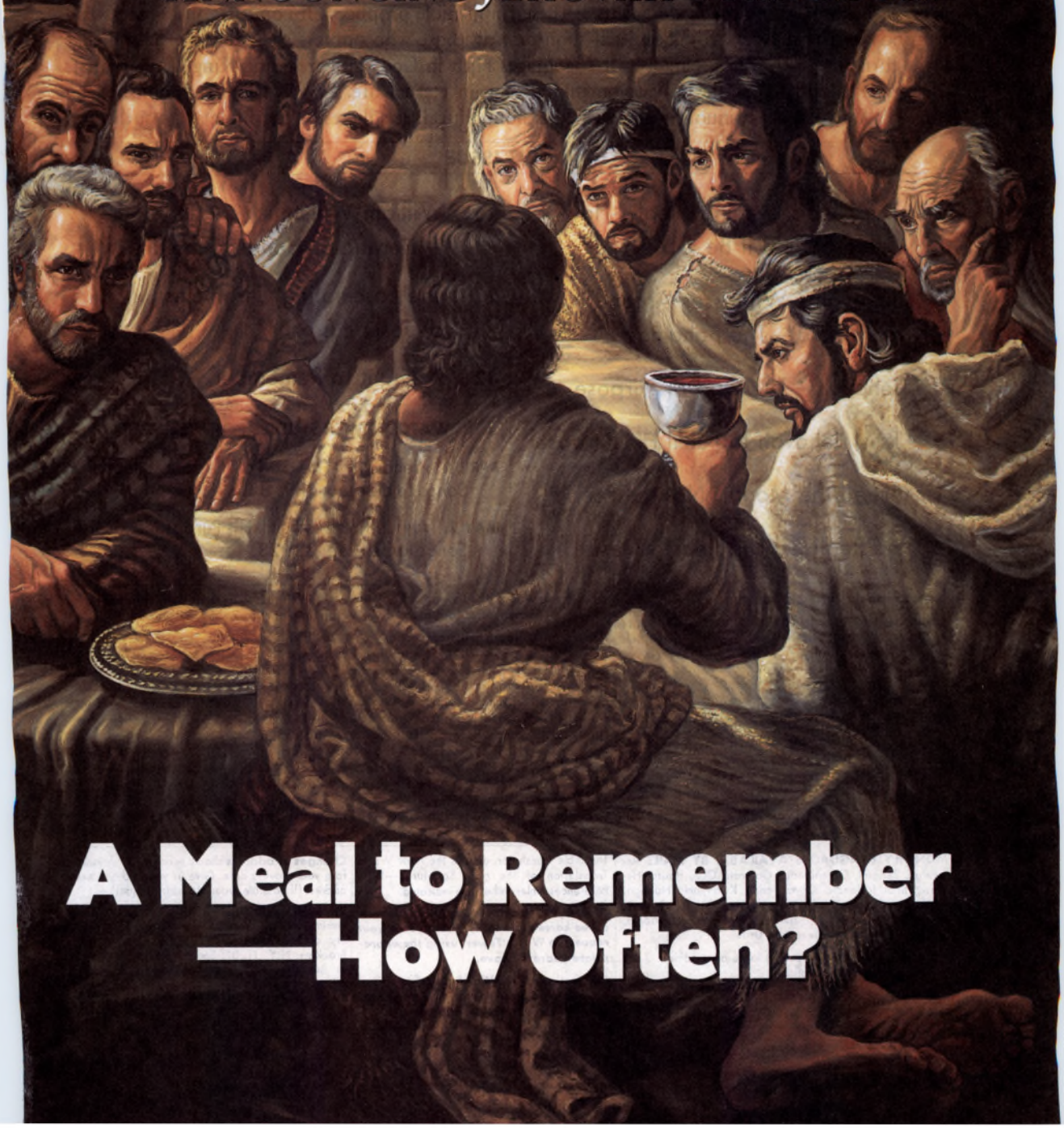
MARCH 15, 1994

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



A Meal to Remember —How Often?

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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

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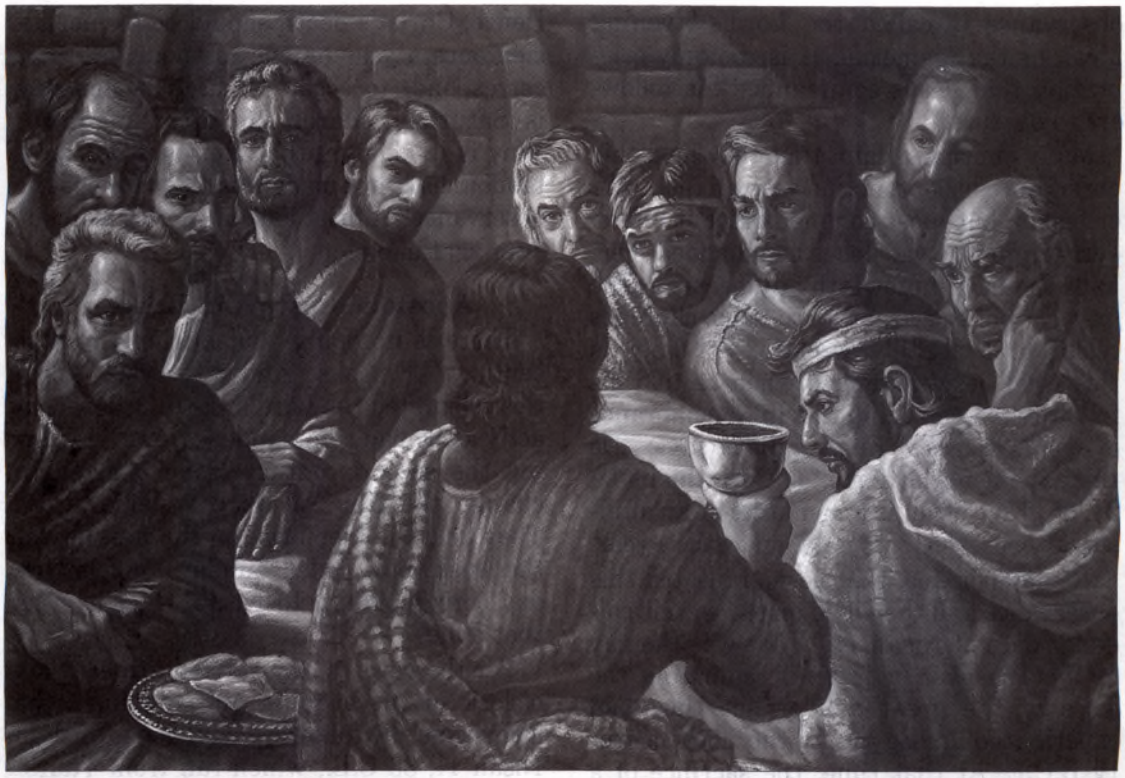


The Lord's Evening Meal

How Often Should It Be Observed?

CHRISTMAS, Easter, "saints' " days. Many holidays and feasts are celebrated by the churches of Christendom. But do you know how many celebrations Jesus Christ commanded his followers to observe? The answer is, Just one! None of the other feasts were authorized by the Founder of Christianity.

Clearly, if Jesus instituted only *one* celebration, it is very important. Christians should observe it exactly as Jesus commanded. What was this unique observance?

The One Celebration

This observance was introduced by Jesus the day he died. He had commemorated the Jewish feast of the Passover with his apostles. Then he passed some of the unleavened Passover bread to them, saying: "This means my body which is to be given in your behalf." Next, Jesus passed a cup of wine, saying: "This cup means the new covenant by virtue of my blood, which is to be poured out in your behalf." He also said: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26) This

observance is called the Lord's Evening Meal, or the Memorial. It is the only celebration that Jesus commanded his followers to observe.

Many churches claim that they hold this observance in conjunction with all their other feasts, but most commemorate it differently from the way Jesus commanded. Perhaps the most noteworthy difference is the *frequency* of the celebration. Some churches celebrate it monthly, weekly, even daily. Is this what Jesus intended when he told his followers: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me"? *The New English Bible* says: "Do this as a memorial of me." (1 Corinthians 11: 24, 25) How often is a memorial or an anniversary observed? Usually, just once a year.

Remember, too, that Jesus initiated this observance and then died on the Jewish calendar date of Nisan 14.* That was the day of the Passover, a festival reminding the Jews of the great deliverance they had experienced in Egypt in the 16th century B.C.E. At that time, the sacrifice of a lamb resulted in the salvation of the Jewish firstborn, whereas Jehovah's angel struck down all the firstborn of Egypt.—Exodus 12:21, 24-27.

How does this help our understanding? Well, the Christian apostle Paul wrote: "Christ our passover has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7) Jesus' death was a greater Passover sacrifice, giving mankind the opportunity for a far grander salvation. For Christians, therefore, the Memorial of Christ's death has replaced the Jewish Passover.—John 3:16.

The Passover was an annual celebration. Logically, then, so is the Memorial. The Passover—the day Jesus died—always fell on the 14th day of the Jewish month Nisan. Hence, Christ's death should be memorialized once a year on the calendar day that corresponds to Nisan 14. In 1994 that day is Saturday, March 26, after sundown. Why is it, though, that churches of Christendom have not made this a day for special observance? A brief look at history will answer that question.

* Nisan, the first month of the Jewish year, began with the first appearance of the new moon. Nisan 14 thus always came at full moon.

Apostolic Custom in Danger

There is no doubt that during the first century C.E., those guided by Jesus' apostles celebrated the Lord's Evening Meal exactly as he had commanded. However, during the second century, some started to change the time of its commemoration. They held the Memorial on the first day of the week (now called Sunday), not on the day corresponding to Nisan 14. Why was that done?

