." (Luke 21:34, 35) Those who would follow Jesus' steps closely realize therefore that no matter can safely be overlooked or viewed as of too little consequence to occupy their earnest and diligent attention.

¹² With this stirring admonition of Jesus before us, then, can we afford to ignore or minimize the words that Jesus taught us to pray: "Forgive us our debts, *as we also have forgiven our debtors*"? Do you sincerely and with discernment make this request to God? These are not words to be taken lightly. Jesus added: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; whereas if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:12, 14, 15) Jesus went on to admonish: "Stop judging that you may not be judged; for with what judgment you are judging, you will be judged; and with the measure that you are measuring out, they will measure out to you. Why, then, do you look at the straw in your brother's eye, but do not consider the rafter in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Allow me to extract the straw from your eye'; when, look! a rafter is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First extract the rafter from your own eye, and then you will see clearly how to extract the straw from your brother's eye."—Matt. 7:1-5.

THE POSITIVE QUALITY OF MERCY

¹³ The practice of mercy, as the word is used in English, quite often conveys the idea of refraining, exercising restraint, such as in the administering of punishment, this restraint being motivated by compassion or sympathy. And it is used in this way in the Bible. God's exercise of

mercy is always in harmony with his other qualities and righteous standards, including his justice and trueness. (Ps. 40:11; Hos. 2:19) And since all men are by inheritance sinful and receiving sin's payment of death, it is clear that the pardoning of error, or the lightening of judgment or punishment, is frequently involved in God's exercise of mercy. However, the Hebrew and Greek words are not limited to forgiveness or restraint in applying a judicial penalty. Most frequently, mercy refers, not to a negative action, a holding back (as of punishment), but to a positive action, to an expression of kind consideration or pity that brings relief to those who are disadvantaged and in need of mercy. As might be expected, therefore, the Scriptures show that the mercifulness of Jehovah God is not a quality that comes into play only when persons are, in effect, "on trial" before him on account of having committed some particular wrongdoing. Rather, it is a characteristic quality of God's personality, his normal way of reacting toward those in need, a facet of his love.—2 Cor. 1:3; 1 John 4:8.

¹⁴ So it is with Jesus as well. He did not limit his acts of mercy to those who opposed or offended him. The blind, the demon-possessed, the leprous, and those whose children were afflicted were among those who evoked the expression of his mercy and pity. (Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; Mark 5:18, 19; Luke 17:12, 13) In response to the plea, "Have mercy on us," Jesus performed miracles relieving such ones. He did so, not in a routine, indifferent way, but because he was "moved with pity."—Matt. 20:33, 34.

¹⁵ Does this not make more meaningful the words of Jesus' half brother James, who warned: "For the one that does not practice mercy will have his judgment without mercy"? (Jas. 2:13) God's mercy to us is

12. Of what serious concern is it to us how forgiving we are of others? Give Scriptural counsel.

13. What different meanings does the word "mercy" have as used in the Scriptures?

14. How do Jesus' acts of mercy highlight the meaning of the term?

15. How does John compare God's love to ours?

of such great magnitude that we are compelled to exercise mercy toward our fellows, comparatively small though our manifestation of it may be. John said: "Beloved ones, let us continue loving one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born from God and gains the knowledge of God. He that does not love has not come to know God, because God is love. By this the love of God was made manifest in our case, because God sent forth his only-begotten Son into the world that we might gain life through him. The love is in this respect, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent forth his Son as a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins. Beloved ones, if this is how God loved us, then we are ourselves under obligation to love one another."—1 John 4:7-11.

HOW FAR GOD'S MERCY EXTENDS

¹⁶ This may seem difficult at times and the offenses or seeming shortcomings of our Christian brothers may be such that we are inclined to ignore this requirement of showing love and extending mercy, rationalizing within ourselves that surely Jesus did not mean we should overlook such "extreme" faults in others. But Paul magnifies God's love above any that we could manifest when he said: "God recommends his own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) How much greater are the sins that God has forgiven us than any that we might be called upon to forgive in our Christian brothers! And our need for God's mercy in providing a way of redemption cannot be evaluated alongside the needs of our brothers that we are able to supply. Is it any wonder that God's mercy cannot be made to extend to those who are lacking in mercy?—Col. 3:13; compare Matthew 18:23-35.

16. How does God's mercy to us compare with mercy that we might exercise, and how did Jesus illustrate this at Matthew 18:23-35?

¹⁷ Of most serious concern to us, then, should be the question: Does God's mercy cover all my sins? If I have dedicated myself to Jehovah God and symbolized it by water baptism, making a request to God for a good conscience, could I still come under the judgment of God for failing to exercise mercy, love toward others? (1 Cor. 13:1-3) James warned, as already quoted: "For the one that does not practice mercy will have his judgment without mercy." However, James followed this admonition with the comforting reassurance: "Mercy exults triumphantly over judgment." (Jas. 2:13) How? And in what way that could bring us into judgment might we fail in exercising mercy even now, before the Day of Judgment?

¹⁸ One outstanding example of mercy, exercised to the full extent of the significance of the term, is that displayed by Joseph, the favored son of Jacob. But Joseph, in the mercy that he manifested, was following the pattern that Jehovah God himself was demonstrating at the same time. Whether Joseph realized at the beginning the full extent of God's mercy exercised toward him and his father's household, the Bible account does not say. But Joseph was relying entirely on Jehovah's deliverance and never wavered in his determination to follow Jehovah's direction and to adhere strictly to Jehovah's righteous requirements that he had learned from his father Jacob. And when Joseph was in the greatest need, Jehovah's mercy expressed in his behalf always succored him and, in due time, it brought him into the second-most prominent position in the world of his day, a position of such power that he could, if he so desired, avenge himself with impunity on all who had mistreated him. Or, he could use his position

17. Though dedicated, how might we still come into judgment, yet what reassurance does James give?

18. What example of mercy might be considered, what pattern of mercy does it follow and in what respects?

to become a great blessing to them. How Joseph exercised mercy, not only toward those guilty of wrongdoing, but also in tender compassion and empathy toward those in need, and how this true-life story can show us the way "mercy exults tri-

umphantly over judgment," we leave to the succeeding article to demonstrate. A careful reading of Genesis, chapters 37 through 47, before considering these pages, will prove most interesting and instructive.

