

The **WATCHTOWER** **HOLD ON—**

*The
Promise
Nears
Fulfillment!*

DECEMBER 15, 1976

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

The WATCHTOWER

December 15, 1976
Vol. 97, Number 24

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 high-est 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. One 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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What Did The Wise Man Mean?



IN THE Bible book of Ecclesiastes, wise King Solomon pointed to some of the endless cycles that are associated with the earth. One generation is replaced by another generation. The sun rises and sets. Winds keep on blowing from various directions. Rivers and torrents empty into the sea but never fill it.—Eccl. 1:4-7.

Thereafter the wise man observed: "All things are wearisome; no one is able to speak of it. The eye is not satisfied at seeing, neither is the ear filled from hearing. That which has come to be, that is what will come to be; and that which has been done, that is what will be done; and so *there is nothing new under the sun*. Does anything exist of which one may say: 'See this; it is new'? It has already had existence for time indefinite; what has come into existence is from time prior to us. There is no remembrance of people of

former times, nor will there be of those also who will come to be later. There will prove to be no remembrance even of them among those who will come to be still later on."—Eccl. 1:8-11.

Evidently it was the endless repetition of things that King Solomon had in mind when he stated the foregoing. So many repetitive cycles existed that a person would become weary in trying to describe them all. He would be 'at a loss for words.'

The repetition of cycles can affect man in such a way that his senses of seeing and hearing are not satisfied but desire something new or novel. And yet there really is nothing new in the natural cycles nor in the events of common day-to-day living. Generations long prior to ours witnessed the same natural cycles. And in human affairs the same things have been observed throughout the centuries. There have been advancement, regression, disappointment, oppression, corruption and revolution, followed by still more oppression and corruption. People have had the same hopes, desires and ambitions. Then, when they died, they were forgotten by later generations. Even persons who made a notable name for themselves faded from the memory of the living and were eclipsed by those alive who enjoy prominence.

Of what benefit is this information? It can protect us from attaching undue importance to the pursuit of materialistic goals that leave the Creator out of consideration. All earthly attainments are but temporary. Therefore, instead of making such the chief goal in life, it is far better to enjoy the fruitage of one's labor and make a good name with God, who can restore us to life, setting before us an eternal, happy future.—Eccl. 3:22.

Will You Shun **AMBITION?**

DO YOU have a knack for taking the lead? If so, you can be of great benefit to others. People appreciate someone who can organize matters for smooth, efficient operation.

But while abilities at leadership can be a blessing, something often turns them into a plague. The culprit is *ambition*, which means “an eager or inordinate desire for preferment, honor, superiority, power, or attainment.”

The desire to achieve prominence is very strong. Even some persons who should be exemplary in conduct succumb to it. For example, Jesus said concerning certain religious leaders of his day: “Look out for the scribes who desire to walk around in robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and front seats in the synagogues and most prominent places at evening meals.” (Luke 20:46) Even Jesus’ disciples at times fell prey to ambition. Regarding one of these occasions, we read: “And they came into Capernaum. Now when he was inside the house he put the question to them: ‘What were you arguing over on the road?’ They kept silent, for on the road they had argued among themselves who is greater.”—Mark 9:33, 34; Luke 22:24.

AMBITION’S BAD FRUITAGE

The case of the ancient Israelite army chief Joab illustrates some extremes to which ambition can lead. Joab covertly murdered both Abner and Amasa. This was because of rivalry over the position as King David’s army commander. (2 Sam. 3:26, 27; 20:8-10, 23) When the king became old and sick, Joab joined David’s son Adonijah in a conspiracy to usurp the

throne. (1 Ki. 1:18, 19) When this failed and Solomon was made king, Joab forsook Adonijah. Such ambitious scheming, however, was to no avail, for Joab met an inglorious death by execution early in Solomon’s reign.—1 Ki. 2:5, 6, 29-34.

Probably you have seen many ambitious persons attain powerful administrative positions. Do they really benefit their fellowman? Likely you will agree with the observations of an inspired Bible writer: “There exists something calamitous that I have seen under the sun, as when there is a mistake going forth on account of the one in power: Foolishness has been put in many high positions, but the rich ones themselves [that is, those who might be thought to be in line for oversight] keep dwelling merely in a low condition. I have seen servants on horses but princes walking on the earth just like servants.”—Eccl. 10:5-7.

The rotten fruitage of mismanagement of human affairs by ambitious individuals is well stated at Ecclesiastes 4:1: “And I myself returned that I might see all the acts of oppression that are being done under the sun, and, look! the tears of those being oppressed, but they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, so that they had no comforter.” Is not that situation even more evident today?

GETTING THE CORRECT VIEWPOINT

What is your viewpoint toward gaining prominence, superiority or authority? The Bible can help you to develop a healthy one. How so?

For one thing, the Scriptures show that

ambitious striving to get ahead is simply a waste of time. The inspired penman quoted above observed: "And I myself have seen all the hard work and all the proficiency in work, that it means the rivalry of one toward another; this also is vanity and a striving after the wind." (Eccl. 4:4) Is it not wise to shun such a vain course? Probably you have noticed that hard-driving individuals are especially prone to tension-induced health risks, such as heart attacks. Sound indeed is the Scriptural advice: "Better is a handful of rest than a double handful of hard work and striving after the wind."—Eccl. 4:6.

Unchecked desire for recognition or prominence is hazardous spiritually, too, for God declares: "Self-exaltation and pride . . . I have hated." (Prov. 8:13) Ambition harms not only the one enslaved to it, but also that one's associates. Hence, Bible writer James counseled Christians of the first century: "If you are harbouring bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, consider whether your claims [to be wise] are not false, and a defiance of the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes from above; it is earth-bound, sensual, demonic. For with jealousy and ambition come disorder and evil of every kind."—Jas. 3:14-16, *New English Bible*.

Indicating the "disorder" that ambition can cause is the fact that ten of Jesus' apostles "started to be indignant at James and John" when those two sought the most prominent places alongside Jesus in God's heavenly kingdom. (Mark 10:41) Later, ambitious men caused divisions in the Christian congregation. Eventually this led to a general apostasy from true Christian belief. (Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Pet. 2:1-3) Do you wish to harbor an attitude that has caused so much harm?

THE ROOTS OF AMBITION

Why do so many succumb to ambition? As an "inordinate desire" for superiority

and recognition, ambition is a form of covetousness. Jesus said: "From inside, out of the heart of men, injurious reasonings issue forth: . . . covetings, . . . an envious eye, . . . haughtiness." (Mark 7:21, 22) The apostle Paul sheds further light on the source of the problem, saying: "I am fleshly, sold under sin. . . I behold in my members another law warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive to sin's law that is in my members."—Rom. 7:14, 23.

Basically, what prompts ambition is inherited sin, which inclines people to take a selfish view of matters, causing them to become haughty.—Rom. 3:23; 5:12.

DO YOU PROMOTE AMBITION IN OTHERS?

Possibly ambition does not dominate your life. But you may promote it in others. How might that happen?

Consider the Bible's account about Adam and Eve. Eve knew of God's command not to eat fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and bad. She evidently did not feel hemmed in by this divine prohibition. When questioned by the serpent, Eve did not complain about her lot, but replied simply by restating God's command: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat. But as for eating of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You must not eat from it, no, you must not touch it that you do not die.'"—Gen. 3:2, 3.

Then, Satan the Devil, through the serpent, cleverly planted seeds of ambition in the mind of Eve, when he said: "You positively will not die. For God knows that in the very day of your eating from it your eyes are bound to be opened and you are bound to be like God, knowing good and bad."—Gen. 3:4, 5.

Ah! being "like God," able to decide for herself what was good and bad rather than accepting God's judgment on such matters, *that* appealed to Eve. Where did

Eve's ambition to gain full independence from God lead? "Consequently the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was something to be longed for to the eyes, yes, the tree was desirable to look upon. So she began taking of its fruit and eating it. Afterward she gave some also to her husband when with her and he began eating it." (Gen. 3:6) In this case selfish ambition caused both Adam and Eve as well as all their unborn offspring to become subject to death. —Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12.

What about you? Likely you would not directly urge anyone to violate the law of God. Yet you might promote ambition in others. Understandably, persons highly esteem family members, relatives and close friends. But individuals who desire to please God must beware of making too much of the abilities of loved ones. This could lead to some getting an inflated view of themselves, which, in turn, fosters ambition.

For example, what if someone were to prod a marriage mate, family member or friend into thinking that he was especially qualified for the office of overseer in the Christian congregation? How tragic it would be if the person became haughty and began to demand that others accept his own estimate of himself and his qualifications! With good reason the Scriptures

warn: "An able-bodied man that is flattering his companion is spreading out a mere net for his steps." (Prov. 29:5) Such flattery would hinder, rather than aid, a Christian's efforts at "reaching out for an office of overseer." (1 Tim. 3:1) The Scriptures require that overseers in the Christian congregation be "sound in mind," which means that they must 'not think more of themselves than it is necessary to think.'—1 Tim. 3:2; Rom. 12:3.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Since humans are sinful by inheritance, is slavery to ambition unavoidable? Evidently not, for the Scriptures admonish God-fearing persons to resist sinful tendencies. (Rom. 6:12) While it calls for self-control, shunning ambition is not beyond your ability. You will find it especially helpful to cultivate the mental attitude set forth at Philippians 2:3, 4: "There must be no room for rivalry and personal vanity among you, but you must humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to each other's interest and not merely to your own."—*NE*.