For the Jews, a day started at about six o'clock in the evening and ran until the same time the following day. Jesus died on Nisan 14, 33 C.E., which ran from Thursday evening to Friday evening. He was resurrected on the third day, early Sunday morning. Some wanted the commemoration of Jesus' death to be observed on a fixed day of the week each year, instead of on the day on which Nisan 14 happened to fall. They also viewed the day of Jesus' resurrection as more important than that of his death. Hence, they settled on Sunday.

Jesus commanded that his death be memorialized, not his resurrection. And since the Jewish Passover falls on a different day each year according to the Gregorian calendar that we now use, it is only natural that the same would be true of the Memorial. Many therefore stuck to the original arrangement and observed the Lord's Evening Meal on Nisan 14 each year. In time they came to be called Quartodecimans, meaning "Fourteenthers."

Some scholars recognized that these "Fourteenthers" were following the original apostolic pattern. One historian said: "As regards the day for observing the Pascha [the Lord's Evening Meal], the usage of the Quartodeciman churches of Asia was continuous with that of the Jerusalem church. In the 2nd century these churches at their Pascha on the 14th of Nisan commemorated the redemption effected by the death of Christ."—*Studia Patristica,* Volume V, 1962, page 8.

A Dispute Grows

While many in Asia Minor followed the apostolic practice, Sunday was set aside for observance in Rome. About the year 155 C.E., Polycarp of Smyrna, a representative of the Asian congregations, visited Rome to discuss this and other problems. Unhappily, no agreement was reached on this matter.

Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in a letter: "Neither could Anicetus [of Rome] persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord and the other apostles with whom he consorted; nor yet did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, for he said that he ought to hold to the custom of the elders before him." (*Eusebius,* Book 5, chapter 24) Note that Polycarp reportedly based his stand on the authority of the apostles, whereas Anicetus appealed to the custom of previous elders in Rome.

This dispute intensified toward the end of the second century C.E. About 190 C.E., a certain Victor was elected bishop of Rome. He believed that the Lord's Evening Meal should be observed on a Sunday, and he sought the support of as many other leaders as possible. Victor pressured the Asiatic congregations to change to the Sunday arrangement.

Replying on behalf of those in Asia Minor, Polycrates of Ephesus refused to bow to this pressure. He said: "We keep the day without tampering with it, neither adding, nor subtracting." He then listed many authorities, including the apostle John. "These all," he maintained, "observed the fourteenth day for the Pascha according to the Gospel, in no way deviating therefrom." Polycrates added: "I for my part, brethren, . . . am not *affrighted* by threats. For those better than I have said, *We must obey God rather than men."—Eusebius,* Book 5, chapter 24.

Victor was displeased with this reply. One historical work says that he "excommunicated all the Asiatic Churches, and sent his circular letters to all Churches that were of his opinion, that they should hold no communion with them." However, "this rash and bold act of his was ill resented by all wise and sober men of his own party, several of whom wrote sharply to him, advising him . . . to preserve charity, unity, and peace."—Bingham's *Antiquities of the Christian Church,* Book 20, chapter 5.

Apostasy Institutionalized

Despite such protests, the Christians in Asia Minor became increasingly isolated on the issue of when to celebrate the Lord's Evening Meal. Variations had crept in elsewhere. Some celebrated the whole period from Nisan 14 through the following Sunday. Others were holding the occasion more frequently—weekly on Sunday.

In 314 C.E. the Council of Arles (France) tried to force the Roman arrangement and suppress any alternative. The remaining Quartodecimans held out. In order to settle this and other matters that were dividing the professed Christians in his empire, in 325 C.E. the pagan emperor Constantine called an ecumenical synod, the Council of

Nicaea. It issued a decree that instructed all in Asia Minor to conform to the Roman usage.

It is interesting to note one of the principal arguments advanced for abandoning the observing of the Memorial of Christ's death according to the date on the Jewish calendar. *A History of the Christian Councils,* by K. J. Hefele, states: "It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom (the calculation) of the Jews, who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded." (Volume 1, page 322) To be in such a position was viewed as a "'humiliating subjection' to the Synagogue which irked the Church," says J. Juster, quoted in *Studia Patristica,* Volume IV, 1961, page 412.

Anti-Semitism! Those who celebrated the Memorial of Jesus' death on the same day that he died were viewed as Judaizers. It was forgotten that Jesus himself was a Jew and that he had given the day its meaning by then offering his life in behalf of mankind. From then on, the Quartodecimans were censured as heretics and schismatics and were persecuted. The Council of Antioch in 341 C.E. decreed that they were to be excommunicated. Nevertheless, there were still many of them in 400 C.E., and they persisted in small numbers long thereafter.

Since those days, Christendom has failed to return to Jesus' original arrangement. Professor William Bright admitted: "When a special day, Good Friday, came to be devoted to the commemoration of the Passion as such, it was too late to restrict to it the 'paschal' associations which St. Paul had connected with the sacrificial death: they had been freely applied to the Resurrection-festival itself, and a confusion of ideas established itself in the ritual language of Greek and Latin Christendom."—*The Age of the Fathers,* Volume 1, page 102.

What About Today?

'After all these years,' you may ask, 'does it really matter when the Memorial is ob-

"THAT PRECIOUS RANSOM"

The ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ is far more than a doctrine. Jesus said of himself: "The Son of man came, not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." (Mark 10:45) He also explained: "God loved the world [of mankind] so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) For the dead, the ransom opens the way for a resurrection and the prospect of life eternal.—John 5:28, 29.

It is the vitally important death of Jesus Christ that is memorialized at observances of the Lord's Evening Meal. His sacrifice accomplishes so much! One woman who was trained by godly parents and who has walked in God's truth for decades expressed her gratitude in these words:

"We look forward to the Memorial. It becomes more special each year. I remember standing in the funeral home 20 years ago, looking at my dear dad and coming to a true heartfelt appreciation for the ransom. It had been an academic subject before that. Oh, I knew all the scriptures and how to explain them! But only when I felt the cold reality of death did my heart fairly leap with joy over what will be accomplished for us by means of that precious ransom."

served?' Yes, it does. Changes were made by strong-minded men striving for power. People followed their own ideas instead of obeying Jesus Christ. Clearly fulfilled was the apostle Paul's warning: "I know that after my going away oppressive wolves will enter in among you [Christians] and will not treat the flock with tenderness, and from among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves."—Acts 20: 29, 30.

At issue is the matter of obedience. Jesus established just one celebration for Christians to observe. The Bible clearly explains when and how it should be observed. Who, then, has the right to change that? The early Quartodecimans suffered persecution and excommunication rather than compromise in this matter.

You may be interested to know that there are still Christians on earth who respect Jesus' wishes and commemorate the Memorial of his death on the date that he established. This year, Jehovah's Witnesses will meet together in their Kingdom Halls all around the earth after 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 26—when the 14th day of Nisan begins. They will then do exactly what Jesus said should be done at this most meaningful time. Why not observe the Lord's Evening Meal with them? By being present, you too can show your respect for the wishes of Jesus Christ.

Jehovah's Witnesses Around the World

THE Commonwealth of the Bahamas—an archipelago of 3,000 islands and islets—lies like a coral necklace across 550 miles of turquoise sea between Florida and Cuba. Among its 267,000 inhabitants is a growing chorus of Kingdom proclaimers. Their song of praise calls to mind Isaiah 42: 10-12: "Sing to Jehovah a new song, his praise from the extremity of the earth, you men that are going down to the sea and to that which fills it, you islands and you inhabiting them. . . . From the top of the mountains let people cry aloud. Let them attribute to Jehovah glory, and in the islands let them tell forth even his praise."

New Faith Challenged

In July 1992, a regular pioneer (a full-time Kingdom preacher) placed with a business acquaintance the Bible study aid *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth.* After the man read the book, he told himself, 'This religion is something I must look into.' On the following two Sundays, he attended meetings at two different Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses. Next, a Bible study was started with him. However, only six weeks into his Bible lessons, a challenge arose that would test his fledgling faith —birthday celebrations.

The businessman's family was very much involved in such celebrations, but his love for God's Word incited him to continue with his Bible lessons. As his knowledge of Scriptural truth increased, so did his understanding of birthday celebrations and worldly holidays and Jehovah's view of them.

When this man's wife organized a social gathering for Father's Day, he politely refused to attend. She felt, though, that he did not love her anymore and was putting his religion ahead of her and the family. He kindly explained that applying what he was learning from the Bible was helping to transform him into a better husband and father. Eventually, she grew in appreciation for his love of Scriptural truth and agreed to study the Bible. Now he conducts a Bible study with his family. And what joy he had at the "Divine Teaching" District Convention this past year! His wife and daughter were present and saw him get baptized.

Immigrants Hear the New Song

Thousands of Haitian immigrants are blending into Bahamian society. They too need to hear the new song of Kingdom truth. The Witnesses living in the Bahamas are grateful that two Haitian-American couples have arrived. These individuals have helped to strengthen the newly formed Haitian groups on the islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco.

As a further aid to Haitians interested in the Kingdom message, the first Creole district convention ever held in the Bahamas took place from July 31 to August 1, 1993. Attendance reached 214, with three newly dedicated ones being baptized. Many Haitians who learned the truth in the Bahamas have since returned to their home island or have relocated elsewhere to add their voices to those of the local Witnesses in singing praise to Jehovah.