How Merciful

Are You?

IN THIS day of intolerance and self-interest, the one acting mercifully is a refreshing blessing. It is said of the true God: "Jehovah is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in loving-kindness. Jehovah is good to all, and his mercies are over all his works." (Ps. 145:8, 9) And Jesus admonished us to "continue becoming merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:36) What an indictment of this present generation, then, are the intolerable conditions resulting from the innumerable suspicions, rivalries and animosities of peoples and nations!

² Proverbs 28:27 says: "He that is giving to the one of little means will have no want, but he that is hiding his eyes will get many curses." It is evident from this that God's mercy will not extend to those 'hiding their eyes.' God is not a sentimentalist. His exercise of mercy is always in harmony with his other qualities and righteous standards, including his justice and holiness. (Hos. 2:19) Anyone presuming upon God's mercy, thinking that God will continue his mercy toward that one no matter what he does, is doomed to bitter disappointment. The one showing deliberate disrespect for God's righteous ways by his acts and course of life offends God, and the true God will rightly "shut off his mercies in anger."—Ps. 77:9; Rom. 2:4-11.

³ Jesus' half brother James gave sound warning and, at the same time, reassurance when he wrote: "For the one that does not practice mercy will have his judgment without mercy. Mercy exults triumphantly over judgment." (Jas. 2:13) How merciful are you? Is it easy for you to overlook offenses that may be committed against you? or do you find it difficult to put such matters out of your mind? Are you actively conscious of the needs of those around you? or must these things constantly be brought to your attention? Are you inclined to be suspicious of others' motives? or can you recognize and accept sincerity and lack of guile? Are you prone to be more solicitous of those who are prominent or particularly talented in some way? or can you find true pleasure in strictly spiritual qualities? If you were to weigh yourself in the balance of these questions, would you be found wanting in mercy? The result is vital, because, whether we individually are concerned or not, Jehovah's judgment will be entered to-

1. Why is there no excuse for this present generation in its widespread lack of mercy?
2. To whom only does God's mercy extend, and why?

3. What questions might help us to determine our own quality of mercy?

ward us individually just as he has indicated through James, and only the one practicing mercy will have mercy shown to him when brought into judgment.

*The merciful person is one who does not hold a grudge, who is willing to hold back condemnation and punishment whenever circumstances will allow it, who is generous in giving both materially and spiritually, who is conscious of those in need and who shows concern for them in an active way, who does not show partiality or use his tongue in pride or jealousy, who performs his acts of charity and distributes his gifts of mercy with sincerity and humility free from boasting, who does not become so efficient in his dealings with his associates that they become to him mere parts of an "organizational machine." The generous giving of himself, even more than of his possessions, will not go unrewarded—certainly not unrewarded by Jehovah. God's Word says: "He that is showing favor to the lowly one is lending to Jehovah, and his treatment He will repay to him." And Jesus added to the proverb: "Happy are the merciful, since they will be shown mercy."—Prov. 19:17; Matt. 5:7.

DEVOTION TO RIGHT PRINCIPLES BRINGS FAVOR

*An outstanding example of one who imitated Jehovah's mercy was Joseph the great-grandson of Abraham and the son of Jacob or Israel. Joseph was born in Syria, the first of Jacob's two sons by his beloved wife Rachel. (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:24) Since Jacob was ninety-one years old at Joseph's birth, Joseph was a son of his old age and came to be loved more than his elder brothers. When Joseph was six years old or thereabouts, Jacob left Paddan-aram where he had gone to obtain a wife from among his own people and,

with his entire family, he returned to Canaan. (Gen. 31:17, 18, 41) He resided for a time at Succoth, at Shechem and at Bethel. Later, on the way from Bethel to Bethlehem, Joseph's mother, Rachel, died while giving birth to her second son Benjamin; thus Benjamin was Joseph's only full brother, the other sons of Jacob being Joseph's half brothers, born of Jacob to Leah, Rachel's sister, and to Zilpah and Bilhah, the two maidservants of Leah and Rachel.—Gen. 33:17-19; 35:1, 5, 6, 16-19.

*Joseph's ten half brothers did not display the same devotion to right principles that Joseph manifested from an early age. When he was seventeen he was tending sheep in association with the sons of Jacob by Bilhah and Zilpah. Though younger than his brothers, Joseph demonstrated more zeal for his father's interests than these half brothers and dutifully brought a bad report to his father. (Gen. 37:2) He was not acting unmercifully in so doing, because these brothers were following a course of wrongdoing and Jacob was entitled to be made aware of it. This devotion to right principles may have contributed to Jacob's love for Joseph. But, instead of Joseph's brothers profiting from Joseph's example, they demonstrated a jealous attitude and displayed the same harsh spirit toward him that had caused them, under the leadership of Simeon and Levi, to massacre the men of Shechem who were attempting to establish friendly relations with them and who were defenseless at the time. Although they claimed their slaughter of the Shechemites was justified, their father Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, the leaders in the attack: "You have brought ostracism upon me in making me a stench to the inhabitants of the land," and many years later Jacob re-

4. How might a merciful person be identified?

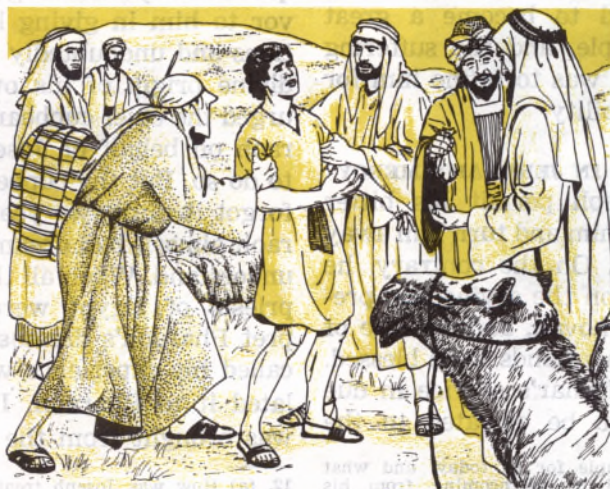
5. Who was Joseph, and why was he particularly a beloved one of his father?