Ambition is, therefore, wholly unscriptural. Its roots are sunk deeply in human sinfulness and the arrogant spirit of this world. Rather than ambitious self-exaltation, the Bible urges humble service of others. That is the spirit in which Christian men are encouraged to 'reach out for the office of overseer.'—1 Tim. 3:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-3.

Among the many benefits of heeding this Scriptural counsel is the one mentioned at Ecclesiastes 5:12: "Sweet is the sleep of the one serving, regardless of whether it is little or much that he eats." Too, such an unselfish person has the love and appreciation of his associates, instead of their resentment. Most importantly, "the one serving" gains the favor of Jehovah God. Are these not powerful reasons for one to shun ambition?

IN COMING ISSUES

■ "Girded" for the Work Ahead.

■ A New Year —Time for a Change?

■ Facing the "Great Tribulation" with Confidence.

Insight on the News

● An international convention of child experts meeting at Salonica, Greece, stressed the fact that child play is not just an innocent activity without a purpose; it is also a manifestation of human existence. It allows the child to learn behavior patterns and to communicate his feelings to the surrounding world.

War Toys Harm Children

Particular emphasis was placed on the negative aspects of having imitation war weapons as playthings for children. It was agreed that such war toys cultivate a tendency to aggression in children. For this reason it was proposed that governments impose controls on the industries that manufacture such toys.

Parents who have respect for life, and for God's laws, observe that his Word tells them to "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. . . . Neither will they learn war anymore." (Isa. 2:4) God's Word also counsels: "Let us pursue the things making for peace and the things that are upbuilding to one another." (Rom. 14:19) Hence, conscientious parents will not let their children use toys that build hostility and disrespect for God's gift of life.

● Throughout the world today, moral standards are declining. More and more married people have sex relations with someone other than their mate. Yet studies show that most of those who commit adultery do not find happiness.

Fidelity Superior

Professor of Sociology C. B. Broderick of the University of Southern California states that the age-long moral prohibitions in the "thousands of societies which have condemned infidelity" are well founded. He says: "These traditional moral prohibitions are founded upon certain fundamental [truths] concerning human relationships. Among these is the principle that no society can function without the expectation that social contracts will be honored, and no social contract is of any value unless the fidelity of the partners to the contract is required."

This sociologist observes that committing oneself to a "master principle such as the Golden Rule would seem to me to preclude

any act [such as adultery] which had the potential of devastating another person. Although I have seen the anguish that infidelity can bring, I have never observed anyone being destroyed by fidelity."

After listing many other supporting points, he concludes: "For all these reasons, I judge marital fidelity to be a great value to individuals, to couples, to families, and to the entire social fabric." This view harmonizes with that of the originator of marriage, Jehovah God, who declares: "Let marriage be honorable among all, and the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers."—Heb. 13:4; Prov. 5:15-23.

● The pagan origin of Christmas is becoming more widely acknowledged. In New Zealand,

Christmas of Pagan Origin

the Auckland "Star" says of the December 25 holiday: "The Romans' feast to the god Saturn—Saturnalia, and the Persian festival for the birthday of the god, Mithra, were also held on this day."

How did Christmas come to fall on the same day? One reason, the "Star" notes, is that several centuries after the death of Christ, apostate Christians "wishing to transform pagan festivals rather than abolish them, set December 25 aside to celebrate the birth of Christ."

In the Mount Pleasant, Michigan, "Daily Times" an editorial opinion says regarding Christmas: "Its celebration on the 25th of December is in no way whatsoever an accurate dating of the Birth of Jesus." It notes that the date was "for the Romans, the Festival of 'Sol Invictus'—the Unconquerable Sun—a concept inherited from Greek Culture, who had borrowed it from the Near East. . . . Even today many of the old Pagan Customs, not only from ancient Rome itself but from all over Western Europe, have crept into our celebration of the Festival of Christmas, including holly, mistletoe, Christmas trees, presents, drinking and feasting, and indeed the secular observance of Christmas, at least in America, is not unlike the old Roman Observance of the Festival of Sol Invictus by the Romans."

So Christians who do not celebrate Christmas find solid support in history.

HOLD ON—

The Promise Nears Fulfillment!



"You have need of endurance, in order that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the fulfillment of the promise."—Heb. 10:36.

A GOOD promise, made by a reliable person, can influence the receiver to take rewarding action. All for the sake of a promise, how many of us today would be willing to become an alien, a man without a country, in a foreign land, for a hundred years? Amazingly, we have the historical record of just such a course! It is the case of a man from whom the Arabs claim descent, as well as their blood relatives, the Israelites. This common forefather of theirs received a promise the carrying out of which affects the whole human family for everlasting good.

* The realization of this world-important promise called for action, as the promissory statement from God said: "Go your way out of your country and from your relatives and from the house of your father to the country that I shall show you; and I shall make a great nation out of you and I shall bless you and I will make your name great; and prove yourself a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and him that calls down evil upon you I shall curse, and all the families of the ground will certainly bless themselves by means of you."—Gen. 12:1-3.

* How thankful all of us who belong to "the families of the ground" can be that the receiver of the promise, Abram of Ur of the Chaldeans, trustfully took the prescribed action! Abram (later called Abraham) is an example to us in the way of taking due action to realize a promise that Abraham's God makes to us.

* When Abraham was seventy-five years old, he entered the Promised Land, then a country foreign to him. He died at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years. On this account he was a man without a

country for a whole century—quite a time. His son Isaac, born to him in this foreign land not yet given to Abraham, was likewise a man without a country, but for even a longer period of time—for one hundred and eighty years. Isaac's son, Jacob, to whom the divine promise was passed along, was a man without a country for one hundred and thirty years before he was called down to Egypt, where he died. (Gen. 47:7-9; 49:33) Yet, at his own request, this patriarch of one hundred and forty-seven years of age was buried in the Promised Land, the land of Canaan.—Gen. 50:1-14.

* What was it that strengthened those three patriarchs to hold on in a foreign land and not to return to Ur of the Chaldeans? What helped them to endure in the alien land of Canaan for two hundred and fifteen years (1943 to 1728 B.C.E.) all together? It was their faith in Jehovah God and in the reliability of his unbreakable promise. To this effect we read, in Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13-16:

* "By faith he [Abraham] resided as an alien in the land of the promise as in a foreign land, and dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the very same promise. For he was awaiting the city having real foundations, the builder and maker of which city is God. In faith all these died, although they did not get the fulfillment of the promises, but they saw them afar off and welcomed them and publicly declared that they were strangers and temporary residents in the land. For those who say such things give evidence that they are earnestly seeking a place of their own. And yet, if they had indeed kept remembering that place from which they had gone forth, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they are reaching out for a better place, that is,

5, 6. What quality strengthened those three patriarchs to endure two hundred and fifteen years in the alien land, and how does Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13-16 bear this out?

1. What did a reliable promise influence the common forefather of Arabs and Israelites to make of himself?
2. Why did the realization of that promise call for action on the receiver's part?
3. As respects a promise, in what way is Abraham of Ur of the Chaldeans an example to us?
4. How long was Abraham a man without a country in the land of Canaan; also his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob?

one belonging to heaven. Hence God is not ashamed of them, to be called upon as their God, for he has made a city ready for them."

⁷ Abraham, as an example to his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, was determined to die abroad rather than shrink back from his assignment and return to his native city, Ur of the Chaldeans. That pagan city being in the land of Shinar, Abraham even made himself an unwelcome person there in that neighborhood, because he pursued and put to rout four confederate kings from that area. These were Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim. Abraham and his troops despoiled those kings of all the valuable things and captives that they had seized during their invasion of the land of Canaan. (Gen. 14:1-24; Heb. 7:1) No longer did Abraham want Ur of the Chaldeans as his residential city. He renounced it. He preferred to live as a nomad in the Promised Land, desiring something better than that idolatrous, sinful city of his birth. Rather than a man-made city, Abraham, as well as Isaac and Jacob, wanted a city or government of which his God is the Builder and Maker. The foundations of Ur of the Chaldeans lie in ruins today, but not so God's "city."

⁸ For Abraham's faithfulness till death, Jehovah God promised him, not a heavenly inheritance, but an earthly one, the land of Canaan. So, at his resurrection from the dead, Abraham will be raised to life on earth. But at that time the earth will be under the absolute rule of the city "belonging to heaven," the Messianic kingdom of Abraham's most important Descendant, namely, Jesus Christ. (Heb. 11:16)

7. How did Abraham make himself an undesirable person in the neighborhood of his birth, and what kind of "city" did he want?

8, 9. (a) What kind of inheritance will Abraham get in the resurrection, and how? (b) According to Romans 4:11, 12, how did Abraham become the "father" of Christ's disciples, spiritually speaking?