COUNTRY PROFILE
1993 Service Year*

PEAK NUMBER WITNESSING:
1,294

RATIO:
1 Witness to 197

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE:
3,794

AVERAGE PIONEER PUBLISHERS:
186

AVERAGE BIBLE STUDIES:
1,715

NUMBER BAPTIZED:
79

NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS:
22

BRANCH OFFICE:
NASSAU

* For additional information, see the *1994 Calendar of Jehovah's Witnesses.*

THE BAHAMAS

The first Kingdom Hall, with the branch office and missionary home

Witnesses zealously declare the good news

Milton G. Henschel and Nathan H. Knorr with missionaries in Nassau some 45 years ago

The new branch office, dedicated February 8, 1992

JEHOVAH THE GOD OF PURPOSE

"Surely just as I have figured, so it must occur; and just as I have counseled, that is what will come true."—ISAIAH 14:24.

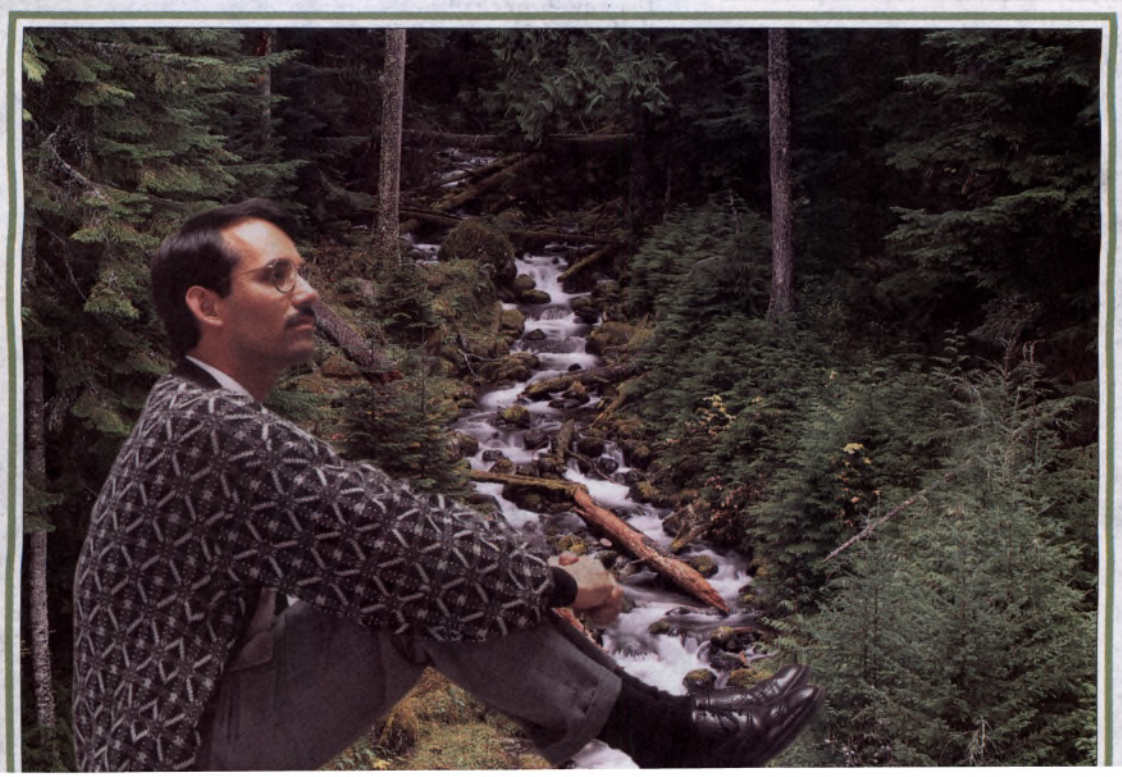
PEOPLE everywhere ask: "What is the purpose of life?" A Western political leader stated: "More people than ever before are asking, 'Who are we? What is our purpose?' " When a newspaper polled young people on the question of what life's purpose is, typical responses were: "To do whatever your heart desires." "Living every moment to its fullest." "Living it up." "To have children, to be happy and then to die." Most felt that this life was all there is. No one spoke of any long-range purpose to life on earth.

1, 2. What do many say about the purpose of life?

[2] A Confucian scholar said: "The ultimate meaning of life is found in our ordinary, human existence." According to this, people would continue to be born, struggle for 70 or 80 years, then die and be nonexistent forever. An evolutionary scientist said: "We may yearn for a 'higher' answer—but none exists." For these evolutionists, life is a struggle for survival, with death ending it all. Such philosophies present a hopeless view of life.

[3] Many doubt that life has a purpose when

3, 4. How do world conditions affect the way many view life?



they see that human existence has been filled with so much misery. In our time, when man is supposed to have reached a peak of industrial and scientific accomplishment, about a billion people worldwide are seriously ill or malnourished. Millions of children die each year from such causes. In addition, this 20th century has had four times as many deaths from war as had the previous four hundred years combined. Crime, violence, drug abuse, family breakdown, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases—the list of negative factors increases. World leaders do not have solutions for these problems.

[4] In view of such conditions, one person expressed what many believe: "There's no point to life. If all of these bad things are happening, then life doesn't mean much." And an elderly man said: "I've been asking why I'm here most of my life. If there's a purpose, I don't care anymore." So because multitudes do not know why God permits suffering, distressing world conditions cause them to have no real hope for the future.

[5] Even religious leaders are divided, and uncertain, about the purpose of life. A former dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London said: "All my life I have struggled to find the purpose of living. . . . I have failed." True, many clergymen teach that at death the good go to heaven and the bad go to a fiery hell forever. But this view still leaves mankind on earth to continue its tormented course. And if it was God's purpose to have people live in heaven, why did he not just make them heavenly creatures to begin with, as he did the angels, and thus spare humans so much suffering? So confusion as to the purpose of life on earth or refusal to believe that it has any purpose is common.

5. Why do this world's religions add to the confusion about the purpose of life?

The God of Purpose

[6] Yet, the most widely distributed book in history, the Holy Bible, tells us that Jehovah, the Sovereign of the universe, is the God of purpose. It shows us that he has a long-range, in fact, an eternal, purpose for humankind on earth. And when Jehovah purposes something, it will without fail take place. Just as the rain causes seed to sprout, says God, "so my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it." (Isaiah 55:10, 11) Whatever Jehovah says he will accomplish "is what will come true."—Isaiah 14:24.

[7] We humans can have full confidence that the Almighty will keep his promises, for God "cannot lie." (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) When he tells us he will do something, his word is a guarantee that it will come to pass. It is as good as done. He declares: "I am the Divine One and there is no other God, nor anyone like me; the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done; the One saying, 'My own counsel will stand, and everything that is my delight I shall do' . . . I have even spoken it; I shall also bring it in. I have formed it, I shall also do it." —Isaiah 46:9-11.

[8] Furthermore, Jehovah "does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) For this reason, he does not want anyone to be ignorant of him. A prophet named Azariah said: "If

6, 7. What does the Bible tell us about the Universal Sovereign?

8. Can those who sincerely want to know God find him?

you search for [God], he will let himself be found by you, but if you leave him he will leave you." (2 Chronicles 15:1, 2) Hence, those who sincerely want to know God and his purposes can surely do so if they make the effort to search for him.

9 Search where? For those truly searching for God, he has provided his Word, the Bible. By means of his holy spirit, the same active force that he used to create the universe, God directed faithful men to write down what we need to know about his purposes. For example, regarding Bible prophecy, the apostle Peter said: "Prophecy was at no time brought by man's will, but men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit." (2 Peter 1:21) Similarly, the apostle Paul declared: "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work." —2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

10 Note that God's Word enables us to be, not partially or incompletely, but *"fully* competent, *completely* equipped." It enables one to be certain about who God is, what his purposes are, and what he requires of his servants. This is to be expected from a book authored by God. And it is the only source we can search to get accurate knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5; John 17:3) By doing so, we will "no longer be babes, tossed about as by waves and carried hither and thither by every wind of teaching by means of the trickery of men, by means of cunning in contriving error." (Ephesians 4:13, 14) The psalmist expressed the proper outlook: "Your [God's] word is a lamp to my foot, and a light to my roadway."—Psalm 119:105.

9, 10. (a) What has been provided for those who want to know God? (b) What does a search of God's Word enable us to do?

Progressively Revealed

11 At the very beginning of the human family, Jehovah revealed his purposes toward this earth and humans upon it. (Genesis 1:26-30) But when our first parents rejected God's sovereignty, mankind fell into spiritual darkness and death. (Romans 5:12) Nevertheless, Jehovah knew that there would be those who would want to serve him. Therefore, down through the centuries, he has progressively revealed his purposes to his faithful servants. Some of those with whom he communicated were Enoch (Genesis 5:24; Jude 14, 15), Noah (Genesis 6:9, 13), Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and Moses (Exodus 31:18; 34:27, 28). God's prophet Amos wrote: "The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets."—Amos 3:7; Daniel 2:27, 28.

12 When God's Son, Jesus Christ, was on the earth some 4,000 years after the rebellion in Eden, many more details of Jehovah's purposes were revealed. This was particularly so regarding God's purpose to establish a heavenly Kingdom to rule over the earth. (Daniel 2:44) Jesus made that Kingdom the theme of his teaching. (Matthew 4:17; 6:10) He and his disciples taught that under the Kingdom, God's original purpose for the earth and for mankind would be fulfilled. The earth would be transformed into a paradise inhabited by perfect humans, who would live forever. (Psalm 37:29; Matthew 5:5; Luke 23:43; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:4) Moreover, Jesus and his

11. How has Jehovah revealed his purposes to mankind?
12. How did Jesus shed more light on God's purposes?

disciples demonstrated what would take place in that new world by the miracles God empowered them to perform.—Matthew 10: 1, 8; 15:30, 31; John 11:25-44.