6. (a) What report concerning his half brothers did Joseph bring to his father, and why was this not an unmerciful act? (b) How, on a previous occasion, had Simeon and Levi shown themselves to be lacking in compassion?

ferred to the anger of Simeon and Levi as cursed, "because it is cruel, and their fury, because it acts harshly." (Gen. 34: 1-31; 49:7) Because of their lack of compassion, when they saw that their father loved Joseph more than all his brothers and had a long, striped shirtlike garment made for him (perhaps similar to those worn by persons of rank), "they were not able to speak peacefully to him."—Gen. 37:3, 4.

⁷ In time Joseph had a dream that he reported to his brothers. In his dream all the brothers were binding sheaves in the middle of the field when his sheaf got up and stood erect and the sheaves of his half brothers proceeded to encircle it and bow down to his sheaf. At this his brothers began to say to him: "Are you going to be king over us for certain?" and they found further reason to hate him. The account continues: "After that he had still another dream, and he related it to his brothers and said: 'Here I have had a dream once more, and here the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.' Then he related it to his father as well as his brothers, and his father began to rebuke him and say to him: 'What does this dream that you have dreamed mean? Am I and also your mother and your brothers for certain going to come and bow down to the earth to you?' And his brothers grew jealous of him,

7. What dreams did Joseph have, and how did his father and half brothers react?



Despite Joseph's pleas for mercy, his brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver

but his father observed the saying." Jacob evidently recognized that the dreams might be significant. Though it might seem that Joseph was manifesting an attitude of superiority over his brothers, he was, in fact, merely relating what Jehovah had revealed to him, a circumstance that gave his brothers further opportunity to manifest their heart condition.—Gen. 37:5-11.

JEALOUSY BREEDS MURDEROUS HATE

⁸ His half brothers now went to feed the flock of their father in the vicinity of Shechem while Jacob was dwelling at Hebron. Jacob became concerned for their welfare, perhaps having in mind the animosity that had been stirred up against him and his sons in this vicinity on their way out of Syria. Though it must have been an unpleasant assignment for him in view of his half brothers' animosity, Joseph did not hesitate to go for Jacob to see if they were safe and sound and whether the flock was safe and sound. He finally located them near Dothan, but, before he could get close by them, they caught sight of him from a distance and began scheming to put him to death.—Gen. 37:12-20.

⁹ Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, tried to deliver him out of their hands, "in order to return him to his father," out of concern for his own liability as the firstborn for Joseph. (Gen. 37:

8. How did Joseph come to be away from home with his half brothers, and how did his brothers view the matter?

9. What did Reuben plan to do, but what finally happened to Joseph at the hands of his brothers?

22-30) Apparently Reuben was not present when a caravan of Ishmaelites passed by on its way to Egypt coming from Gilead. Judah proposed that Joseph be sold to them instead of their killing him and covering over his blood. The brothers agreed and, though Joseph pleaded for mercy, they sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver pieces. Then they took Joseph's long garment, which they had taken from him, slaughtered a male goat and dipped the long garment in the blood. When it was later shown to Jacob, he was convinced that a vicious wild beast had devoured his son, and so great was his grief that he refused to be comforted. Eventually the merchants brought Joseph into Egypt and he was sold as a slave to Potiphar, the chief of Pharaoh's bodyguard.—Gen. 37:21-36.

¹⁰ This murderous hatred that Joseph's half brothers had manifested in such a violent way and their callous lack of concern for their father stand as a warning example to any today who may harbor animosity toward their spiritual brothers in the Christian congregation. Jesus said: "Everyone who continues wrathful with his brother will be accountable to the court of justice." (Matt. 5:22) But Joseph was being prepared to become a great blessing to his people, and the suffering that he experienced was to refine him for this great responsibility.

JOSEPH SUSTAINED IN JEHOVAH'S MERCY

¹¹ Never did Joseph permit his bitter experiences to sour him and turn him away from the true God. On the contrary, he relied all the more on the saving and preserving power of Jehovah, and because of it all the works of his hands were blessed. His diligence in Potiphar's service in due time caused him to be elevated to the

position of superintendent in Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife tried repeatedly but unsuccessfully to seduce Joseph, who remained firm in his determination not to sin against his God. Foiled in her efforts, Potiphar's wife now falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape and, when Potiphar believed her story, Joseph was thrown into prison.—Gen. 39:1-20.

¹² For a time Joseph was treated harshly in prison. (Ps. 105:17, 18) However, his diligence and reliance on Jehovah again were rewarded with further responsibility, and his exemplary conduct under adverse circumstances resulted in his being placed in a position of trust over the other prisoners. These came, eventually, to include two servants of Pharaoh, his chief cupbearer and his chief baker. Later on, they each had a dream and the next morning were downcast because there was no one to interpret their dreams for them. Joseph, sensitive to their need and with due credit to Jehovah God, interpreted their dreams for them and, just as he revealed it to them, so it occurred. The chief cupbearer was restored to Pharaoh's favor within three days, while the chief baker was hanged within the same period. Unquestionably encouraged by Jehovah's favor to him in giving him the interpretations and undoubtedly reassured as to the divine origin of his own dreams, Joseph urged the chief cupbearer to speak to Pharaoh on behalf of Joseph, and he agreed to do so. But the cupbearer, out of prison, forgot it until two years later when Pharaoh himself had dreams that he could not understand. When all the magic-practicing priests of Egypt were unable to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, the cupbearer recalled his experience with Joseph and related it to Pharaoh. Immediately Joseph was brought from the prison to interpret

10. How is this an example for us today, and what benefit to Joseph would be forthcoming from his sufferings?

11. How did Joseph react to his bitter experiences, yet what further trials awaited him?

12. (a) How was Joseph treated in prison, what experience did he have with two servants of Pharaoh and how did it encourage him? (b) What circumstances led to Joseph's release from prison?

Pharaoh's dreams.—Gen. 39:21–41:14.