Abraham was an excellent example of faith to this glorious Descendant, the one through whom God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled, for Jesus Christ is outstandingly the 'seed of Abraham' in whom all the nations of the earth will procure a never-ending blessing. (Gen. 22:18) Spiritually speaking, Abraham is said to be the "father" of the disciples of Jesus Christ, no matter whether these have been taken from among circumcised Jews or from among uncircumcised non-Jews, the Gentiles. On this point, we read the following words:

⁹ "And he [Abraham] received a sign [years after his becoming a wandering alien in the land of Canaan], namely, circumcision, as a seal of the righteousness by the faith he had while in his uncircumcised state [until he begot Isaac], that he might be the father of all those having faith while in uncircumcision [as Gentiles], in order for righteousness to be counted to them; and a father of circumcised offspring, not only to those who adhere to circumcision [the circumcised Jews], but also to those who walk orderly in the footsteps of that faith while in the uncircumcised state [as Gentiles] which [faith] our father Abraham had."—Rom. 4:11, 12; Gen. 15:6; 17:7-17.

¹⁰ Because Abraham became like a spiritual father to the disciples of his natural Descendant Jesus Christ, Abraham was used as a type of Jehovah God, who is the heavenly Father of all the "seed" by means of whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. (Gal. 3:8, 9) Thus Jehovah God is the Greater Abraham. From him comes the quality of faith, because he gives his holy spirit to those who worship him, one of the fruits that this spirit produces being faith. (Gal. 5:22) His de-

10. (a) How is God, more so than Abraham, the "father of all those having faith"? (b) So, by means of what quality shall we enter into fulfillment of God's promises?

pendable faithfulness to his promises inspires faith within us toward him. Far more so than Abraham, Jehovah is the Father of the faithful ones or of those having faith. By holding fast to such faith, we shall, like Abraham, enter into fulfillment of God's promises to us. Our faith will aid us to endure until we get the things promised by God.

"ALIENS AND TEMPORARY RESIDENTS" IN THIS WORLD

¹¹ Abraham is indeed an example to us today who look forward to the wonderful things promised to us by the God who does not lie. At present we still have men and women who, in a figurative way, are persons without a country. These are the ones who really have the faith of Abraham. They are the dedicated, baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, the Principal One of the 'seed of Abraham.' It is from no wrong standpoint that they are looked upon as a people without a country. This standpoint is backed up by what one of Christ's disciples, the apostle Peter, wrote in his first letter addressed to those whom he calls "the temporary residents scattered about in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." (1 Pet. 1:1) In what sense were these Christians "temporary residents"? This is shown in chapter two, verses eleven and twelve, where the apostle Peter writes:

¹² "Beloved, I exhort you as aliens and temporary residents to keep abstaining from fleshly desires, which are the very ones that carry on a conflict against the soul. Maintain your conduct fine among the nations [or, the Gentiles], that, in the thing in which they are speaking against you as evildoers, they may as a result of

11, 12. How are we, who, like Abraham, look forward to God's promises, a people without a country, and how is this backed up by what is written in 1 Peter 2:11, 12?

your fine works of which they are eye-witnesses glorify God in the day for his inspection."—1 Pet. 2:11, 12.

¹³ "Aliens" we dedicated disciples of Christ may be to the world, but how consoling it is to know that we are not "aliens" to God! To him we are no longer "alienated and enemies because [our] minds were on the works that were wicked." (Col. 1:21) We do not walk "as the nations also walk in the unprofitableness of their minds, while they are in darkness mentally, and alienated from the life that belongs to God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the insensibility of their hearts." (Eph. 4:17, 18) The apostle Peter and the anointed Christians of his day expected to move out of this worldly system of things in the day of their death and thus no longer be alien sojourners or temporary residents in it. But today, in this twentieth century of the Christian congregation, those of Jehovah's Christian witnesses who survive the oncoming "great tribulation" will not move out of the system. Why not? Because this wicked system of things will itself be removed from the face of the earth in the "war of the great day of God the Almighty" in which the tribulation will end.—Matt. 24:21, 22; Rev. 7:14, 16; 14, 16; 19:11-21.

¹⁴ Do we really profess to be dedicated Christians? Well, then, are we conducting ourselves as "aliens and temporary residents" among the worldly nations in the way advised by the inspired apostle Peter? There was a solid reason why he exhorted Christians who had been given a "new birth to a living hope" that they should carefully conduct themselves as persons in

13. (a) However, to whom are we not "aliens," and why not? (b) Unlike Peter, why shall we not have to move out of their wicked system of things?

14. What solid reason did Peter give for anointed Christians to conduct themselves as "aliens and temporary residents" in this world?

a foreign land. The reason for their doing this was that, as Peter said, "you are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession, that you should declare abroad the excellencies' of the one that called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. For you were once not a people, but are now God's people." (1 Pet. 1:3; 2:9, 10) Obviously, then, such ones are no longer a part of this world that is alienated from God. They are no longer walking in its darkness, but are light bearers from God. They are in a situation like that of Abraham of long ago.

¹⁵ Their hope is not that of this world. Their hope is one inspired by God's promise. This promise is now nearing fulfillment, glorious realization. More than nineteen centuries ago Peter penned the words: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell. Hence, beloved ones, since you are awaiting these things, do your utmost to be found finally by him spotless and unblemished and in peace." (2 Pet. 3:13, 14) Those "new heavens" were the "city" that faithful Abraham awaited so patiently, a heavenly government "having real foundations, the builder and maker of which city is God." (Heb. 11:10) The "new earth" is the new human society made up of all those who procure a blessing through the spiritual 'seed of Abraham.'—Gen. 22:18; Rev. 21:1.

CHRISTLIKE NON-INVOLVEMENT WITH THE WORLD

¹⁶ Since Christians are "aliens and temporary residents" and, as such, are

15. According to 2 Peter 3:13, 14, what is the hope of these Christians who have been given the "new birth"?
16. So, then, why can Christians not interest themselves in the political affairs and controversies of worldly nations?

awaiting the fulfillment of such a divine promise, how could they really interest themselves in the political affairs and violent conflicts of worldly nations? If their hearts are truly set on the "new heavens" and a "new earth" in connection with God's kingdom, they sincerely could not do so!

¹⁷ Jesus Christ said to his disciples: "Your heavenly Father knows you need all these [material] things. Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness." (Matt. 6:32, 33) Such a seeking of the heavenly Father's kingdom first would include one's taking an active part in the carrying out of Jesus' prophecy: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come." (Matt. 24:14) An obedient Christian cannot compromisingly divide his attention and time between the interests of God's kingdom and the interests of man-made kingdoms and actually be putting God's kingdom first and gaining his approval.

¹⁸ Having become "aliens and temporary residents" toward this old world, Christians no longer have the right to make themselves again a part of this world. Were they to do so, then they would not be included in the prayer that Jesus offered to God: "I request you . . . to watch over them because of the wicked one. They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world. Sanctify them by means of the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:15-17) There was sound reason for such a prayer, inasmuch as "the wicked one" is "the ruler of this world."—John 12:31; 14:30.

17. How does one's obedience to Christ's words in Matthew 6:32, 33 make it out of order for one to divide one's attention between God's kingdom and man-made kingdoms?

18. Why do Christians have no right to make themselves a part of this world?

¹⁹ Does this world of Devil-ruled mankind love these Christian "aliens and temporary residents" because they consistently refuse to become a part of this world? Well, did the world love Jesus Christ because, as he said, he was "no part of the world"? The disciple is not better than his Master. Consequently Jesus said to his disciples: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were part of the world, the world would be fond of what is its own. Now because you are no part of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, on this account the world hates you. Bear in mind the word I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also; . . . In fact, the hour is coming when everyone that kills you will imagine he has rendered a sacred service to God." (John 15:18-20; 16:2) In order for the genuine Christian to enter into the fulfillment of God's promise, he has to undergo faithfully such world hatred and mistreatment.

²⁰ The Christianized Jews in the Roman province of Judea, and particularly those in its capital Jerusalem, came to know the truth of those warning words of their Messianic Master, Jesus Christ. About twenty-eight years after Jesus spoke the above words, the apostle Paul, who was a Christianized Jew, was in position to write to the Hebrew believers in Jerusalem these strength-reviving words: "Keep on remembering the former days in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great contest under sufferings, sometimes while you were being exposed as in a theater both to reproaches and tribulations, and sometimes while you became sharers

with those who were having such an experience. For you both expressed sympathy for those in prison and joyfully took the plundering of your belongings, knowing you yourselves have a better and an abiding possession."—Heb. 10:32-34.

CHRISTIAN "AMBASSADORS"

²¹ Admittedly the world is hostile to Jehovah God and to his devoted people. Because of this, God has assigned an ambassadorial service to his dedicated, baptized worshipers who have received from him the "new birth." (1 Pet. 1:3) Accordingly he sends them forth to the alienated world, not to sue for peace and make a compromise with the world. The doomed world is not the one to dictate to God any terms of peace. (Luke 14:31, 32) God sends forth his ambassadors to plead with individual persons of the world to take advantage of God's loving terms for entering a peaceful, lifesaving relationship with Him. The Christianized Jew, Paul, along with his half-Jewish companion, Timothy, calls this fact to our attention, saying, in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21:

²² "God was by means of Christ reconciling a world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and he committed the word of the reconciliation to us. We are therefore ambassadors substituting for Christ, as though God were making entreaty through us. As substitutes for Christ we beg: 'Become reconciled to God.' The one who did not know sin he made to be sin for us, that we might become God's righteousness by means of him."

²³ Because of being ambassadors substituting for Christ to *all* the nations, the commissioned Christians have to car-

19. As "aliens and temporary residents," what must Christians undergo in this world?

20. According to Hebrews 10:32-34, what did Christianized Jews, who were hated as Jesus was, need to remember?

21, 22. (a) Because of the world's hostility, whom does God send to the people, and for what to be done? (b) How is this called to our attention in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21?