[13] At Pentecost 33 C.E., 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, God's spirit was poured out on the congregation of Christ's followers. It replaced unfaithful Israel as Jehovah's covenant people. (Matthew 21:43; 27: 51; Acts 2:1-4) The outpouring of the holy spirit on that occasion was an evidence that, from that time on, God would reveal the truths about his purposes through this new agency. (Ephesians 3:10) During the first century C.E., the organizational framework of the Christian congregation was established.—1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Ephesians 4:11, 12.

[14] Today, truth seekers can identify the true Christian congregation by its consistent manifestation of God's foremost quality, love. (1 John 4:8, 16) Indeed, brotherly love is an identifying mark of genuine Christianity. Jesus said: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves." "This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you." (John 13:35; 15:12) And Jesus reminded his hearers: "You are my friends if you do what I am commanding you." (John 15:14) So God's true servants are those who *live* the law of love. They do not just talk about it, for "faith without works is dead."—James 2:26.

Enlightenment

[15] Jesus foretold that with the passing of time, the true Christian congregation would be enlightened more and more regarding God's purposes. He promised his followers: "The helper, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, that one will teach you all things." (John 14:26) Jesus also said: "Look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 28:20) Thus, enlightenment concerning the truth about God and his purposes increases among God's servants. Yes, "the path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established."—Proverbs 4:18.

[16] Today, that spiritual light is brighter than ever, for we are at the time when many Bible prophecies are being fulfilled or are nearing fulfillment. These show us that we are living in "the last days" of this evil system of things. This is the time period called "the conclusion of the system of things"; it will be followed by God's new world. (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13; Matthew 24:3-13) As foretold by Daniel, God's heavenly Kingdom will soon "crush and put an end to all these kingdoms [now existing], and it itself will stand to times indefinite."—Daniel 2:44.

[17] Among the prophecies now being fulfilled is the one recorded in verse 14 of Matthew chapter 24. There Jesus said: "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." All over the earth, that Kingdom-preaching work is being done by millions of Jehovah's Witnesses. And hundreds of thousands of people are joining them every year. This is in harmony with the prophecy at Isaiah 2: 2, 3, which says that "in the final part of the days" of this evil world, people from many

13. Regarding God's dealings with humankind, what change took place at Pentecost 33 C.E.?
14. How can truth seekers identify the true Christian congregation?
15. Of what can God's servants be assured?
16. What does our spiritual enlightenment tell us about where we are with respect to God's purposes?
17, 18. What grand prophecies are now being fulfilled?

nations would come to Jehovah's true worship, and 'he would instruct them about his ways, and they would walk in his paths.'

[18] These new ones are flocking to Jehovah's worship "just like a cloud," as foretold at Isaiah chapter 60, verse 8. Verse 22 adds: "The little one himself will become a thousand, and the small one a mighty nation. I myself, Jehovah, shall speed it up in its own time." That time, the evidence shows, is right now. And new ones can be confident that in associating with Jehovah's Witnesses, they have come into contact with the true Christian congregation.

[19] Why can we say this with certainty? Because these new ones, along with the millions already within Jehovah's organization, have dedicated their lives to God and are doing his will. This includes living in harmony with the law of godly love. As one evidence of this, these Christians have 'beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears and are not learning war anymore.' (Isaiah 2:4) All of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide have done this because they practice love. This means that they can never take up war weapons against one another or anyone else. In this they are unique—unlike the world's religions. (John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:10-12, 15) They do not become involved in divisive nationalism, for they form a global brotherhood cemented by love, "a perfect bond of union."—Colossians 3:14; Matthew 23:8; 1 John 4:20, 21.

19. Why do we say that new ones who associate with Jehovah's Witnesses are coming to the true Christian congregation?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ What do many say regarding life's purpose?
- ☐ How does Jehovah reveal himself as a God of purpose?
- ☐ What great enlightenment took place in the first century C.E.?
- ☐ How can the true Christian congregation be identified today?

Most Choose Not to Know

[20] While the spiritual light among God's servants brightens, the rest of earth's population is descending into ever-greater spiritual darkness. They do not know Jehovah or his purposes. God's prophet described this time when he said: "Look! darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups." (Isaiah 60:2) This is so because people do not manifest a sincere interest in learning about God, nor do they show a desire to try to please him. Jesus said: "Now this is the basis for judgment, that the light has come into the world but men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were wicked. For he that practices vile things hates the light and does not come to the light, in order that his works may not be reproved."—John 3:19, 20.

[21] Such individuals are not genuinely interested in finding out God's will. Instead, they center their lives on doing their own will. By ignoring God's will, they place themselves in a dangerous position, for his Word declares: "He that is turning his ear away from hearing the law—even his prayer is something detestable." (Proverbs 28:9) They will bear the consequences of their chosen course. The apostle Paul wrote: "Do not be misled: God is not one to be mocked. For whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap."—Galatians 6:7.

20, 21. Why are the vast majority of mankind in spiritual darkness? (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19)

[22] However, there are multitudes who do want to know God's will, who sincerely search for him, and who are drawn to him. "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you," says James 4:8. Of such ones Jesus said: "He that does what is true comes to the light, in order that his works may be made manifest as having been worked in harmony with God." (John 3:21) And what a marvelous future God has purposed for those who come to the light! Our next article will discuss the thrilling prospects.

22. Multitudes who want to know God are now doing what?

TRUST JEHOVAH TO FULFILL HIS PURPOSE

"The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it."—PSALM 37:29.

WHEN Jehovah created our first parents, Adam and Eve, he made them perfect. And he created them so that they could live forever on this earth—if they obeyed his laws. (Genesis 1: 26, 27; 2:17) Furthermore, God placed them in paradisaic surroundings. (Genesis 2:8, 9) Jehovah said to them: "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth and subdue it." (Genesis 1:28) Thus, their offspring would eventually spread earth wide, and this planet would become a paradise filled with a perfect, happy race of people. What a fine start the human family had! "God saw everything he had made and, look! it was very good." —Genesis 1:31.

[2] Yet, the state of human affairs that has existed for thousands of years bears no resemblance to God's original purpose. Mankind is far removed from perfection and is far from being happy. World conditions have been distressing, and as prophesied, they have worsened dramatically in our time. (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13) So how can we be confident that God's purpose for humans will be realized in the near future? Will more long periods of time pass with continued distressing conditions?

1. What is Jehovah's purpose for humans and for this earth?
2. The state of human affairs raises what questions?

What Went Wrong?

[3] Those who have accurate knowledge of God's inspired Word know why Jehovah has permitted these bad conditions on earth. They also know what he will do about them. From the Bible account, they have learned that our first parents misused the wonderful gift of free choice that God had given humans. (Compare 1 Peter 2:16.) They wrongly chose the course of independence from God. (Genesis, chapters 2 and 3) Their

3. Why did Jehovah not immediately end the rebellion of mankind?

God created humans to live forever in happiness on a paradise earth

rebellion raised questions of the greatest magnitude, such as: Does the Universal Sovereign have the right to rule over humans? Is his rule best for them? Can human rule succeed without God's oversight? The sure way to find the answers to these questions was to let centuries of human rule pass. The results would show beyond any doubt whether humans could be successful apart from their Maker.

[4] When Adam and Eve left God, he no longer sustained them in perfection. Without his support, they deteriorated. The result was imperfection, old age, and ultimately death. Through the laws of heredity, our first parents passed those negative characteristics on to all their descendants, including us. (Romans 5:12) And what of the result of thousands of years of human rule? It has been catastrophic, just as Ecclesiastes 8:9 truthfully states: "Man has dominated man to his injury."

[5] The passing of time has shown beyond any doubt that it is not in humans to direct their affairs successfully apart from their Creator. The inspired Bible writer Jeremiah declared: "I well know, O Jehovah, that to earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step."—Jeremiah 10:23; Deuteronomy 32:4, 5; Ecclesiastes 7:29.

4, 5. (a) What has been the result of human rejection of God's rule? (b) What has the passing of time demonstrated beyond any doubt?

God's Purpose Has Not Changed

[6] Has the passing of thousands of years of

6, 7. (a) Have thousands of years of history changed Jehovah's purpose? (b) What is included in Jehovah's purpose?

human history—so filled with wickedness and suffering—changed God's purpose? His Word states: "This is what Jehovah has said, the Creator of the heavens, He the true God, the Former of the earth and the Maker of it, He the One who firmly established it, who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited." (Isaiah 45:18) So God formed the earth to be inhabited by humans, and that is still his purpose.

7 Not only did Jehovah create the earth to be inhabited but he also purposed that it become a paradise to be enjoyed by perfect, happy people. That is why the Bible foretold that there would be "a new earth," a new human society, in which "righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:13) And at Revelation 21:4, God's Word tells us that in his new world, "he will wipe out every tear from [mankind's] eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore." It is for such reasons that Jesus could speak of that coming new world on earth as "Paradise." —Luke 23:43.

8 Since Jehovah is the all-powerful and all-wise Creator of the universe, no one can thwart his purpose. "Jehovah of armies has sworn, saying: 'Surely just as I have figured, so it must occur; and just as I have counseled, that is what will come true.'" (Isaiah 14:24) Thus, when God says he will make this earth a paradise inhabited by perfect people, that is what will happen. Jesus said: "Happy are the mild-tempered ones, since they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5; compare Psalm 37:29.) We can count on the fulfillment of that promise. In fact, we can stake our lives on it.