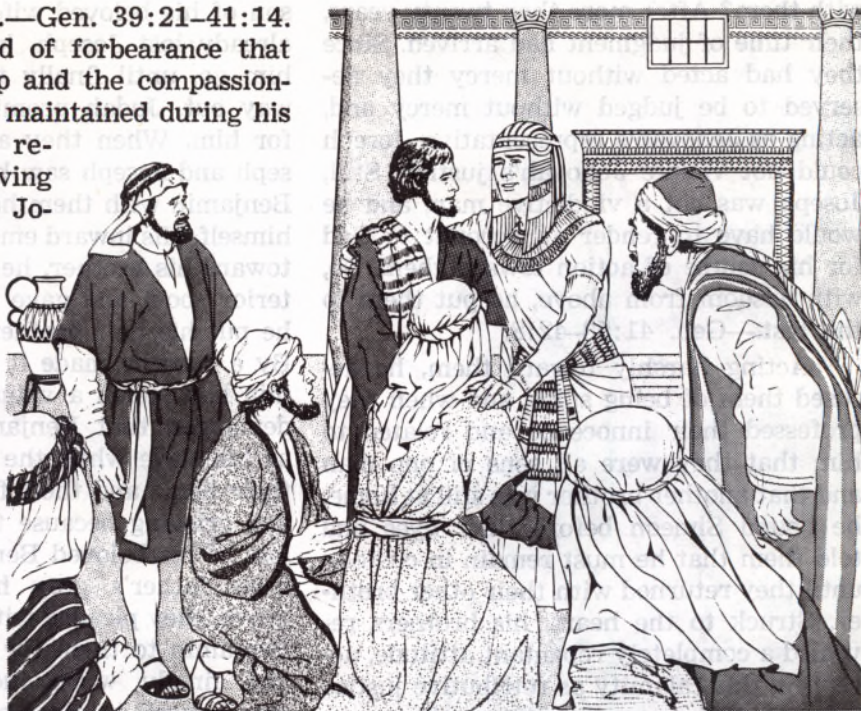
¹³ Now the record of forbearance that Joseph had built up and the compassionate attitude he had maintained during his trials were to be rewarded. Again giving credit to Jehovah, Joseph interpreted the two dreams of Pharaoh, explaining that there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. Joseph then advised Pharaoh that Jehovah had given him an answer of peace and described how Pharaoh could prepare for the years of famine during the years of plenty. Pharaoh recognized in Joseph himself the able food administrator who would be needed and appointed him to this position, making him second in the kingdom and giving him all authority to organize the work of storing up grain against the years of famine. Such great quantities did they store up that finally they gave up counting it. Joseph was also given a wife, As'enath, the daughter of Poti'phera, a priest of On, who bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.—Gen. 41:15-52.

TRUE REPENTANCE MAKES ROOM FOR MERCY

¹⁴ Now Joseph was indeed in an enviable position. The lives of the people of Egypt,

13. What was the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams, and how was Joseph rewarded by Jehovah for his forbearance during his trials?

14. What opportunity presented itself to Joseph in his exalted position, and how was his mercy to be put to the severest test?



Though Joseph's brothers had dealt mercilessly with him, he did not retaliate but showed his repentant brothers compassion and cared for all their needs

including the lives of Potiphar and his wife, were in his hands. But there was no danger to any of them. Joseph had already proved himself to be a forgiving and a merciful man, not one to be vengeful or vindictive. Still, his mercy was going to be put to the severest test. This occurred when the famine had spread to all the earth and peoples from all the earth came to Egypt seeking grain. One day, when Joseph was caring for his duties and compassionately providing food for the starving nations as well as for the Egyptians, his ten half brothers presented themselves before him and bowed down with their faces to the earth. Immediately Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed respecting them and, though he recognized them, he made himself unrecognizable to them and spoke to them only through an interpreter. How would he deal

with them? After more than twenty years, their time of judgment had arrived. Since they had acted without mercy they deserved to be judged without mercy and, acting as Jehovah's representative, Joseph could not violate Jehovah's justice. Still, Joseph was not a vindictive man, and he would have to render an account to God for his course of action toward them. So, with wisdom from above, he put them to the test.—Gen. 41:53-42:8.

¹⁵ Acting harshly toward them, he accused them of being spies, and when they professed their innocence and related to him that they were all sons of one man and that another brother was still at home, he bound Simeon before their eyes and told them that he must remain in custody until they returned with their other brother. Struck to the heart, his brothers revealed a completely repentant attitude, accepting this calamity as retributive justice from God, "because," as they said among themselves, "we saw the distress of [Joseph's] soul when he implored compassion on our part, but we did not listen." Joseph, overhearing them, though they were unaware of it, was deeply moved himself and turned away from them in tears. However, their testing was not yet accomplished. There must be no doubt of the sincerity of their repentance. Loading their receptacles with grain, Joseph secretly had their money restored to them in their sacks, and sent them home, keeping Simeon in custody.—Gen. 42:9-28.

¹⁶ Eventually their grain was used up and it became necessary to return to Egypt. But they had been warned not to see the face of Egypt's food administrator again unless their brother was with them. Jacob, fearful of losing the only remaining

son of his beloved wife Rachel as he had already lost Joseph, kept refusing to let him go, until finally there was no other way out. Judah promised to be security for him. When they appeared before Joseph and Joseph saw his own full brother Benjamin with them he could not restrain himself. His inward emotions being excited toward his brother, he withdrew to an interior room and gave way to tears. Then he put his half brothers to the final test. By a ruse he made it appear that Benjamin had stolen a valuable silver cup and demanded that Benjamin be left behind as his slave while the others returned to their home and their father. Heartbroken and grieving because they knew that the loss of his beloved Benjamin would bring their father's gray hairs down to the grave, they pleaded with Joseph to restore Benjamin to them for their father's sake and, finally, when Judah volunteered to give himself in place of Benjamin, Joseph could stand no more and, breaking into tears, he revealed himself to his brothers, saying: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now do not feel hurt and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here; because for the preservation of life God has sent me ahead of you." Joseph, at Pharaoh's bidding, then arranged for Jacob his father to come to Egypt with all his household, and the best of the land of Egypt became theirs.—Gen. 42:29-47:31.