23. In view of "the word of the reconciliation" that these Christian "ambassadors" carry, why are they not authorized to meddle in worldly politics and conflicts?

ry "the word of the reconciliation" to people of all sorts of political persuasion—to Democrats, to Republicans, to Socialists, to the Nazi-minded, to the Fascist-minded, to Communists, to Conservatives, to Laborites, and so forth. God's "word of the reconciliation" is the same to all of these, without partiality. For this reason his "ambassadors substituting for Christ" cannot dabble in the politics of *any* country or become members of *any* political party anywhere. As "ambassadors" from God they are "aliens and temporary residents" no matter in what land they are preaching "this good news of the kingdom." Remembering the apostle Paul's words, "Our citizenship exists in the heavens" (Phil. 3:20, 21), they appreciate that they have no right or authorization to meddle in political matters. They must remain strictly neutral toward national or local politics and all selfish conflicts of this world.

²⁴ So they are the most law-abiding of people, paying taxes and acting in the best interests of the community. Yet these ambassadors who substitute for Christ are hated by the world, just as Christ himself was. (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7) It is not strange, therefore, that just about six years after Paul wrote what is said in 2 Corinthians 5:19-21, he found himself a prisoner in Rome, Italy, and accordingly wrote to the congregation in Ephesus, Asia Minor, to pray for him: "That ability to speak may be given me with the opening of my mouth, with freeness of speech to make known the sacred secret of the good news, for which I am acting as an ambassador in chains."—Eph. 6:19, 20.

²⁵ Just the same as nineteen hundred

24. Despite being most law-abiding, what do these "ambassadors" experience from the world, as shown by Paul's words in Ephesians 6:19, 20?

25. One's carrying out one's Christian ambassadorship calls for what, and with what knowledge about possessions in mind?

years ago, one's serving as an 'ambassador substituting for Christ' in among people today alienated from God calls for one to endure such suffering. As a pattern for us, Paul endured faithfully. He held onto his ambassadorship or his Christian ministry. He said: "In every way we recommend ourselves as God's ministers, by the endurance of much, by tribulations, by cases of need, by difficulties, by beatings, by prisons," and so forth. (2 Cor. 6:4, 5) As a fellow sufferer, Paul could tell his Christianized Hebrew brothers to keep on enduring, just as they had endured much when they first got the light of Bible truth. Although they might lose all earthly material possessions, yet they, and he too, had "a better and an abiding possession."—Heb. 10:32-34.

²⁶ As ambassadors or as emissaries from God who substitute for Christ, we Christian witnesses of Jehovah today have need to develop the power of endurance, do we not? Yes, for we need to continue enduring. Since the end of the Gentile Times in 1914 we have gone through a lot of persecution and mistreatment in a hostile world. Still more of such experiences lie yet ahead of us before we realize the fulfillment of God's promise of "new heavens and a new earth," in which righteousness is to dwell forever. (2 Pet. 3:13) The fulfillment of this promise is getting nearer and nearer. This generation among which all such unrighteous persecution of God's ambassadors and emissaries has been committed since World War I of 1914-1918 C.E. is a marked generation. How so? In that it will experience God's fulfilling of his promise to bring in the righteous new system of things. (Matt. 24:34; Mark 13:30) So let us hold on confidently in faithful endurance!

26. Why is there yet need for Christian ambassadors and emissaries to hold on in faithful endurance?

The Promise Fulfilled

TO DOERS OF GOD'S WILL

THIS world tries to make it hard for a person to do God's will. Yet, for as long as this world lasts—and that will not be much longer—we are determined to persist in doing His will. Our doing so will call for us to endure further world opposition and persecution. But God gives us his glorious promise to strengthen us to keep on enduring until his promise is fulfilled. So it remains for us to have faith in His promise, just as Abraham of ancient time did. God Almighty can supply us the needed faith and power of endurance. We have His word for it in Romans 15:4, 5:

² "All the things that were written aforetime were written for our instruction, that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who supplies endurance and comfort grant you to have among yourselves the same mental attitude that Christ Jesus had [not pleasing himself, but pleasing God]."

³ The mental attitude of Christ Jesus leaned ever toward doing the will of God his heavenly Father. His mental attitude inclined him to endure whatever befell him for doing God's will. Consequently he

never wavered. Never did he shrink back. The prospect of enduring a sacrificial death as foretold for him in the Scriptures "written aforetime" did not turn him aside from doing his Father's will. For enduring a martyr's death he was rewarded with a resurrection to heavenly life. Thus he endured until the fulfillment of God's promise to him, even though he knew that this required God to perform his mightiest act in his behalf. (Eph. 1:19-21) In harmony with Christ's own case, the apostle Paul prayed for God Almighty to supply endurance to us. (Rom. 15:5) This prayer will never fail as long as we persevere in doing God's will. As a reward for our enduring down to the finish we shall receive the gladdening fulfillment of God's promise to us.

⁴ May the mental attitude of Christ support us in bearing up under whatever God yet permits to come upon us from a hostile world, in which we are "aliens and temporary residents." Let us constantly keep in mind what is required of doers of God's will now during what is left of this "time of the end." (Dan. 12:4) "You have need of endurance, in order that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the fulfillment of the promise. For yet 'a very little while,' and 'he who is coming will arrive and will not delay.'" (Heb. 10:36,

1, 2. (a) Though the world makes it hard for doers of God's will, what are we determined to do? (b) Where do we have God's word for it that the needed power of endurance will be supplied to us?

3. (a) How did Christ's mental attitude function, leading to what reward? (b) In consideration of what on our part shall we be rewarded with the fulfillment of God's promise?

4. What is now required of doers of God's will who have the mental attitude of Christ, and for how much longer?

37) Can we endure "yet 'a very little while'" longer? If we do so, then God, "he who is coming," will arrive on time and fulfill his promise to us.

"HE WHO IS COMING WILL ARRIVE"

⁵In Hebrews 10:37 the apostle Paul makes quotations from the inspired pre-Christian Scriptures. But he does so, not from the original Hebrew reading, but from the Greek translation thereof known as the Greek *Septuagint Version* (LXX), made during the three centuries immediately before our Common Era. According to the Hebrew, Habakkuk 2:2, 3 reads: "And Jehovah proceeded to answer me and to say: 'Write down the vision, and set it out plainly upon tablets, in order that the one reading aloud from it may do so fluently. For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it keeps panting on to the end, and it will not tell a lie. Even if it should delay, keep in expectation of it; for it will without fail come true. It will not be late.'"

⁶However, according to *The Septuagint Bible* by Charles Thomson and the *Septuagint Version* as published by S. Bagster and Sons, Ltd., Habakkuk 2:2, 3 reads: "And the Lord answered [me] and said: Write a vision; write it distinctly in a book that the reader may trace these things [may run]; for the vision is for a time yet to come. But it will spring up at last and will not be vain. Though he may tarry, wait for him; for he will assuredly come and will not fail [and will not tarry]."

⁷Thus the *Septuagint Version* turns our attention from the vision to a coming person. Also, when it says, "wait for him,"

5. According to the Hebrew reading of Habakkuk 2:2, 3, the observer of the vision was to keep in expectation of what?

6. According to the Greek *Septuagint Version*, from which Paul quoted, there is to be a waiting for a thing or for a person—which?

7. How may Paul have been influenced by the Greek *Septuagint* to speak about "endurance" in order to receive the fulfillment of the promise?

the Greek text uses the verb that means "to endure," so that the idea would be one of enduring waitingly until the coming one arrived. Likely this use of the Greek verb meaning "to endure" influenced the apostle Paul to use the related Greek noun in the preceding verse (Hebrews 10:36), saying: "For you have need of *endurance*, in order that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the fulfillment of the promise."

"A VERY LITTLE WHILE"

⁸The coming one, who is to arrive on time, is Jehovah God, then bent on executing judgment, vengeance, against the oppressors of His people. His coming will also be in fulfillment of the recorded "vision." When, or how soon, is He to come as Executioner? The apostle Paul writes: "Yet 'a very little while.'" Here he quotes from Haggai 2:6, which reads: "This is what Jehovah of armies has said, 'Yet once—it is a little while—and I am rocking the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry ground.'" Thus Jehovah applies to himself the time limit, "a little while." And since the apostle Paul, under inspiration, connects up this same time period with Jehovah's coming without any delay, we can be certain that Jehovah's coming to execute judgment upon our opposers and persecutors will now occur before not very long.

⁹What is "a very little while" for the Eternal God could be a very long time for us. Nevertheless, let us ever remember where we are on the stream of the "time of the end." (Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8; Dan. 12:4) Our greatest adversary, Satan the Devil, realizes that we are close to the end of the system of things long under his con-

8. According to Paul's quotation from Haggai 2:6, when, or how soon, will the coming one arrive as Executioner for our relief?