8. Why can we be sure that Jehovah will fulfill his purpose?

They Trusted Jehovah

9 Many God-fearing people throughout history did stake their lives on God's purpose for the earth because they were convinced that he would fulfill it. Although their knowledge may have been limited, they trusted God and built their lives on the doing of his will. For instance, there was Abraham, who lived about 2,000 years before Jesus walked the earth—long before the Bible began to be written. He trusted Jehovah to fulfill His promises. Likely, Abraham learned about the Creator from his faithful ancestor Shem, who was taught by Noah. So when God told Abraham to move out of prosperous Ur of the Chaldeans into the unfamiliar and dangerous land of Canaan, that patriarch knew he could trust Jehovah, and therefore he went. (Hebrews 11:8) In time, Jehovah told him: "I shall make a great nation out of you."—Genesis 12:2.

10 What happened after Isaac was born to Abraham? Jehovah indicated to Abraham that it was through Isaac that his descendants would develop into a great nation. (Genesis 21:12) Thus, it must have seemed to be quite a contradiction when Jehovah told Abraham, as a test of his faith, to sacrifice his son Isaac. (Genesis 22:2) Yet, with full trust in Jehovah, Abraham took steps to comply, actually taking up his knife to slaughter Isaac. At the last moment, God sent an angel to restrain Abraham.—Genesis 22:9-14.

11 Why was Abraham so obedient? Hebrews 11:17-19 reveals: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, as good as offered up Isaac, and the man that had gladly received the promises attempted to offer up

9. What did Abraham do that showed his trust in Jehovah?
10, 11. Why was Abraham willing to offer up his only-begotten son, Isaac?

Abraham put his trust in Jehovah's ability to resurrect the dead

his only-begotten son, although it had been said to him: 'What will be called "your seed" will be through Isaac.' But he reckoned that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; and from there he did receive him also in an illustrative way." Romans 4:20, 21 similarly states: "Because of the promise of God [Abraham] did not waver in a lack of faith, . . . being fully convinced that what [God] had promised he was also able to do."

[12] Abraham was rewarded for his faith not only by the sparing of Isaac and by having a "great nation" come through him but also in another way. God told Abraham: "By means of your seed *all nations* of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact that you have listened to my voice." (Genesis 22:18) How? The King of God's heavenly Kingdom would come through Abraham's line of descent. That Kingdom would crush out of existence this evil world under Satan. (Daniel 2:44; Romans 16:20; Revelation 19:11-21) Then, in a cleansed earth under Kingdom rule, Paradise would be developed globally, and from "all nations" people who do God's will would enjoy perfect health and life forever. (1 John 2: 15-17) And though Abraham possessed only limited knowledge of the Kingdom, he trusted God and looked forward to its establishment.—Hebrews 11:10.

12. How was Abraham rewarded for his faith?

[13] Several hundred years later, there was Job, who lived between the 17th and 16th centuries B.C.E. in what is now Arabia. He too lived before the Bible began to be written. Job "proved to be blameless and upright, and fearing God and turning aside from bad." (Job 1:1) When Satan inflicted a loathsome, painful disease upon Job, that faithful man "did not utter one sinful word" throughout his ordeal. (Job 2:10, *The New English Bible*) Job trusted God. And while he did not know the details as to why he was suffering so much, he staked his life on God and His promises.

[14] Job knew that even if he died, God could someday restore him to life by means of the resurrection. He indicated this hope when he said to Jehovah God: "O that in Sheol [the grave] you would conceal me, . . . that you would set a time limit for me and remember me! If an able-bodied man dies can he live again? . . . You will call, and I myself shall answer you." (Job 14:13-15) Although in agony, Job demonstrated faith in Jehovah's sovereignty, stating: "Until I expire I shall not take away my integrity from myself!"—Job 27:5.

[15] Some six centuries after Job and about a thousand years before Jesus came to the earth, David expressed his confidence in a new world. He said in the psalms: "Those hoping in Jehovah are the ones that will possess the earth. And just a little while longer, and the wicked one will be no more . . . But the meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace. The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it." Because of his unwavering hope, David urged: "Trust in Jehovah . . . Also take exquisite delight in Jehovah, and he will give you the requests of your heart." —Psalm 37:3, 4, 9-11, 29.

13, 14. Why did Job trust God?
15. How did David express his confidence in Jehovah's purpose?

[16] Down through the centuries, faithful men and women have had this same hope of eternal life on earth. In fact, they made up 'a great cloud of witnesses' who very literally staked their lives on Jehovah's promises. Many of those ancient witnesses of Jehovah were tortured and killed because of their faith, "in order that they might attain a better resurrection." How so? In the new world, God will reward them with a better resurrection and the prospect of everlasting life.—John 5:28, 29; Hebrews 11:35; 12:1.

Christian Witnesses Trust in God

[17] In the first century C.E., Jehovah revealed to the newly established Christian congregation more details about the Kingdom and its rule over the earth. For example, his spirit inspired the apostle John to write that the number to be associated with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of heaven would be 144,000. These would be faithful servants of God who had been "bought from among mankind." (Revelation 7:4; 14:1-4) They would rule over the earth "as kings" with Christ in heaven. (Revelation 20:4-6) So firmly did those first-century Christians trust Jehovah to fulfill his purpose for the heavenly Kingdom and its earthly domain that they were willing to give up their lives for their faith. Many of them did just that.

[18] Today, nearly five million Witnesses of Jehovah have the same trust in God as did their counterparts who lived centuries

16. What hope did 'a great cloud of witnesses' have?
17. How firmly did first-century Christians trust Jehovah?
18. How do Jehovah's Witnesses today imitate their counterparts of long ago?

before them. These present-day Witnesses have also staked their lives on God's promises. They have dedicated their lives to him and have the complete Bible to fortify their faith. (2 Timothy 3:14-17) These modern-day Witnesses of Jehovah imitate Jesus' first-century followers who declared that they would "obey God as ruler rather than men." (Acts 5:29) In this century many of these Christian Witnesses have been cruelly persecuted. Some have even been killed for their faith. Others have died from sickness, accident, or old age. Like faithful witnesses of times past, however, they have trusted God because they knew that he would restore them to life in his new world by means of the resurrection.—John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:12, 13.

[19] Jehovah's Witnesses appreciate that their being brought out of all nations into one global brotherhood was long ago foretold in Bible prophecy. (Isaiah 2:2-4; Revelation 7:4, 9-17) And Jehovah is having them do a worldwide preaching work to gather into his favor and protection still other honesthearted ones. (Proverbs 18:10; Matthew 24:14; Romans 10:13) All of these put their full trust in Jehovah, knowing that he will soon usher in his marvelous new world.—Compare 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 6:10.

[20] Bible prophecies indicate that Satan's world has been in its last days for nearly 80 years now, since the pivotal year 1914. This world is nearing its end. (Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5) Jehovah's Witnesses therefore take heart because they realize that soon God's Kingdom will assume complete control of all earth's affairs. By bringing this present evil world to an end and ushering in his righteous new world, God will completely erase the bad situation that has existed on earth for so many centuries.—Proverbs 2:21, 22.

[21] Then, throughout eternity, God will show his great care for us by showering down blessings that will far more than make up for any hurt that we have received in the past. So many good things will happen to us in the new world that our previous troubles will fade from memory. How comforting to know that Jehovah then will 'open his hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.'—Psalm 145:16; Isaiah 65:17, 18.

[22] In the new world, faithful mankind will see the fulfillment of Romans 8:21: "The creation itself also will be set free from enslavement to corruption and have the glorious freedom of the children of God." They will see fulfilled this prayer that Jesus taught his followers: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." (Matthew 6:10) So put your complete trust in Jehovah because his infallible promise is: "The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it."—Psalm 37:29.

19, 20. What do we recognize about Bible prophecy for our day?

21. Why can we rejoice regardless of present troubles?

22. Why should we put our trust in Jehovah?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ What is Jehovah's purpose for humans and for this earth?
- ☐ Why has God permitted bad conditions on the earth?
- ☐ How did faithful people of old show their trust in Jehovah?
- ☐ Why do God's servants today trust in Jehovah?

"Feed the Mouth, Not the Feet"

A Look at Traditional African Burial Customs

"THEY don't bury their dead!" This is a statement commonly made about Jehovah's Witnesses in West Africa. Yet, it is well-known that the Witnesses do, in fact, bury their dead.

Why do people say that Jehovah's Witnesses do not bury their dead? They do so because the Witnesses do not observe many of the popular local burial customs.

Traditional Burial Customs

Aliu lives in a small village in Central Nigeria. When his mother died, he informed his relatives of her death and then arranged for a Scriptural talk to be given in her home. Delivered by an elder in the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, the talk focused on the condition of the dead and the heartening resurrection hope referred to in the Bible. After the talk, Aliu's mother was buried.

The relatives were highly indignant. To them no burial is complete without a wake, usually held the night after a person dies. In Aliu's community a wake is a time of celebration, not mourning. The corpse is bathed, clothed in white, and laid out on a bed. The bereaved ones send for musicians, buy cases of beer and jugs of palm wine, and arrange for a bull or a goat to be sacrificed. Then the relatives and friends arrive to sing, dance, eat, and drink until dawn the next day.

During these festivities, food is put at the feet of the corpse. Portions of the dead person's hair, fingernails, and toenails are cut and set aside for the "second burial." It takes place days, weeks, or even years later.

On the day following the wake, the corpse is buried, though the funeral ceremonies go on for a week or longer. Later, the second burial takes place. The portions of hair, fingernails, and toenails are wrapped in a white cloth, which is tied to a five- or six-foot wooden plank. In a procession of singing and dancing, the plank is carried to the grave site and buried near the person it represents. Once again, there is much music, drinking, and feasting. To end the funeral proceedings, a gun is fired once toward the sky.

Since Aliu did not permit any of these things, he was accused of having no respect either for the dead or for the traditions that honor them. But why did Aliu, a Witness of Jehovah, refuse to go along with tradition? Because he could not conscientiously accept the religious ideas upon which these traditions are based.