STANDING IN JUDGMENT WITH A RECORD OF MERCY

¹⁷ The extent and quality of Joseph's mercy are emphasized by the circumstances under which it was exercised. Cruelly, even murderously, dealt with by his half brothers, maliciously accused falsely by

15. (a) How did Joseph treat his half brothers, and with what end in view? (b) How did his half brothers react to this turn of events?

16. (a) How did Benjamin finally come down to Egypt, and how did Joseph react on seeing him? (b) To what final test did Joseph subject his half brothers, and how did it turn out?

17. (a) What emphasizes the extent and quality of Joseph's mercy, and why can we be reasonably certain that mercy was a characteristic quality of Joseph? (b) How can we personally profit from the examples of Joseph, Jesus and Stephen?

Potiphar's wife, harshly and unjustly imprisoned by Potiphar, thoughtlessly and ungratefully forgotten by the chief cupbearer whom he had compassionately comforted, Joseph gave no thought to retaliating in kind when it was within his power to do so. On the contrary, he lovingly and with deep and sincere consideration cared for all their needs, extending his compassionate interest to all his father's household and to all the people of the nation of Egypt. Surely this quality of mercy was not something that Joseph acquired only after he was exalted to a position of prominence and power. Rather, the mercy that Jehovah exercised toward him during his trials, preserving, sustaining and reassuring him, stands as a testimony of the forgiving and merciful attitude that Joseph must have maintained through it all. This seems quite certain from the rule that Jesus stated: "Happy are the merciful, since they will be shown mercy." (Matt. 5:7) It is much like Jesus' own attitude on the torture stake when he was about to die and he said: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are do-

ing," and like that of Stephen when being stoned to death and he cried out: "Jehovah, do not charge this sin against them." (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60) The merciful attitude displayed in each instance was rewarded by Jehovah.

¹⁸ Does it not clearly appear, then, what our interest should be in exercising mercy? Paul assures us that "each of us will render an account for himself to God." (Rom. 14:12) How reassuring it is to know that "mercy exults triumphantly over judgment"! Whether at some critical point during the present time, or in a fast-approaching Day of Judgment (2 Pet. 3:7), how we will fare in rendering an account for ourselves before God and his appointed Judge, Jesus Christ, will, among other factors, depend upon the record of mercy our account will show. Following consistently Jesus' commandment to love, under all circumstances, will help to fill that record and, at the same time, contribute to Jehovah's praise and to the peace of the congregation.

18. Why should our exercising of mercy be of particular concern to us?

No Spiritual "Energy Crisis"

TODAY there is an "energy crisis" in many lands. For some people this means reduced travel by automobile, since gasoline is in short supply. Fuel is also needed to operate mammoth generators that produce electricity. Hence, many people try to conserve energy by turning off unnecessary lights.

Nevertheless, there is light that does not depend on commonly used energy sources. Grateful ones who possess it refuse to ex-

FOR
DISCREET
ONES

tinguish their light or even to reduce its intensity. Spiritually speaking, they 'let their light shine.'—Matt. 5:14-16.

Jesus Christ had them in mind when he likened the kingdom of God to ten vir-

gins who were invited to a wedding feast. His parable was part of an answer to the question: "What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matt. 24:3) The evidence proves that we now live in the "last days," so the fulfillment of the foretold "sign" should intrigue us.

All ten virgins had lamps, perhaps vessels with a spout and a wick at one end and a handle at the other. These may have been filled with olive oil, then commonly used for illumination. Because the bridegroom delayed, the virgins slept, only to be aroused in the middle of the night with the announcement that he was coming. The five "discreet" virgins had additional oil in receptacles they carried, but the "foolish" ones brought no extra oil and had to go off to buy some. Meanwhile, the "discreet" virgins met the bridegroom and went in with him to the wedding feast. The "foolish" virgins later sought entry, but in vain.—Matt. 25:1-12.

The glorified Jesus Christ is the "bridegroom," and the "discreet" virgins become his heavenly "bride," finally numbering 144,000. (Rev. 14:1-4; 19:7, 8; 20:6; 21:9) While on earth, they have abundant "oil," God's Word and his holy spirit. So they suffer from no spiritual "energy crisis" that could affect a lamp. The "foolish" virgins, though, have lacked sufficient "oil" to keep their lamps burning from the time that the first "joint heirs with Christ" were spiritually begotten on Pentecost of 33 C.E. until the Bridegroom appeared and would go in to the marriage feast.—Rom. 8:17.

AWAITING THE BRIDEGROOM

All ten symbolic virgins slept for a time. (Matt. 25:5) But during those centuries there must have been some stirrings, especially by the "discreet" virgins. Particularly was this so after the religious awakening of the early sixteenth century C.E.,

when a strenuous effort was made in Europe to return to the Holy Scriptures as the sole book of divine truth. Christ the Bridegroom's promise to return impressed sincere Bible students, who realized that this would precede the millennium marked by Satan's confinement in the "abyss."—Rev. 20:1-6.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, Lutheran theologian Johann Albrecht Bengel of Germany predicted that the millennium would start in 1836. Later, in the United States, William Miller taught his own followers that Christ would appear in the flesh and take them to their heavenly home in 1843. Yet, those dates passed without incident, and the writings or expressions of neither Bengel nor Miller proved to be the foretold midnight cry: "Here is the bridegroom! Be on your way out to meet him."

In the 1870's, however, a small group of men not affiliated with Christendom's sects began studying the Bible at Pittsburgh (Allegheny), Pennsylvania. Among them was Charles Taze Russell. They learned that Christ would return as a spirit and that this would begin an invisible presence made manifest by visible evidences.

Those Bible students associated the "times of the Gentiles" spoken of by Jesus with the "seven times" mentioned in Daniel. (Luke 21:24, *King James Version*; Dan. 4:16, 23, 25, 32) They understood that those "seven times" of earth's domination by the Gentiles began in the late seventh century B.C.E. and would run for 2,520 years. Accordingly, twenty-four-year-old C. T. Russell contributed an article to the *Bible Examiner* of October 1876, in which he wrote: "The seven times will end in A.D. 1914."