9, 10. (a) Why may we be sure that what God specifies as "a very little while" will now not be a very long time for us? (b) What do Satan and his demon army know about their time of freedom of action here at the earth?

trol, inasmuch as he is "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31) He knows that now it is practically six thousand years since he set out on his rebellious course and induced our first human parents to join him in rebellion against the universal sovereignty of the Most High God. His further time for freedom of action in misleading the entire inhabited earth is very near its end. After God's Messianic kingdom was born in the heavens at the close of the Gentile Times in 1914, Satan the Devil and his army of demon angels were cast down in defeat from heaven to the vicinity of this earth. Then they heard the victorious cry ring out:

¹⁰ "Now have come to pass the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ, because the accuser of our brothers has been hurled down, who accuses them day and night before our God! And they conquered him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their witnessing, and they did not love their souls even in the face of death. On this account be glad, you heavens and you who reside in them! Woe for the earth and for the sea, because the Devil has come down to you, having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time."—Rev. 12:10-12.

¹¹ So the Devil and his demon army know that they have a short period of time since their ouster from the holy heavens. During this short period of time they have been able to do a lot of damage here at the earth. The "woe for the earth and for the sea" does not apply to the Christian brothers whom the Devil and his demons have accused before our God. That "woe" applies to the worldlings here on land and sea. These are lying in the power of the wicked one. (1 John 5:19) That "woe" includes all the difficulties and hardships of a political, social, economic and

11. To whom does the "woe" mentioned in Revelation 12:12 apply, and how?

religious kind that Satan and his demons are causing in their "great anger." Victimized humans are thereby threatened with utter destruction at the hands of the coming Executioner in the "great tribulation" now so near for the world. (Rev. 7:14) Satan and his demons are bent on doing the greatest damage possible in the tiny portion of their "short period of time" that yet remains.—Rev. 12:12.

WAR ON THE REMNANT OF THE WOMAN'S SEED

¹² By bringing "woe" on worldlings who selfishly do business on land and sea, Satan the Devil like a dragon swallows down mankind in general to make them a part of his visible earthly organization. He keeps them so preoccupied with their selfish, materialistic pursuits due to the "woe" upon them, that they have no time, attention or enthusiasm for the newborn Messianic kingdom of God. Very few of them take seriously or act upon "this good news of the kingdom" that is being preached world wide by Jehovah's Christian witnesses. However, Satan the Devil is not satisfied with this. In his malicious desire to defeat the purpose of Jehovah God, he desperately tries to force the Kingdom preachers into his camp, where people still favor world domination by man-made political governments. During the "short period of time" allowed to him, how has the "dragon" proceeded to do this?

¹³ He does this by making war upon Christ's disciples who are in line for a place with him in his heavenly kingdom of a thousand years. This warfare is, not imaginary, but as real as what Jehovah said to the symbolical serpent in the Garden of Eden after the rebellion of Adam and Eve. There Jehovah said: "I shall put

12. How does Satan act like a dragon toward mankind in general, and what does he try to do about the Kingdom preachers?

13. So how has Satan proceeded, and how does this line up with what God said in Genesis 3:15?

enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise you in the head and you will bruise him in the heel." (Gen. 3:14, 15) That "enmity" has persisted to this day. That "original serpent," the symbolic "dragon," Satan the Devil, knows that God's Messianic kingdom was born in the heavens in 1914, despite his efforts to prevent this. (Rev. 12:1-5, 9) The Kingdom's birth is an accomplished fact that he cannot undo.

¹⁴ However, all during these past nineteen centuries, Satan has known that Jehovah has been calling and choosing joint heirs of Jesus Christ to reign with him for a millennium. There is now left on earth just a small remnant of such prospective joint heirs of Jesus Christ. These Satan makes his target of attack.

¹⁵ The remnant are "glad" with God's "woman," Jehovah's heavenly organization, over the birth of her Kingdom "seed." That remnant of Christ's prospective joint heirs are the remaining ones of the "seed" of God's heavenly "woman." (Rev. 12:12, 17) Jehovah has not made it a woeful time for the Kingdom remnant yet on earth because of his having the "dragon" and his demon angels hurled down from heaven to earth. Rather, he has made this "time of the end" an increasingly blessed time for the Kingdom remnant. This spiritual blessedness counteracts the "woe" that afflicts those under the Devil's rulership. But Satan the Devil tries to wreck the blessedness of the remnant of the Kingdom "seed." He is still bent on trying to defeat God's purpose to have 144,000 joint heirs of Christ. Desperately he still tries to prevent the remnant from proving worthy of a share in the Kingdom. How?

¹⁶ Revelation 12:17 tells how. It tells

14. Whom does Satan now make his target of attack?
15. (a) How, for the Kingdom remnant, does God counteract the "woe" that afflicts mankind? (b) To defeat God's Kingdom purpose, what does Satan still strive to do?

16. According to Revelation 12:17, how does Satan try to keep the remnant from proving worthy of the Kingdom, and since when?

what the "dragon," Satan the Devil, and his demon angels do after being dislodged from heaven, namely: "And the dragon grew wrathful at the woman, and went off to wage war with the remaining ones of her seed, who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus." The symbolic "dragon" and his demon angels had battled unsuccessfully to maintain their position in the holy heavens after the birth of God's Messianic kingdom in 1914 C.E. So now during their detention here in the neighborhood of our earth they spitefully direct their warfare against those on earth who are called to the Messianic kingdom against which they battled up in heaven. —Rev. 12:7-13.

¹⁷ This is really a "hot war." It has already cost the lives of many hundreds of Jehovah's Christian witnesses in violent deaths, both among the "remaining ones" of Christ's prospective joint heirs and among the "great crowd" of those who are preparing now to be earthly subjects of Christ's thousand-year kingdom. (Rev. 7:9-17; 20:4-6) Unitedly the Kingdom remnant and the "great crowd" engage in doing the "will of God" by observing His commandments and carrying out the work of "bearing witness to Jesus." They bear witness to Jesus as being now enthroned in heaven and making ready to put an end to the "dragon's" warfare against his faithful disciples by destroying all the dragon's earthly agents and thereafter binding and imprisoning him and his demon angels for the thousand years of His peace-bringing reign.

¹⁸ To those who are doers of God's will on earth to the end, his promise will be fulfilled. The "dragon's" all-out efforts to

17. How is this "war" really a "hot" one against the doers of God's will, and how will Jesus put an end to it?

18. What fulfillment of God's promise will the faithful remnant get, and with what effect on the Kingdom membership?

keep the remnant from gaining entrance into the heavenly kingdom are doomed to failure. Revelation 20:4-6 assures us that these doers of God's will who are yet needed to complete the full membership of 144,000 Kingdom joint heirs will endure in faithfulness to the death, that they may know the happiness of having a part in "the first resurrection." God's Messianic kingdom will not be lacking even one of its foreordained number of Christ's joint heirs.

¹⁹ As for the "great crowd" of the prospective earthly subjects of Christ's king-

19. What fulfillment of God's promise will the "great crowd" get, and because of what on their part?

Gain The Promised Eternal Life

-EXERCISE FAITH!

THE "short period of time" during which Satan the Devil and his demon army are restrained here at the earth is now nearing its close. (Rev. 12: 7-12) He may therefore be expected to intensify his warfare against the "remaining ones" of the "seed" of God's heavenly "woman" and against the "great crowd" of fellow proclaimers of God's Messianic kingdom. So it becomes all the more urgent for these doers of God's will to exercise faith in order to endure faithfully under the fire of the enemy.

1. In view of the Devil's "short period of time," why is it now more urgent for doers of God's will to exercise faith?

dom, these give loyal cooperation and support to the Kingdom remnant in their endeavors to do the "will of God" to the finish. They courageously join the remnant in doing the divine will, down till the universal sovereignty of Jehovah God is vindicated. To this faithful, obedient "great crowd" God's promise of a Paradise earthly home will without fail be fulfilled. Unspeakable joy will be theirs when they hear the reigning Son of God extend to them his loving invitation: "Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit [the earthly realm of] the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world."—Matt. 25:34.

² All we who are now the target of Satan's warfare are given much encouragement to remain faithful to the Sovereign Lord Jehovah until the enemy's guns are silenced. This bringing of the warfare to a close should reasonably be near, especially since it is now more than fifty-six years since the symbolic Dragon and his demon army were hurled down from heaven to the neighborhood of our earth, to be left here on the loose for only "a short period of time." In spite of the shortness of the time, we still must follow the

2, 3. Despite the shortness of the time left for Satan, what counsel of Paul to Hebrew Christians do we targets of Satan's fire need to follow?

counsel of the apostle Paul, written in Hebrews 10:36, 37:

“You have need of endurance, in order that, after you have done the will of God, you may receive the fulfillment of the promise. For yet ‘a very little while,’ and ‘he who is coming will arrive and will not delay.’”

According to those quotations made by the apostle Paul from Habakkuk 2:3 and Haggai 2:6, Jehovah is “he who is coming” and who “will arrive and will not delay.” As an invincible Warrior he will gain the victory over all those who wage war against his long-harassed worshipers. By his glorious victory in the “war of the great day of God the Almighty” at Har-Magedon, he will vindicate his promise to bring lasting relief to his afflicted worshipers.

The Dragon, Satan the Devil, and his demon army have been restrained from materializing visibly in the flesh in order to wage war on Jehovah’s Christian witnesses of today. Hence, they are obliged to use earthly agents under their unseen control, worldly persons, organizations and political governments. The political elements that are involved in the warfare make up the worldwide political system that Revelation 13:1-10 pictures as a ferocious “wild beast.” This includes the modern Anglo-American Dual World Power, the Seventh World Power spoken of in Bible prophecy. In fulfillment of Bible prophecy this Seventh World Power promoted the creation of an idolatrous “image” of the political “wild beast.” (Rev. 13:11-15) For more than fifty-six years now that “image” has attracted the attention of the world. The “image” is the international organization for world peace and security, first in the form of the

4. How will God vindicate his promise to bring timely relief to his worshipers?

5. Why are Satan and his demon army now obliged to use visible earthly agencies, and what are the symbolic “wild beast,” the Seventh World Power, and the “image” of the wild beast?