Traditional African Beliefs

Throughout Africa, people believe that all humans came from the spirit realm and will return there. The Yoruba of Nigeria say: "The earth is a market, whereas the heaven is home." And the Igbo saying is: "Everyone coming into this world will have to return home, no matter how long one tarries on earth."

Consider the customs mentioned earlier. The purpose of the wake is to give the spirit a good send-off. White clothing is considered suitable attire for the spirit realm. Putting food at the feet is associated with the idea that the corpse eats through the legs and must be fed so as not to become

hungry on the journey to the land of the ancestors.

Moreover, the people in general believe that when the spirit leaves the body, it lingers near the living and does not return to the ancestors until it is finally released by the second burial. Unless the second burial is performed, people fear that the spirit will become angry and plague the living with sickness or death. The firing of the gun is to "send the spirit out" to heaven.

Although funeral customs vary greatly from place to place in Africa, the central idea usually is that the spirit survives the death of the body. The central purpose of the rituals is to assist the spirit to respond to the "home call."

These beliefs and practices have been encouraged by Christendom's doctrine of the immortality of the human soul and by her veneration of "saints." Typical is the comment of an army chaplain in Swaziland who said that Jesus came, not to destroy traditional beliefs, but to fulfill or confirm them. Since clergymen usually preside over burial procedures, many people feel that the Bible supports both the traditional beliefs and the customs that spring from them.

What the Bible Says

Does the Bible support these beliefs? Concerning the condition of the dead, Ecclesiastes 3:20 states: "All [both humans and animals] are going to one place. They have all come to be from the dust, and they are all returning to the dust." The Scriptures further say: "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all . . . Their love and their hate and their jealousy have already perished . . . There is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in Sheol [the grave], the place to which you are going."—Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10.

These and other scriptures make it clear that the dead cannot see us or hear us or help us or hurt us. Is this not in harmony with what you have observed? You may know of a rich and influential man who has died and whose family has thereafter suffered, although they fully performed all the customary funeral ceremonies. If that man is alive in the spirit realm, why does he not help his family? He cannot do so because what the Bible says is true—the dead are indeed lifeless, "impotent in death," and therefore unable to help anyone.—Isaiah 26:14.

The Son of God, Jesus Christ, knew this to be true. Consider what happened after the death of Lazarus. The Bible states: "He [Jesus] said to them [his disciples]: 'Lazarus our friend has gone to rest, but I am journeying there to awaken him from sleep.' Therefore the disciples said to him: 'Lord, if he has gone to rest, he will get well.' Jesus had spoken, however, about his death." —John 11:11-13.

Notice that Jesus likened death to sleep, to rest. Upon his arrival at Bethany, he consoled Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha. Moved with compassion, Jesus gave way to tears. Yet, in no way did he say or do anything suggesting that Lazarus had a spirit still alive and desiring help to reach the land of his ancestors. Instead, Jesus did what he said he would do. He awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death by means of a resurrection. This gave evidence that God would eventually use Jesus to resurrect all those in the memorial tombs.—John 11: 17-44; 5:28, 29.

Why Stand Out as Different?

Is there anything wrong with going along with funeral customs that are based on unscriptural beliefs? Aliu and millions of other Witnesses of Jehovah believe that there is.

They know that it would be wrong—even hypocritical—for them to support any practice clearly based on false and misleading *doctrines*. They do not want to be like the scribes and the Pharisees, whom Jesus condemned for religious hypocrisy.—Matthew 23:1-36.

The apostle Paul warned his coworker Timothy: "The inspired utterance says definitely that in later periods of time some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to misleading inspired utterances and teachings of demons, by the hypocrisy of men who speak lies." (1 Timothy 4:1, 2) Is the concept that mankind's dead are alive in the spirit realm a teaching of demons?

Yes, it is. Satan the Devil, "the father of the lie," told Eve that she would not die, indicating that she would keep on living in the flesh. (John 8:44; Genesis 3:3, 4) That was not the same as saying that an immortal soul lives on after the death of the body. However, Satan and his demons strive to turn people away from the truth of God's Word by promoting the idea that life continues after death. Because they believe what God says in the Bible, Jehovah's Witnesses have no share in views and practices that support Satan's lies.—2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

By avoiding unscriptural burial practices, Jehovah's servants have incurred the disfavor of some not sharing their views. Certain Witnesses have been deprived of inheritances. Others have been ostracized by their families. As true Christians, however, they realize that faithful obedience to God brings the world's disfavor. Like the loyal apostles of Jesus Christ, they are determined to "obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29; John 17:14.

While cherishing the memory of their loved ones who have fallen asleep in death, true Christians strive to demonstrate love for the living. For example, Aliu had taken his mother into his home after his father died and had fed and cared for her for the rest of her life. When others say that Aliu cared little for his mother because he did not bury her according to popular custom, he refers to this commonly voiced saying among his people: "Feed my mouth before you feed my feet." Feeding the mouth, or caring for a person while he or she is still alive, is far more important than feeding the feet, the practice described earlier and associated with the wake after the individual is dead. Feeding the feet, in fact, does not benefit the deceased at all.

Aliu asks his critics, 'Which would you prefer—that your family care for you in your old age or that they put on a big celebration after you die?' Most choose to be looked after while still alive. They also appreciate knowing that in the event of their death, they will have a dignified Bible-based memorial service and a decent burial.

That is what Jehovah's Witnesses endeavor to do for their loved ones. They feed the mouth, not the feet.

He Realized His Heart's Desire

IS IT your heart's desire to see the Messianic Kingdom hold sway over all the earth? If so, you yearn and pray for the promised earthly blessings under that heavenly Kingdom. Exercise patience, then, for "the thing desired is a tree of life when it does come."—Proverbs 13:12; James 5:7, 8.

Almost 2,000 years ago, there lived in Jerusalem the "righteous and reverent" man Simeon. He had faith in Messianic prophecies and was patiently "waiting for Israel's consolation."—Luke 2:25.

Messianic Prophecies Give Hope

Jehovah was responsible for the first Messianic prophecy—one that gave hope to sinful and dying mankind. God foretold the coming of the Seed of his "woman," or universal organization.—Genesis 3:15.

That One was identified as Abraham's seed, and Jacob foretold his coming. (Genesis 22:17, 18; 49:10) Glories of the Messiah's Kingdom were extolled in the psalms. (Psalm 72:1-20) Isaiah foretold that the Seed would be born of a virgin, and Micah prophesied that the birth would occur in Bethlehem. (Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2) These are but a few of the many Messianic prophecies.

Still No Messiah!

Reflect on the past, and imagine that the first century C. E. is approaching. God's original Messianic prophecy is now 4,000 years old. The Jews have experienced the destruction of Jehovah's temple, the desolation of their homeland, a 70-year exile in Babylon, and 500 more years of subjection to Gentile rulers. Still no Messiah!

How God-fearing Jews yearned for the Messiah's coming! From him blessings would flow to them and to all nations.

A Reverent Man

Among reverent Jews longing and praying for the Messiah's coming is Simeon, a faithful elderly servant of Jehovah living in Judea's capital city. Something special has happened to Simeon.

God has placed his holy spirit on Simeon and has rewarded him with a revelation. Simeon will not see death until he has seen the One who will be the Messiah. But days and months are passing. Simeon is aging and can hardly expect to live much longer. Will God's promise to him be fulfilled?

One day (in 2 B.C.E.), a young couple with a baby come to the temple from Bethlehem. Holy spirit reveals to Simeon that this is the long-awaited day. He goes to the temple, where he will see the One of whom the prophets have written. Hurrying as fast as his aged frame permits, he sees Joseph, Mary, and the child.

With what joy Simeon takes the child Jesus into his arms! This One will be the promised Messiah—"the Christ of Jehovah." At such an advanced age, Simeon cannot hope to watch Jesus fulfill His earthly

mission. Yet, it is wonderful to see him as a babe. Messianic prophecies are beginning to be fulfilled. How happy Simeon is! Now he will be content to sleep in death until the resurrection.—Luke 2:25-28.

Simeon's Prophetic Words

As Simeon lifts his voice in praise to Jehovah, we hear him say: "Now, Sovereign Lord, you are letting your slave go free in peace according to your declaration; because my eyes have seen your means of saving that you have made ready in the sight of all the peoples, a light for removing the veil from the nations and a glory of your people Israel." Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph, and His mother, Mary, continue to wonder about these words.—Luke 2:29-33.

Simeon's countenance is bright as he blesses Joseph and Mary, evidently wishing them Jehovah's blessing in fulfilling their responsibilities toward the child. Then the aged man's face becomes serious. Directing his remarks to Mary alone, he adds: "Look! This one is laid for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel and for a sign to be talked against (yes, a long sword will be run through the soul of you yourself), in order that the reasonings of many hearts may be uncovered."—Luke 2:34, 35.

Simeon's Statement to Mary

Imagine how Mary felt. What did Simeon mean? Some would accept Christ and be lifted up from their already fallen state. However, others would reject him, stumble over him, and fall. As foretold, Jesus proved to be a stone of stumbling to many Jews. (Isaiah 8:14; 28:16) Simeon's words do not mean that individual Israelites would first fall in unbelief and then rise in belief by accepting Jesus. Rather, reactions to him would vary with different individuals, uncovering the reasonings of many hearts and leading to God's judgment toward them for good or for bad. To unbelievers, he would be as a sign, or an object of contempt. By putting faith in him, others would be lifted up from being dead in trespasses and sins and would come to enjoy a righteous standing with God. The actions of people toward the Messiah would show what was in their hearts.