In 1877, Russell joined Nelson H. Barbour in publishing the book *Three Worlds, and the Harvest of This World*. It indicated that the end of the Gentile Times in 1914

would be preceded by a forty-year period to open with a three-and-a-half-year harvest beginning in 1874 C.E. According to Bible chronology thereafter adopted, it was understood that 6,000 years of man's existence on earth ended in 1872, whereas six millennia of human sin concluded and the seventh millennium began in 1874. Christ's presence was thought to have begun in October 1874, at the start of the great antitypical Jubilee.—Lev. chap. 25; Rev. 20:4.*

From that understanding, it was thought that the "chaste virgin" class began going forth to meet the Bridegroom in 1874. (2 Cor. 11:2) Hence, when C. T. Russell began publishing a new religious magazine in July 1879, it was called "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence." It was heralding Christ's presence as having begun in 1874. This invisible presence was expected to continue until the Gentile Times ended in 1914, when the Gentile nations would be destroyed and the remnant of the "chaste virgin" class would be glorified with their Bridegroom in heaven by death and resurrection to live in the spirit. (1 Cor. 15:42-44) Thus would the "discreet virgin" class enter through the door into the wedding.

The "chaste virgin" class endeavored to let their light shine as they approached the

* Man's creation was placed in 4128 and sin's entrance in 4126 B.C.E. Such chronology followed an incorrect manuscript rendering of Acts 13:20 in *The Emphatic Diaglott*, which said that God gave Israel judges "about four hundred fifty years, till Samuel the prophet." A footnote stated that this was at variance with 1 Kings 6:1, where the Hebrew letter *daleth* (thought to represent the number 4) supposedly had been mistaken for the similar character *he* (5). Hence, it was suggested that 580 (not 480) years elapsed between Israel's exodus from Egypt and the time that Solomon began building Jehovah's temple. But the oldest manuscripts spell out all numbers. So a transcriber's visual error could not have occurred at 1 Kings 6:1, which gives this period correctly as 480 years. This harmonizes with a correct reading of Acts 13:20, which indicates that the period of "about four hundred and fifty years" there mentioned preceded the era of the Judges.

In 1943 the Watch Tower Society's book *"The Truth Shall Make You Free"* did away with the nonexistent extra 100 years in the period of the Judges and placed the end of 6,000 years of man's existence in the 1970's. It also fixed the beginning of Christ's presence, not in 1874, but in 1914 C.E.

time when they expected to meet their Bridegroom in heaven. Finally, that day arrived—October 1, 1914. The Gentile Times ended, but the anticipated heavenly glorification of the church did not come about. In fact, it had not occurred by the time Russell himself died on October 31, 1916. Rather, great trouble and persecution came upon those desirous of meeting the Bridegroom. A climax was reached in the summer of 1918, when the Watch Tower Society's new president, J. F. Rutherford, and seven other Christian men associated with headquarters were unjustly convicted and imprisoned.

J. F. Rutherford spent only nine months in prison, not twenty years, as sentenced. He and his seven associates were released on March 25, 1919, and eventually they were exonerated completely. But the year 1919 was significant for another reason. As the slumbering virgins were aroused by the midnight cry that the bridegroom was coming, so in 1919 C.E. the fact of the heavenly Bridegroom's presence in the Kingdom was thrust upon all who claimed to be virgins awaiting him.

PUTTING THEIR "LAMPS" IN ORDER

Immediately efforts were made to strengthen the courage of true Christians who had been looking for the Bridegroom. A general convention was held at Cedar Point, Ohio, on September 1-8, 1919. Tremendous enthusiasm was built up on September 5, when President J. F. Rutherford announced publication of a new magazine, *The Golden Age*, from October 1, 1919, onward. God's "consecrated" people were encouraged to take part in getting subscriptions for it, looking to the time when 4,000,000 copies of an issue would be circulated. Today, named "Awake!," this journal has an average printing of well over 8,000,000 copies an issue.

Certainly, 1919 was of no little consequence in the history of God's "chaste vir-

gin" class. A great worldwide Kingdom-preaching work then got under way. The "discreet virgin" class was aroused at that time and has not gone to sleep since!

That truly was when "all those virgins rose and put their lamps in order." (Matt. 25:7) The lamps were about to go out. Whereas the "discreet" virgins had receptacles filled with oil, the "foolish" virgins had no extra oil. Yet, the "discreet" ones could not share their oil, for the divided supply of all ten would then have given out. So the "foolish" virgins had to depart and try to buy oil somewhere at that late hour.

The symbolic "oil" pictures God's Word and his holy spirit, which illuminates that Word and produces in possessors of the "oil" the godly "fruitage of the spirit." Refusing to divide their "oil" with the "foolish" virgins means that the "discreet" virgins will not compromise with that class. The "foolish" virgins profess Christianity, yet do not meet its requirements. They may be influenced somewhat by their Bible knowledge, but not to the point of having God's powerful spirit in them and producing its fruitage. Though they expect to go to heaven, their religious development does not enable them to meet the challenge of the midnight cry: "Here is the bridegroom! Be on your way out to meet him." They have an illuminating-oil crisis. Theirs is a light that fails.

In 1919 the "discreet virgin" class acted to get out of Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. They could not compromise with the "foolish virgin" class, as by joining Babylon the Great in worshipping the 'image of the wild beast,' the League of Nations, which Babylon the Great made her riding mount in 1919. (Rev. 13: 14, 15; 14:11, 12; 17:1-18; 18:4) Their unequivocal stand was made clear at the Cedar Point convention on September 7,

1919, when J. F. Rutherford gave the public address "The Hope for Distressed Humanity." In it he boldly pointed out God's disapproval of the League of Nations, which the clergy endorsed as a political expression of God's kingdom on earth. The "discreet virgin" class had the faith that the kingdom of God's Son had been established in heaven at the close of the Gentile Times in 1914, and they refused to recognize and worship any substitute. They could not afford to give away any of their spiritual "oil" and reduce the measure of their devotion to God's Messianic kingdom.