League of Nations and now as the United Nations.

Patriotic believers in national sovereignty and man-made forms of political rulership over all the earth really worship the political “wild beast.” They also trust in the “image” of that “wild beast” rather than Jehovah’s sovereign rulership by Christ. Nationalistically they lend hand and head to the support of those man-made arrangements for world domination. This results in their getting the “mark” that plainly shows that they are serving, not the interests of God’s kingdom, but those of self-governing mankind. They are not ashamed to be connected with the meaningful number, six hundred, sixty and six, the identifying number of the political “wild beast.” In the Bible six is the number used to signify human imperfection, human shortcoming. Hence, 600 plus 60 plus 6 denotes human imperfection and deficiency in an intensified way, particularly in human rulership of the earth. Today we can see more clearly than ever before the frustrating failure of man’s political rulership because of its imperfection, inadequacy and corruptness. It is found wanting before God.—Rev. 13:16-18.

Patrioteers who worship the “wild beast” and its “image” proudly wear the “number of its name [666].” They put pressure upon everybody else to force them to join in worshipping the “wild beast” and thereby getting marked as belonging to the man-made political state, not to God. They resort to persecution of various kinds against Jehovah’s Christian witnesses. Why? Because these refuse to take part in idolatrous worship of man-made creations. This poses a severe test

6. What symbolic “mark” do patriotic worshipers of the “wild beast” get, and what does this numerical “mark” signify?

7. What do political patrioteers try to force everybody else to join them in doing, and for whom does this pose a test of faithfulness?

of faithfulness for all who uphold Jehovah's universal sovereignty and Godship. That is why the angel seen in the apostle John's vision said: "Here is where it means endurance for the holy ones, those who observe the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."—Rev. 14:12.

* We who observe God's commandments obey Him as Ruler rather than men, even at the cost of suffering at the hands of persecutors. We hold onto our faith in Jesus as the Messiah or Christ and advertise him as the anointed King whom Jehovah has enthroned and crowned at the expiration of the Gentile Times in 1914. For this vital reason we abstain from taking an active part in the politics and vio-

8. So what do we observers of God's commandments and of the faith of Jesus do, and what would getting the "mark" of the "wild beast" result in for us?

lent controversies of the "wild beast" and of the Anglo-American Dual World Power, the promoter of the "image" of the "wild beast" from the postwar year of 1919 onward. We are not ignorant of what it would mean for us to get the "mark, the name of the wild beast or the number of its name." It would mean for us to "drink of the wine of the anger of God that is poured out undiluted into the cup of his wrath" and to "be tormented with fire and sulphur in the sight of the holy angels and in the sight of the Lamb [Jesus Christ]." This would lead to our everlasting destruction, "the second death." We would be plunged into the symbolic "fiery lake that burns with sulphur." (Rev. 14:9-11; 13:16, 17; 19:20; 21:8) Do we want that to occur to us? No!



Only those who exercise a sustained faith will survive the end of this system and gain eternal life in fulfillment of God's promise

⁹ The present situation where extreme nationalism and the worship of the political state have spread world wide indeed calls for *endurance* on the part of those who "observe the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." But our steadfast obedience to God's commandments and the faith of Jesus is what now constitutes the will of God. It is only *after* we have done the will of God in this respect that we shall receive the fulfillment of his promise to us. Inasmuch as it is now but "a very little while" before "he who is coming" will arrive and will not delay, it would be foolish in itself for us to stop enduring so as to get selfish relief for ourselves before Jehovah arrives with vengeance against those who make it so hard for us to do His will faithfully to the end. But the thing promised by God serves as an incentive to us to continue doing God's will out of love for him. The thing promised is held out to us, but we need to exercise strong faith in the Promiser, believing that he is absolutely faithful to his promise as well as being able to fulfill it to us.

GAINING ETERNAL LIFE BY FAITH

¹⁰ Do we have such faith? We need it to make us strong to endure until the fulfillment of God's promise. Such faith on our part honors God, for it demonstrates that we trust in him with respect to trueness to his promise. So our faith in God is something pleasing to him. He is happy to reward such an enduring faith. (Heb. 11:6) In reminding us of how essential faith is to our maintaining Christian integrity and proving worthy of eternal life in the promised new order of righteousness, the apostle Paul quotes a

9. (a) The present situation calls for what quality on our part? (b) What serves as an incentive for us to keep on faithfully, with what confidence in God?

10. (a) Why is God pleased to reward our demonstration of faith in him? (b) In contrast with the soul swollen up with self-confidence, by reason of what quality will God's righteous one live?

further statement by God in the prophecy of Habakkuk. In that prophecy God first speaks of the one who is swelled up with pride, self-importance and self-confidence, having no faith in Jehovah. So this one is not an upright soul, not upright toward the one true and living God. After taking note of such a soul, Jehovah makes the statement that is quoted by Paul: "But my righteous one will live by reason of faith." (Heb. 10:38; Hab. 2:4) Such faith induces the "righteous one" to be faithful, upright.

¹¹ Of course, in 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul says: "We are walking by faith, not by sight." And this means that we are living with faith toward God. However, in order to endure and gain *eternal* life in fulfillment of God's promise, we have to exercise faith down to the finish of our life in this wicked system of things, of which Satan the Devil is ruler. (1 John 2:25; John 12:31) We need to display the same degree of faith that was displayed by faithful "men of old times." They proved their faith down to the very death, even though then they did not receive the fulfillment of the particular promise made to them. Their exemplary exploits of faith the apostle Paul briefly describes in the following chapter of his letter, Hebrews chapter eleven. From his account of so many men and women of faith who had a commendable witness borne to them by God, Paul leads us to the greatest example of faith, saying:

¹² "So, then, because we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also put off every weight and the sin that easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, as we look intently at the Chief Agent and Perfecter of our faith, Jesus. For the joy

11, 12. (a) In order to gain the promised eternal life, to what extent do we have to exercise faith? (b) From a brief description of exploits of faith by persons of old time, to what example of the greatest kind does Paul lead us?

that was set before him he endured a torture stake, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—Heb. 12:1-3.

¹³ Now especially it behooves us to look intently at our Perfect Exemplar, Jesus Christ, for by this time he not only sits at the right hand of the throne of God but also reigns as the installed Messianic King. Even during this “very little while” that is rapidly terminating before Jehovah arrives as Avenger, it is possible for us to lose faith, committing the sin that so easily entangles us. Nineteen centuries ago Paul took occasion to warn the Christianized Hebrews of such a danger, by adding the further quotation from Habakkuk’s prophecy, saying: “And, ‘if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’” —Heb. 10:38.

¹⁴ In Habakkuk’s prophecy, according to the early Greek translation, the *Septuagint*, Jehovah says: “If anyone draw back, My soul hath no pleasure in him. But the just shall live by faith in Me.” (Hab. 2:4, Thomson’s translation) The one losing faith and drawing back gains Jehovah’s displeasure. This one is contrasted with the Christian who holds fast his faith in Jehovah and gains eternal life. In making his quotation Paul reverses the order of the two parts of Habakkuk 2:4. Paul puts the last part first.

¹⁵ Paul does this in order to caution us who have the Christian faith for the time being, for even now there is the danger that some of us may shrink back and fall away. “Consequently let him that thinks he is standing beware that he does not

fall.” (1 Cor. 10:12) As the world under Satan gets more dictatorial, the pressure upon us increases. As we see the tremendous final test of our faithfulness looming up before us at the approach of the “great tribulation,” we might decide not to face it. We might lose faith and confidence in God. So we shrink back. We cease to endure trial.

¹⁶ Quite appropriately the Latin *Vulgate* version of Habakkuk 2:4 reads: “Behold, he that is unbelieving, his soul shall not be right in himself: but the just shall live in his faith.” (*Douay English Version*) The Roman Catholic *The New American Bible* indicates that the Christian is “rash” in giving up his faith because of the mounting difficulties that he sees just ahead, so that he breaks his integrity toward God. It reads: “The rash man has no integrity; but the just man, because of his faith, shall live.”

¹⁷ The Christian who marches right on in faith toward the “great tribulation” is not “rash” in doing so. The real rash one, the person swollen up with self-confidence, is the one who through disbelief toward God Almighty becomes a quitter. The quitter stops short of the reward, the fulfillment of God’s promise to the faithful. Jehovah God has no pleasure in quitters.

¹⁸ Faced now with the most turbulent time in all the history of Jehovah’s devoted people, what shall we do? What should be our determination? Far be it from us to take the cowardly course and shrink back! By God’s undeserved kindness, our rightful course is set for us by the apostle Paul as he speaks for the faithful class and says: “Now we are not the

13. During this “very little while” that is terminating, why do we especially need to look intently at the perfect Exemplar of faith, having in mind what warning of Paul in Hebrews 10:38?

14. What order does Habakkuk 2:4 follow in making the contrast between two different persons, but how does Paul reverse the order in Hebrews 10:38?