What of Simeon's words: "A long sword will be run through the soul of you yourself"? There is no Scriptural indication that Mary had an actual sword run through her. Yet, rejection of Jesus by the majority would distress her. And how painful it was for Mary to see Jesus nailed to a stake! This was like having a sword run through her.

Simeon Applies Messianic Prophecies

God's spirit had moved Simeon to apply Messianic prophecies to Jesus. Simeon could leave this life in peace, or tranquillity, 'because his eyes had seen God's means of saving that He had made ready in the sight of all the peoples, a light for removing the veil from the nations and a glory of His people Israel.' (Luke 2:30-32) How well this applied to Isaiah's prophetic words!

That prophet foretold: "The glory of Jehovah will certainly be revealed, and all flesh must see it together." "I [Jehovah] also have given you [the Messiah] for a light of the nations, that my salvation may come to be to the extremity of the earth." (Isaiah 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; 52:10) The Christian Greek Scriptures and physical facts have since borne out that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the true light of the nations, the One to remove the veil of spiritual darkness and bring salvation to the people.

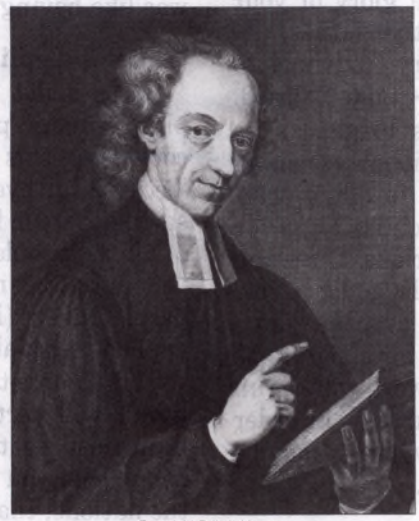
God's Word says no more about elderly Simeon. Evidently he died before Christ opened the way to heavenly life. Before long, then, Simeon will be resurrected to life on earth. What joy he—and you—can experience in the new world under God's Messianic Kingdom!

William Whiston
Heretic or Honest Scholar?

WOULD you sacrifice your career for the sake of your beliefs? William Whiston did.

He became a figure of religious controversy in the early 18th century, when he took issue with the Church of England over the Bible's teachings. As a result, he was eventually branded a heretic. His course thus brought him ridicule but also earned him respect.

Who was William Whiston? And what did he accomplish?



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A Bible Scholar

William Whiston was a brilliant Cambridge University colleague of Sir Isaac Newton. If you consult the English edition of the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, you will likely be reading the translation made by Whiston in 1736. Although other translations exist, his scholarly rendering, along with his notes and essays, has yet to be surpassed and is still in print. Many consider this work to be the pinnacle of Whiston's achievements.

Not to be overlooked, however, is the *Primitive New Testament,* Whiston's translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures. It was published in 1745, in his 78th year. Whiston translated the four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles from the Codex Bezae, Paul's letters from the Clermont Codex, and the remaining portion, including Revelation, from the Alexandrine Manuscript. He carefully omitted the spurious part of 1 John 5:7. Whiston chose these three ancient Greek sources as the best available at the time.

Love for the Bible was the apparent motivation for what Whiston did. Prevalent in his day was deism, the teaching that reason alone is an adequate basis for belief in God. According to the book *William Whiston —Honest Newtonian,* he strongly upheld "the traditionalist view that the Bible is the one infallible source of ancient history." The term "Newtonian" here is a reference to Isaac Newton, best known for his *Principia,* in which he expounded the law of universal gravitation. Newton's thinking had a profound effect on William Whiston. How?

Contrasting Personalities

William Whiston was born in 1667, the son of a Church of England clergyman. After being ordained in 1693, he returned to Cambridge University to study mathematics and become an assistant to Newton. A

close bond developed between them. When Newton relinquished his position as Lucasian Professor of Mathematics about three years later, he made sure that Whiston was appointed in his stead. Pursuing his career, Whiston lectured on astronomy and mathematics, but Newton's influence also spurred him to take a deeper interest in Biblical chronology and doctrine.

Newton was a religious man. As a committed believer in the Biblical Millennium, he wrote extensively on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation. However, hardly any of these writings were published during his lifetime. He rejected the Trinity doctrine. But when it came to publishing his evidence against the Trinity, "Newton withdrew in fear that his anti-Trinitarian views would become known," observes *The New Encyclopædia Britannica.* F. E. Manuel puts it this way in *Isaac Newton, Historian:* "Newton's group either kept their opinions secret or restrained their enthusiasm. . . . Where Newton was covert Whiston shrieked in the marketplace." The two men thus had contrasting personalities.

Ostracism

In July 1708, Whiston wrote to the archbishops of both Canterbury and York, urging reform of Church of England doctrine in view of the false teaching of the Trinity as reflected in the Athanasian Creed. Understandably, he was counseled to be cautious. Yet Whiston persisted. "I have studied these points to the bottom," he said, "and am thoroughly satisfied the christian church has been long and grossly cheated in them; and, by God's blessing, if it be in my power, it shall be cheated no longer."

Newton feared for his social and academic position. Whiston, on the other hand, did not. Having crystallized his anti-Trinitarian beliefs, he wrote a pamphlet presenting his views. But in August 1708, Cambridge University refused to grant Whiston a license to print this material, as it was deemed to be unorthodox.

In 1710, Whiston was charged with teaching doctrine contrary to Church of England belief. He was found guilty, deprived of his professorship, and banished from Cambridge. However, despite legal proceedings against him, which continued nearly five more years, Whiston was never convicted of heresy.

Although his anti-Trinitarian views were akin to Whiston's, Newton did not speak out for his friend and eventually ostracized him. In 1754, Newton's Biblical scholarship exposing the Trinity was finally published —27 years after his death. But that was too late to be of any help to Whiston, who had died two years earlier.

Newton is also considered responsible for debarring Whiston from the prestigious Royal Society. But Whiston was not discouraged. He and his family moved to London, where he founded a Society for Promoting Primitive Christianity. He put all his energies into writing, his most important work to that time being the four volumes of *Primitive Christianity Revived.*

Controversial to the End

As a scientist, Whiston worked on different ways for mariners to determine longitude at sea. Even though his ideas were not taken up, his persistence eventually led to the development of the marine chronometer. Though many of Whiston's views on Bible prophecy, like those of his contemporaries, have proved to be inaccurate, he left no stone unturned in his search for truth. His tracts on the orbit of comets and his postulations on the effects of the Deluge of

Noah's day are among the many he wrote to defend both scientific and Biblical truth. Transcending his other writings, however, are those exposing the Trinity doctrine as unscriptural.

True to form, Whiston left the Church of England in 1747. He did so, both literally and figuratively, when he walked out of church as a clergyman began to read the Athanasian Creed. *A Religious Encyclopædia* says of Whiston: "One must admire the manly openness and truthfulness of his character, the consistency of his life, and the straight-forwardness of his conduct."

For William Whiston, truth could not be compromised, and personal convictions were more precious than the plaudits and accolades of men. Although controversial, Whiston was an honest scholar who fearlessly championed the Bible as the Word of God.—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

The Fascinating Chronicles of Josephus

STUDENTS of history have long pondered the fascinating writings of Josephus. Born just four years after the death of Christ, he was an eyewitness to the chilling fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy about the first-century Jewish nation. Josephus was a military commander, a diplomat, a Pharisee, and a scholar.

Josephus' writings abound with captivating details. They illuminate the Bible canon while furnishing a literary guide to the topography and geography of Palestine. No wonder many consider his works to be a valuable addition to their library!

His Early Life

Joseph ben Matthias, or Josephus, was born in 37 C.E., the first year of the reign of Roman emperor Caligula. Josephus' father belonged to a priestly family. His mother, he claimed, was a descendant of Hasmonaean high priest Jonathan.

While in his teens, Josephus was an avid student of the Mosaic Law. He carefully analyzed three sects of Judaism—the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. Favoring the latter, he decided to dwell for three years with a desert hermit named Bannus, likely an Essene. Abandoning this at the age of 19, Josephus returned to Jerusalem and joined the Pharisees.

To Rome and Back

Josephus traveled to Rome in 64 C.E. to intercede in behalf of Jewish priests whom Judean procurator Felix had sent to Emperor Nero for trial. Experiencing shipwreck en route, Josephus narrowly escaped death. Only 80 of the 600 passengers on the ship were rescued.

During the visit of Josephus to Rome, a Jewish actor introduced him to Nero's wife, the empress Poppaea. She played a key role in the success of his mission. The magnificence of the city made a lasting impression on Josephus.

When Josephus returned to Judea, revolt against Rome was firmly fixed in the minds of the Jews. He attempted to impress his countrymen with the futility of warfare against Rome. Unable to restrain them and likely fearful that he would be considered a traitor, he accepted appointment as commander of Jewish troops in Galilee. Josephus rallied and trained his men and secured provisions in preparation for battle against Roman forces—but to no avail. Galilee fell to Vespasian's army. After a 47-day siege, Josephus' stronghold at Jotapata was conquered.

When he surrendered, Josephus shrewdly predicted that Vespasian would soon be emperor. Confined but spared punishment because of this prediction, Josephus was freed when it came true. That was a turning point in his life. For the rest of the war, he served the Romans as an interpreter and a mediator. Expressing the patronage of Vespasian and his sons Titus and Domitian, Josephus added the family name Flavius to his own.

The Works of Flavius Josephus

The oldest of Josephus' writings is entitled *The Jewish War.* It is believed that he prepared this seven-volume account to present the Jews with a graphic portrayal of Rome's superior strength and to provide a deterrent against future revolts. These writings scrutinize Jewish history from the capture of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes (in the second century B.C.E.) to the turbulent strife of 67 C.E. As an eyewitness, Josephus then discusses the war climaxing in 73 C.E.