The "discreet virgin" class thus met the glorious Bridegroom in 1919 and have continued as part of the procession that honors him down to the end. When they reach the "door," they prove worthy of admission. The Bridegroom finds them shining with the Christian personality and therefore accepts these "discreet" virgins of today as part of the Christian congregation. —2 Cor. 11:2, 3; Eph. 5:27.

CONFRONTED BY A CLOSED DOOR

Upon returning, the "foolish" virgins found the door closed. (Matt. 25:10) But, in the fulfillment, when is it officially shut? When the "great tribulation" breaks out and destruction starts upon Christendom and all the rest of Babylon the Great. Then it will be too late for professed Christians to get out of her. By that time, too, the full number of the 144,000 "chosen ones" making up Christ's "bride" will have been completed.—Matt. 24:21, 22.

The parable concludes with the words: "Afterwards the rest of the virgins also came, saying, 'Sir, sir, open to us!' In answer he said, 'I tell you the truth, I do not know you.'" (Matt. 25:11, 12) Because of their negligence resulting in a spiritual "oil crisis," the "foolish" virgins had not met the bridegroom or added

any brilliance to his marriage procession. Certainly, then, he was justified in keeping the door locked to them.

Likewise, when the "great tribulation" begins upon Christendom, the "foolish virgin" class will discern that they have not been associated with the religious organization that makes up the "chaste virgin," "the bride, the Lamb's wife." (Rev. 21:9) Yes, they will call out to the Bridegroom, but the door will not be opened, for Jesus said on another occasion: "Not everyone saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will." (Matt. 7:21-23) In the "great tribulation" the Bridegroom will leave the "foolish virgin" class outside in the blackness of the world's deepest night, to perish with all other "workers of lawlessness." From their destruction they will have no resurrection to heavenly life.

"KEEP ON THE WATCH"

Jesus emphasized the point of his parable with timely words for anointed Christians living at the "conclusion of the system of things." He said: "Keep on the

watch, therefore, because you know neither the day nor the hour." (Matt. 25:13) Those who wish to be like the five "discreet" virgins must shine continually with an active Christian personality. They dare not compromise with those who would take away some or much of their spiritual "oil." Their faith in the Bridegroom's arrival and presence must continue bright, and they need to remain in the shining procession that follows his steps until he brings his bridal congregation completely home.

The long delay in the Bridegroom's arrival has ended. He is here, in his glorious presence. The time for drowsiness and sleep is past! Now is the time to shine in his honor and to rejoice with him in the joy his heavenly Father has set before him, that of taking his spiritual "bride" to himself and celebrating this with a marriage feast. Spirit-anointed Christians, therefore, must keep on the watch, for they do not know the day or hour when that "door" of opportunity will be shut, never to be reopened. But such vigilant and discreet ones will not be shut out because of any fatal spiritual illuminating-oil crisis.

The Great Debate Continues

WHEN does life begin? At birth or at conception? This is the basic question that legislators of several countries are pondering. Recently the United States Senate held an "abortion hearing" in which scientists testified concerning the beginning of life. One witness, Dr. J. Lejeune, a French geneticist, argued that "from its very beginning the 'thing' we started with is a member of our kin . . . the same human being from fecundation [fertilization] to death." In his contention that life begins at conception, he stated: "The very fact that we have to develop ourselves during nine months inside the bodily protection of our mother does not change anything."

At this same hearing another scientist arguing in favor of abortion reasoned that

the question "is essentially a religious and moral" one. In reflecting on his point, how does the greatest of religious books refer to the unborn? As simply tissue? The Bible at Jeremiah 1:5 says: "Before you proceeded to come forth from the womb I sanctified you." God viewed Jeremiah as having life prior to his birth. Likewise the inspired psalmist David says: "You kept me screened off in the belly of my mother. . . . Your eyes saw even the embryo of me, and in your book all its parts were down in writing."—Ps. 139:13-16.

Thus, while the debate continues among scientists and legislators, for those who look to the Bible the answer has already been given by the greatest Scientist, the Source of life himself.—Ps. 36:9.

It Was Just a Brief Printed Message

EACH year Jehovah's Christian witnesses distribute millions of handbills, inviting people to attend Bible discourses at their Kingdom Halls and other meeting places. At times these handbills, with their brief Scriptural message on the reverse side, have been instrumental in causing people to start making remarkable changes in their life. Also, leaflets or folders encouraging home Bible study have led to similar results.

● On the west coast of the United States in November 1971, a young, long-haired, bearded man walked into a Kingdom Hall. Searching for the right religion, he made it a point to hear different speakers who were prominent in their churches. So when he saw on a windowsill at his lodging place a handbill extending an invitation to a discourse at the Kingdom Hall, he decided to attend. As he noted that the lecturer represented the Watchtower Society, his interest was stirred as he thought that the speaker must be someone of importance.

At the Kingdom Hall, one of Jehovah's witnesses approached the young man and, in the course of the conversation, offered to study the Bible with him. But he turned down this offer. However, at the conclusion of the talk, delivered by a traveling overseer, he agreed to give some thought to having a home Bible study and he remained for the Watchtower study and the traveling overseer's concluding talk. Now he was not just willing to have a Bible study, but he even asked what he had to do to be baptized.

Plans were made to discuss the Bible the following evening, Monday, at the home of the Witness. The young man came, full of questions. On Thursday evening of that week still more questions were considered. As soon as his list of questions was answered, the young man said, "O.K., let's study."

The next day he was at the Kingdom Hall for the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting, the two meetings scheduled for that evening. At first no one recognized him. He had trimmed his hair and shaved off his beard.—1 Cor. 11:14.

As he progressed in his study of the Bible he told the Witness that 'he could never go

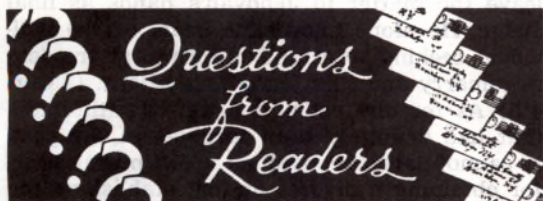
from door to door,' telling other people about the Scriptures. Soon, however, he was sharing in the house-to-house preaching work. After studying just five months he brought his life into harmony with God's righteous requirements, dedicated himself to Jehovah and symbolized that dedication by water baptism.