15. Thus Paul gives us what cautioning, so appropriate in view of what test looming up before us?

16. How does a person who is unbelieving toward God act rashly?

17. What can be said about one’s being “rash” in marching right on in faith toward the “great tribulation”?

18. In Hebrews 10:39, what course is set by the apostle Paul for the faithful class?

sort that shrink back to destruction, but the sort that have faith to the preserving alive of the soul."—Heb. 10:39.

¹⁹ Now is the time for us to make up our minds. Are we going to rest unwavering faith in God and to agree with the apostle Paul and declare with decisiveness: "We are not the sort that shrink back to destruction"? Declaring ourselves to be not of that sort of unbelieving Christians, we shall not forsake the "gathering of ourselves together," as the shrinking unbelievers have the custom, but we shall, even in underground places, if necessary, gather together in order to encourage one another, "and all the more so as you behold the day drawing near." We should not throw away our freeness of speech, "which has a great reward to be paid it," but we will boldly keep on proclaiming Jehovah's theocratic government by Christ as the one and only hope for all mankind.—Heb. 10:25-35; Matt. 24:14; Mark 13:10.

²⁰ In contrast with destruction, eternal life is what we want, is it not? So, speaking now, not negatively, but positively, we wholeheartedly say: "We are . . . the sort that have faith to the preserving alive of the soul. Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld. For by means of this the men of old times [including Abraham] had witness borne to them."—Heb. 10:39 through 12:2.

²¹ Our faith in the promise of God, for whom lying is an impossibility, empowers us to endure. Faith and endurance go to-

19. If declaring ourselves in favor of not shrinking back, we shall do what about meetings and "freeness of speech"?

20. If we want eternal life, in favor of what positive course do we declare ourselves?

21. Faith in God's promise empowers us to do what, and with what kind of expectation?

gether, as it is written in Revelation 13:10: "Here is where it means the endurance and faith of the holy ones." Till now we may have endured a long time for the promise of God to be fulfilled, but our expectation of it is a fortified, assured one, an expectation to the point where we are absolutely convinced that God will not disappoint us.

²² We may not yet see the things promised by God and for which we hope, but we know that they are realities forasmuch as we have the "evident demonstration" of their existence according to Almighty God's power. In order to enter into the fulfillment of God's promise we must possess life; we need to have our souls preserved alive. We can gain that prize of life solely by a sustained faith. We eagerly desire to enjoy God's fulfilled promise eternally. Away, then, with any thought or inclination to shrink back in fear and in unbelief! Faith is what we will exercise along with works in proof! In reward for that, Jehovah God the Life-Giver will preserve our souls alive forever.—1 John 2:25.

²³ Without fail, therefore, the "God who supplies endurance" will fulfill his promise to the faithfully enduring doers of his will. (Rom. 15:5) Joyfully he will usher us into the eternal blessings and privileges of his long-promised kingdom by his Son Jesus Christ. Thus, not in vain shall we have preached this kingdom "in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations" before "the end" came.—Matt. 24:14.

22. What do we believe about the unseen things of God's promise, and with what will he reward us to enjoy fulfillment of the promise?

23. In fulfillment of his promise, what will God do to the faithfully enduring doers of his will?



HAPPY YOUTHS

in a Mixed-up World

"VERY touching."

Those words were used to describe a particular occasion at the recent "Sacred Service" District Assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses. It was eye-catching, indeed, to observe so many teen-agers sitting together as a group in a reserved section during one of the assembly sessions. But why the unusual seating arrangement?

The talk "What Does Youth Want out of Life?" was specially directed to young persons. For it, teen-agers were asked to sit together in reserved seats. During this discourse the speaker released the new 192-page book *Your Youth—Getting the Best out of It*. To the delight of all assembled, a free copy was given to each teen-ager in the reserved-seat section.

WHY PUBLISHED

"A person's youth can be one of the happiest periods of life. Unfortunately, for many it is not. Changing standards have created a mixed-up world, and today's problems often rob young people of happiness. This book is published to help them to see the solutions to these problems and

so get the best out of life now and in the future." Thus commented the book's publishers.*

Can this objective be attained? How has this book been received? Please note what people have been saying in letters to the publishers.

READABLE AND STRAIGHTFORWARD

Concerning this publication, some youngsters have commented: "It certainly has cleared up many things which were foggy in my mind." "I truly enjoyed reading it because you handled a variety of 'touchy' subjects in such a straightforward and honest way. And, of course, one's attention was always directed to Jehovah's Word, the Bible." "It is very frank, not 'beating around the bush,' and seems to 'hit the nail on the head.'" "I feel the book was written with much love and was frank. Yet you didn't feel embarrassed when reading it."

Some of this book's chapters are entitled "Growing into Manhood," "Moving into Womanhood," "Dating and Courtship" and "Can You Succeed in Marriage?" Such subjects are handled in a straightforward, but dignified and Scriptural way.

'WE KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND AND CARE'

Doubtless, many youths feel that older persons do not really care about them or understand their problems. "I never really believed that grown-ups knew what all we teen-agers were going through," re-

* Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

marked one girl. "But you do and you let us know that straightforwardly by really telling it like it is—which is, of course, the best way." Pleased with the new book, another youngster stated: "I know that you care for the youths as well as for the older ones."

SPECIFIC AID IN SOLVING PROBLEMS

Centuries ago, the Biblical psalmist said: "How will a young man cleanse his path? By keeping on guard according to your word. . . . Blessed you are, O Jehovah. Teach me your regulations. . . . For your statutes I shall show a fondness. I shall not forget your word." (Ps. 119:9-16) In this mixed-up world, youthful curiosity often leads to experimenting with unwholesome things. Yet, for true happiness, young persons need to 'keep on guard according to God's word.'

One young reader of the *Youth* book admitted: "I was indulging in a small part of the 'experimenting' that worldly youths engage in and the book so vividly warns against. I am so happy for all other youths around the world who will have this wonderful information firsthand without having to experiment or learn it the hard way!"

A seventeen-year-old girl dedicated to God said: "It has not been easy to keep the right mental attitude toward such things as sex, music and dating. This is especially hard because at school abusing these things is taken so lightly that even if you stand up for what is right around other kids at school, you still are affected by their attitude." She also

remarked: "The world says, 'You're not cool if you don't get drunk.' So the Witness could think, 'I'm really not a drunkard if I get drunk only once or twice.' But I really appreciate that point on page 102 of the *Youth* book that says, 'just one bad experience with alcohol can bring lasting damage.'" —Prov. 23:29-35.

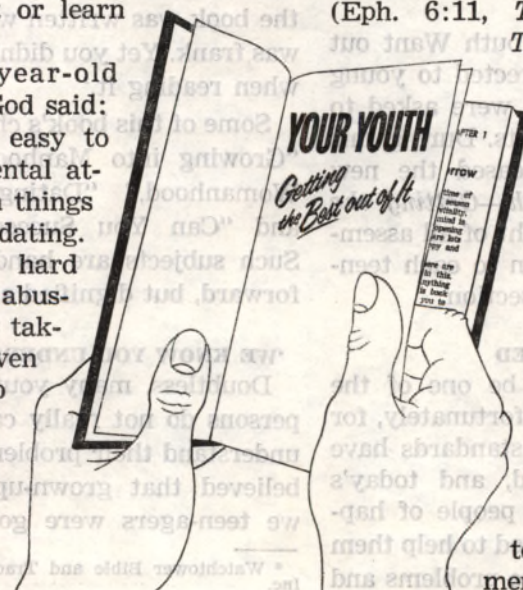
Some students fail to see the practicality of their studies. However, the *Youth* book shows young readers why they should apply themselves in school. On one aspect of this matter, a young Witness wrote: "This past semester my grades have not been very good, and the chapter 'Why Study in School?' helped me to realize that I should try my best in school because I am obligated to do my best as a Witness, giving a witness to my friends."

WARDING OFF SATAN'S ATTACK

The apostle Peter admonished fellow Christians: "Keep your senses, be watchful. Your adversary, the Devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone." (1 Pet. 5:8) Satan resorts to various "machinations," or "crafty acts." (Eph. 6:11, *The Kingdom Interlinear*

Translation of the Greek Scriptures) His attack may involve outright persecution or some subtle methods. But by strengthening one's relationship with God, this new book aids youths to cope with Satanic attack.

Interestingly, a twenty-year-old wrote: "Youth is very hard. Coming out of the world has a pull on you. Satan is trying his best." She said that the *Youth* book "really helps" to cope with such things as mental depression. "It seems



that . . . worldly influences are getting worse all the time," commented another girl, "but with this little book and God's Word, the Bible, it's so much easier to ward off Satan's tricks."

PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT

The *Youth* book urges young girls to concentrate on the inner adornment of a "quiet and mild spirit" produced by the "secret person of the heart." (1 Pet. 3:3, 4) "Although I'm only thirteen," wrote one girl, "I really can appreciate your counsel on always being concerned about the inner person of the heart."

Another youth particularly enjoyed the chapter "How Do You View Your Parents?" She had not been getting along well with her stepmother, but says: "After reading that chapter, I started changing my attitude toward her. I have a love for her I never had before."