Another of Josephus' works was *The Jewish Antiquities,* a 20-volume history of the Jews. Starting with Genesis and creation, it continues to the outbreak of war with Rome. Josephus closely follows the order of the Bible narrative, adding traditional interpretations and external observations.

Josephus wrote a personal narrative entitled simply *Life.* In it he seeks to justify his stand during the war and attempts to allay accusations brought against him by Justus of Tiberias. A fourth work—a two-volume apology entitled *Against Apion*—defends the Jews against misrepresentations.

Insight Into God's Word

There is no doubt that much of Josephus' history is accurate. In his work entitled *Against Apion,* he shows that the Jews never included the Apocryphal books as part of the inspired Scriptures. He gives testimony to the accuracy and internal harmony of the divine writings. Says Josephus: "We have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, . . . but only twenty-two books [the equivalent of our modern division of the Scriptures into 39 books], which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine."

In *The Jewish Antiquities,* Josephus adds interesting detail to the Biblical account. He says that "Isaac was twenty-five years old" when Abraham bound him hand and foot for sacrifice. According to Josephus, after assisting in the construction of the altar, Isaac said that " 'he was not worthy to be born at first, if he should reject the determination of God and of his father' . . . So he went immediately to the altar to be sacrificed."

To the Scriptural account of Israel's departure from ancient Egypt, Josephus adds these particulars: "The number that pursued after them was six hundred chariots, with fifty thousand horsemen, and two hundred thousand footmen, all armed." Josephus also says that "when Samuel was twelve years old, he began to prophesy: and once when he was asleep, God called to him by his name."—Compare 1 Samuel 3:2-21.

Other writings of Josephus provide insight into taxes, laws, and events. He names Salome as the woman who danced at Herod's party and who asked for the head of John the Baptizer. (Mark 6:17-26) Most of what we know about the Herods was recorded by Josephus. He even says that "in order to cover his great age, [Herod] coloured his hair black."

The Great Anti-Roman Revolt

Just 33 years after Jesus gave his prophecy concerning Jerusalem and its temple, its fulfillment began to unfold. Radical Jewish factions in Jerusalem were bent on throwing off the Roman yoke. In 66 C.E., news of this prompted the mobilizing and dispatching of Roman legions under Syrian governor Cestius Gallus. Their mission was to quell the rebellion and punish the offenders. After wreaking havoc in the suburbs of Jerusalem, Cestius' men pitched camp around the walled city. Using a method called testudo, the Romans successfully combined their shields like the back of a tortoise for protection from the enemy. Attesting to the success of this method, Josephus states: "The darts that were thrown fell, and slided off without doing them any harm; so the soldiers undermined the wall, without being themselves hurt, and got all things ready for setting fire to the gate of the temple."

In Our Next Issue

A Better World—Just a Dream?

Are You Resisting the Spirit of the World?

"Turn Down the False Stories"

"It then happened," says Josephus, "that Cestius . . . recalled his soldiers from the place . . . He retired from the city, without any reason in the world." Evidently without intending to magnify God's Son, Josephus recorded the very act that Christians in Jerusalem had awaited. It was the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's prophecy! Years earlier, the Son of God had warned: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near. Then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains, and let those in the midst of her withdraw, and let those in the country places not enter into her; because these are days for meting out justice, that all the things written may be fulfilled." (Luke 21:20-22) As Jesus instructed, his faithful followers quickly fled the city, stayed away, and were spared the agony that later befell it.

When Roman armies returned in 70 C.E., the consequences were recorded in graphic detail by Josephus. Vespasian's eldest son, General Titus, came to conquer Jerusalem, with its magnificent temple. Within the city, warring factions attempted to take control. They resorted to extreme measures, and much blood was shed. Some "were in such distress by their internal calamities, that they wished for the Romans," hoping for "delivery from their domestic miseries," says Josephus. He calls the insurgents "robbers" engaged in destroying the property of the wealthy and murdering men of importance—those suspected of willingness to compromise with the Romans.

Amid civil war, living conditions in Jerusalem plunged to unimaginable depths, and the dead remained unburied. The seditious themselves "fought against each other, while they trod upon the dead bodies as they lay heaped one upon another." They

Josephus at the walls of Jerusalem

plundered the populace, murdering for food and wealth. Outcries of the afflicted were continuous.

Titus exhorted the Jews to surrender the city and thus save themselves. He "sent Josephus to speak to them in their own language; for he imagined they might yield to the persuasion of a countryman of their own." But they reproached Josephus. Titus next built a wall of pointed stakes around the whole city. (Luke 19:43) With all hope of escape cut off and movement restricted, famine "devoured the people by whole houses and families." The continuing battle added to the death toll. Unknowingly fulfilling Bible prophecy, Titus conquered Jerusalem. Afterward, observing its massive walls and fortified towers, he exclaimed: "It was no other than God that ejected the Jews out of these fortifications." Over one million Jews perished.—Luke 21:5, 6, 23, 24.

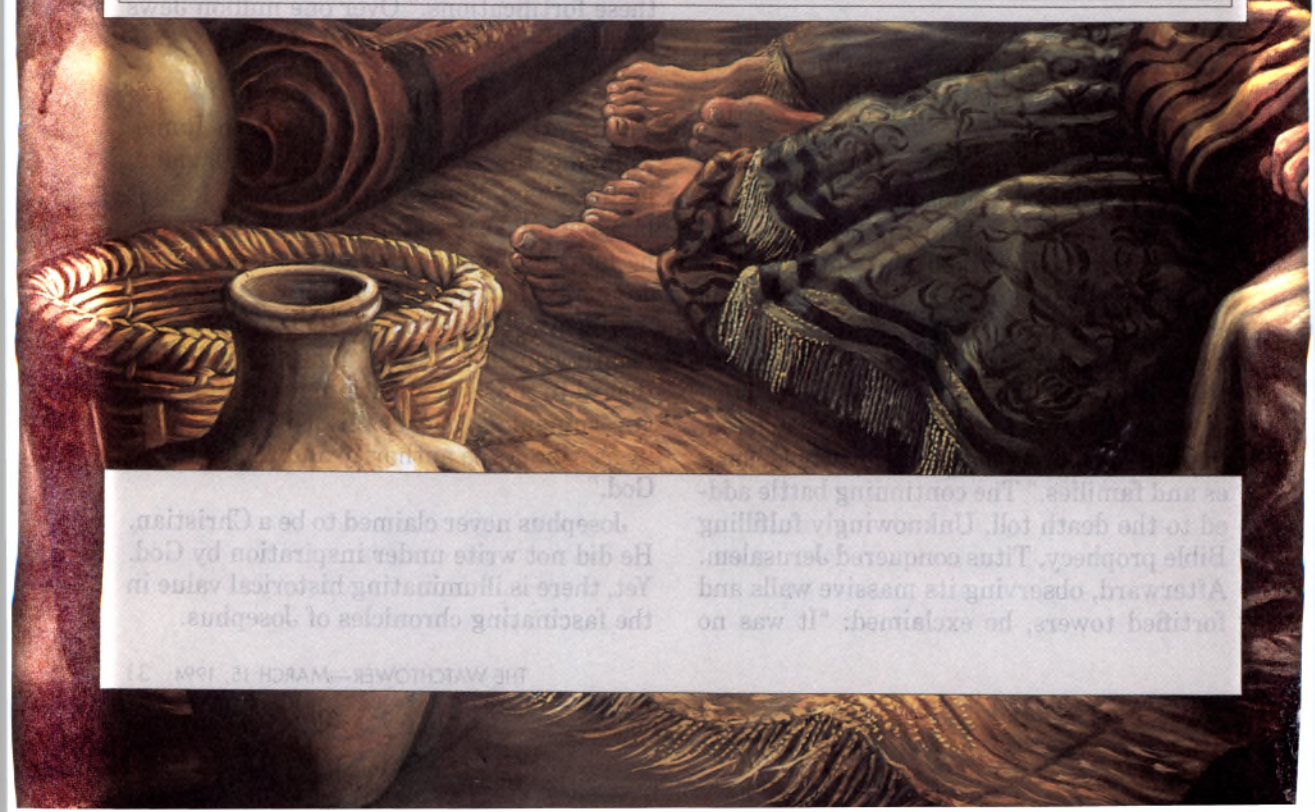
After the War

After the war Josephus went to Rome. Enjoying the sponsorship of the Flavians, he lived as a Roman citizen in the former mansion of Vespasian and received an imperial pension along with gifts from Titus. Josephus then pursued a literary career.

It is interesting to note that Josephus evidently coined the term "Theocracy." With regard to the Jewish nation, he wrote: "Our government . . . may be termed a Theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God."

Josephus never claimed to be a Christian. He did not write under inspiration by God. Yet, there is illuminating historical value in the fascinating chronicles of Josephus.

A Night to Remember

ON A memorable day over 3,500 years ago, Jehovah God had the enslaved Israelites in Egypt kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. That very night, God's angel *passed over* the houses marked in this way but killed the firstborn sons in the homes of all the Egyptians. The Israelites were then freed. Ever since, on the anniversary of that event, Jews have celebrated the Passover.

Immediately after Jesus Christ finished celebrating his last Passover with his apostles, he instituted a meal that would memorialize his sacrificial death. He handed his faithful apostles bread and said: "Take, eat. This means my body." Then he gave them a cup of wine and said: "Drink out of it, all of you; for this means my 'blood of the covenant,' which is to be poured out in behalf of many for forgiveness of sins." Jesus also said: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me." (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19, 20) So Jesus commanded his followers to hold this observance of his death.