● Some years ago a man living in Chicago, Illinois, who had never heard of Jehovah's witnesses, found a leaflet under his door. His landlady, not one of Jehovah's witnesses but somewhat interested in their work, had placed it under his door. The leaflet asked the question, "Would you like to understand the Bible?" Reading the information rather quickly, the man placed the leaflet on a table. Thereafter he would occasionally pick it up and read it. After about two weeks his curiosity got the better of him and so he decided to go to the Kingdom Hall on Sunday to find out just what Jehovah's witnesses were teaching.

At the Kingdom Hall he was warmly welcomed. Before he left, the Witnesses gave him more literature to read. He read this before returning to the Kingdom Hall the following Sunday. He was so impressed by what he read that he got still more literature. Also, that Sunday one of the Witnesses arranged to study the Bible with him, using the publication *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*.

For years this man had attended services in various churches of Christendom. He had also read many books on the so-called 'psychic sciences,' but without any satisfaction. Now, as a result of his visits to the Kingdom Hall, he was convinced that he had found the truth. He continued to make progress in his study of the Scriptures, but found it hard to give up the smoking habit. (2 Cor. 7:1) Eventually, however, as he put it, "with a great deal of prayer and determination, I stopped." Thereafter he dedicated his life to Jehovah God and was baptized in symbol thereof.

So, it can be seen that even brief printed messages are playing a part in aiding people to learn about the truth that leads to eternal life.



● If, after a legal divorce had been obtained, a person learned that his or her former mate had been guilty of adultery or other gross sexual immorality before the divorce, would that give Scriptural validity to the legal divorce? Also, would the forgiveness of a single act of adultery rule out obtaining a divorce on Scriptural grounds if it later came to light that numerous immoral acts were involved? —Sweden.

There are times when knowledge about a divorced mate's adultery or his practice of other gross sexual immorality before the divorce would give validity to a divorce that has already been obtained. Also, forgiveness for one case of adultery does not necessarily mean that previous unrevealed defilements of the marriage bed are likewise forgiven.

According to the Scriptures, adultery or other gross sexual immorality does not automatically sever the marriage bond, but it does give the innocent mate a valid ground for doing so. (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) On the other hand, in the sight of God, a divorce obtained when there is no Scriptural ground for it does not free either mate for remarriage. Such a divorce, from a Scriptural standpoint, is similar to a legal separation.

The apostle Paul's counsel to married persons is: "A wife should not depart from her husband; but if she should actually depart, let her remain unmarried or else make up again with her husband; and a husband should not leave his wife."—1 Cor. 7:10, 11.

Nonetheless, though very rare among true Christians, a separation may occur and may be legalized by a divorce action on grounds other than "fornication." A Christian finding himself or herself in this position may later learn of predivorce adultery on the part of the divorced mate. Such a one now is faced with a decision as to whether to use this as a basis for establishing with the congregation

his or her Scriptural freedom to remarry. If, after having established with the congregation's judicial committee his or her being Scripturally free from the mate, such a one decides to remarry, no charge of adultery would be brought against this one.

The innocent mate may, however, decide not to use this as a basis for establishing his or her Scriptural freedom to remarry. Perhaps the adultery or gross sexual immorality was engaged in by the mate many years ago. The innocent one may have lived for many years with the other mate in the marriage arrangement after the immoral act (though unknown at the time) and before the separation. Therefore, even though now divorced, the innocent party may want to forgive the wrong that occurred in the past, believing that this is what he or she would have done had the matter been revealed then. (Eph. 4:32) The innocent party may possibly entertain the hope of once again making up with the former marriage mate and entering into a legal marriage again with that one.

What, then, of the other situation, that of a person still married who, after having forgiven one act of adultery, later comes to learn about other acts of sexual immorality or perversion by the guilty mate, acts committed

ANNUAL MEETING, OCTOBER 1, 1974

The annual meeting of the members of Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, October 1, 1974, at the Society's Office located at 4100 Bigelow Boulevard, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213. Will those brothers who are members of the Corporation please now see to it that the Secretary's Office has their present mailing addresses so that the regular letters of notice and the proxies can be sent to them to reach them shortly after September 1. The proxies should be returned so as to reach the Office of the Secretary of the Society not later than September 15. As each member knows, he should complete and return his proxy promptly whether he is going to be at the annual meeting personally or not.

before such forgiveness was extended? This would give the innocent mate opportunity to reconsider the matter. The Bible shows that even Jehovah God views a practice of sin as being far more serious than a single act of sin. (1 John 1:8-2:1; 3:4-6) While a man or woman may be willing to forgive one act of adultery, he or she may feel differently about forgiving a *practice* of sexual wrongs over a prolonged period. In such a case, some persons would again choose to forgive the guilty mate but others might want to use this new evidence to obtain a divorce and to establish with the congregation their Scriptural freedom to remarry. This would apply to persons who are separated as well as to those still living together as husband and wife.

Accordingly, acts of marital unfaithfulness that were not forgiven in the past may provide a basis for establishing Scripturally the right to sever the marriage tie in the sight of God. Of course, the person who chooses to do this must be willing to shoulder that responsibility before his Creator. Whereas the elders of the congregation may personally feel that forgive-

ness would have been more appropriate, they leave the matter in Jehovah's hands as final Judge. He alone knows the heart of the individual seeking to establish Scriptural freedom to remarry and that one's motivations. (1 Cor. 4:5) As for any act of marital unfaithfulness that had definitely been forgiven in the past, it cannot later be used as a Scriptural basis for obtaining a divorce or for establishing the right to remarry.

It may be noted that in these matters the Christian congregation is guided by the Scriptures and not by legal stipulations adhered to in certain localities that do not permit the introduction of new evidence after a case has once been heard and decided.

"WATCHTOWER" STUDIES FOR THE WEEKS

September 15: Does God's Mercy Cover All Your Sins? Page 493. Songs to Be Used: 23, 77.

September 22: How Merciful Are You? Page 499. Songs to Be Used: 41, 67.

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