ALSO APPRECIATED BY ADULTS

Appreciation for the book has also been expressed by adults. Wrote one Christian woman: "I have found it most interesting and wish that we'd had this book when I was about twelve. It surely would have helped to eliminate much sorrow and many heartaches." Another Christian woman remarked: "The *Youth* book is a real aid, just what I need to help in understanding the many problems the young ones are going through that I as a forty-year-old never knew anything about when I was a teen-ager. Thanks to Jehovah for this wonderful book." Similarly, a Christian man commented: "I thank Jehovah for his guidance and direction to you for such a timely publication, not only for our young people, but also for adults like myself to come to a better understanding of the obstacles that confront our young people."

One letter stated: "As parents of four

teen-agers, we needed the *Youth* book, and they are delighted with such a help for the problems and pressures they face."

SPURRED TO 'REMEMBER THE CREATOR'

The chairman at one of the "Sacred Service" assemblies remarked: "The attention given to youth and the provisions made for them truly manifested Jehovah's care in their behalf." How appropriate that Christian youths should reciprocate, showing appreciation for God's care! This they can do by heeding the inspired advice: "Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood, before the calamitous days proceed to come, or the years have arrived when you will say: 'I have no delight in them.'" (Eccl. 12:1) Fittingly, this new book encourages youths to remember their Creator during their young manhood or womanhood, before experiencing the effects of old age.

One way to 'remember the Creator' is to tell others about him. Accordingly, some youths have been especially eager to use the book in declaring God's truth to others. (Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20) They have been looking forward to using it in telling the good news from house to house, and have made such comments as these: 'I can't wait till I can use the book in the field service. A lot of teen-agers in the world are looking for answers to their problems.' 'I'm anxiously waiting to use it in the door-to-door witnessing activity.'

The book *Your Youth—Getting the Best out of It* is sure to promote happiness among many youths as they apply its Scriptural advice in this mixed-up world. For lasting happiness, of course, persons young and old need to manifest the attitude of the psalmist, who declared: "O God, you have taught me from my youth on, and until now I keep telling about your wonderful works."—Ps. 71:17.

THE POWER of GOD'S WORD in My Life

MY MIND goes back three years to a time when my life was filled with turmoil. I did not know Jehovah God then, and my life was a testimony to that.

I was in the second year of a very shaky marriage. My first marriage, which began when I was sixteen, ended eight years later, with my first husband being sent to prison. I met my second husband a few months later. After living together for six months without benefit of marriage, we decided to marry.

My husband and I both were employed full time. He was manager of a store, and I was the bookkeeper for an insurance agency. Both jobs required all our time and energy. Our two children (mine by my former marriage) were left with their grandparents the greater part of the time.

The leisure time we had was spent staying high on LSD or mescaline trips, and by smoking marijuana or inhaling THC. After a weekend of that it was hard to go to work on Monday morning. To compensate, we would take amphetamines to keep us functioning. This type of life led to immorality, and it looked as though this marriage, the second for both of us, was heading for divorce.

LEARNING BIBLE TRUTHS

It was then that a close friend of mine, who was having marital problems of her own, decided to take a trip to Colorado to see if she could clear her mind. While staying with old friends there, she discovered that they were studying the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. At first she was

skeptical, but then the information they were sharing with her from the Bible began to make sense.

Upon returning home she contacted the local Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses and asked if someone would come to her home for a Bible study. Someone did. Next she called me, and this proved to be the beginning of many long conversations about the Bible.

Eventually my friend invited me to her home to meet the couple with whom she was studying. After one hour with them, I was amazed. These were not ignorant people, as I had thought. They were well trained in the use of the Bible. I couldn't wait for my husband to meet them. But he wasn't interested. He told me if that's what I wanted, it was OK, but to leave him out of it.

However, after eavesdropping on a few of the Bible discussions of my friend and myself, his curiosity got the better of him. He agreed to meet the couple. His reaction was similar to mine, and a Bible study began. After a few months we realized that what we were learning was the truth the Bible speaks of at John 8:32: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." It did set us free. Free from the use of drugs, immorality, and the unsatisfying pursuit of material gains.

A MATTER OF THEFT

As the time neared for us to symbolize our dedication to serve Jehovah God by undergoing water baptism, my conscience

began to trouble me. There was one sin I had committed that I knew must be resolved. It was theft.

My position as bookkeeper had given me full charge of the company's finances and monthly financial statements. The embezzlement began during my first marriage. My first husband was always involved in illegal activities, and it required a great deal of money to keep him out of trouble. Finally, he was put in prison.

When he went to prison, I was left with two children to support. My income wouldn't cover all our debts and support my family. So, I stole.

Now, here I was ready to dedicate my life to Jehovah, and although I had quit stealing, I was lying when I turned in the false financial statement each month. I knew I could not serve Jehovah until I could live my life in truth.—Prov. 14:5.

RESOLVING THE PROBLEM

My husband and I took the problem to Jehovah in prayer. Our next step was to tell the whole story to the Christian elder with whom we were studying. I was sure these beautiful people would find my acts unforgivable. How little I knew then about Jehovah's people! The love, concern and aid given me by them are qualities that you don't find in today's world.

An appointment was made for me to go to a lawyer with my problem. During the ride to the lawyer's office and while taking the elevator to his suite, I prayed to Jehovah for strength to do what I knew was His will. (Phil. 4:13) The lawyers were not surprised that I had been stealing the money. They were surprised, however, that I wanted to expose the thefts.

"No one knew," they said. "Why not pay it back slowly?"

I explained my desire to serve Jehovah God, and the need to begin that service with a clean conscience. They decided to make an appointment with my employer

and inform him of my theft. I had to wait a week before the day they met. That week is one I'll never forget! I spent the nights beside my children's bedside, knowing I would probably be sent to prison and wondering what would become of them.

My husband loves them. He feels like they are his own children, but my parents violently opposed our new-found faith, and I was afraid they would take the children from him. Our marriage had been made new now that we were applying Bible principles, and it was breaking my heart to think of being separated from my husband.

We were in constant prayer to Jehovah. I asked that, if he felt I could better serve him as a Witness in prison, he would give me the strength to carry out that will. My employer, although shocked by my dishonesty, admired the honesty acquired with my new faith. He agreed to help to arrange with the bonding company for me to repay the money. He even wanted me to continue working there, but the bonding company wouldn't allow it. We had to wait eight months for the decision.

I'm not writing this from prison, but from my own home. They agreed to let me repay this debt. So, not only have we had the joy of seeing our children learn of Jehovah, but at our recent circuit assembly we saw our sixteen-year-old foster daughter symbolize her dedication to serve Jehovah God. She graduated from school last summer and is now auxiliary pioneering. And as of July 1, 1976, I, too, began the full-time witnessing work.

My husband now enjoys sharing congregational responsibilities and was privileged to work at two district assemblies last summer during his vacation.

We thank Jehovah for his loving-kindness and forgiveness and for allowing us to serve Him. We have found Psalm 144:15 to be true: "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah!"—Contributed.



CHRISTMAS

—ITS ORIGIN

THE English name "Christmas," meaning "Christ's Mass," suggests that the holiday so designated is Christian. It is commonly viewed as commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ on December 25.

Biblical evidence, however, rules out a winter date. At the time Jesus was born, shepherds were still living outdoors and keeping watches at night over their flocks. (Luke 2:8) This circumstance does not fit the nights in the month of December, when there are frequent frosts in the Bethlehem area. With the start of the rainy season in the latter part of October, shepherds are already no longer living outdoors.

How, then, did December 25 come to be the day for celebrating the "birth of Christ"? What about the various customs associated with Christmas? Are they of Christian origin? Note what various reference works say about this.

Why the December 25 Date?

"The members of the early church were recruited from among the pagans, and by the establishment of a festival at this time the energy and attention of the proselytes could be focused thus in a Christian festival."—*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, Vol. 1, p. 229.

Is It Really a Christian Festival?

"The celebration was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church . . . In the 5th century the Western church ordered the feast to be celebrated on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun and at the close of the Saturnalia, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed. Among the German and Celtic tribes the winter solstice was considered an important point of the year and to commemorate the

return of the sun they held their chief festival of yule, which, like other pagan celebrations, became adapted to Christmas."—*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1959 edition, Vol. 6, p. 622.

"Most of the customs now associated with Christmas were

not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church. Saturnalia, a Roman feast celebrated in mid-December, provided the model for many of the merry-making customs of Christmas. From this celebration, for example, were derived the elaborate feasting, the giving of gifts, and the burning of candles."—*The Encyclopedia Americana*, 1959 edition, Vol. 6, p. 622.

"The custom of decorating homes and churches with evergreens began in ancient times. The Romans exchanged green tree branches for good luck on the *calends* (first day) of January." (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1973, Vol. 3, p. 415) Regarding the carol entitled "Holly and the Ivy," *Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend* says: "It is one of a number of carols in which the holly and ivy carry over a pre-Christian symbolism of male and female principles."

Is Christmas Acceptable for Christians?

"There were, within the Church, criticisms of the observance on the grounds of its resembling pagan rites, of its being sun-worship (the Armenians called the Roman Church members idolaters as well, because of the identification of Christmas with the date of the birth of the sun), and, as late as 1644, during the Puritan ascendancy, the English Parliament forbade observance of the festival."—*Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, Vol. 1, p. 229.

The Bible raises the questions: "What fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14) None whatsoever. And is not the Christmas celebration an endeavor to bring ancient paganism into partnership with Christ?

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