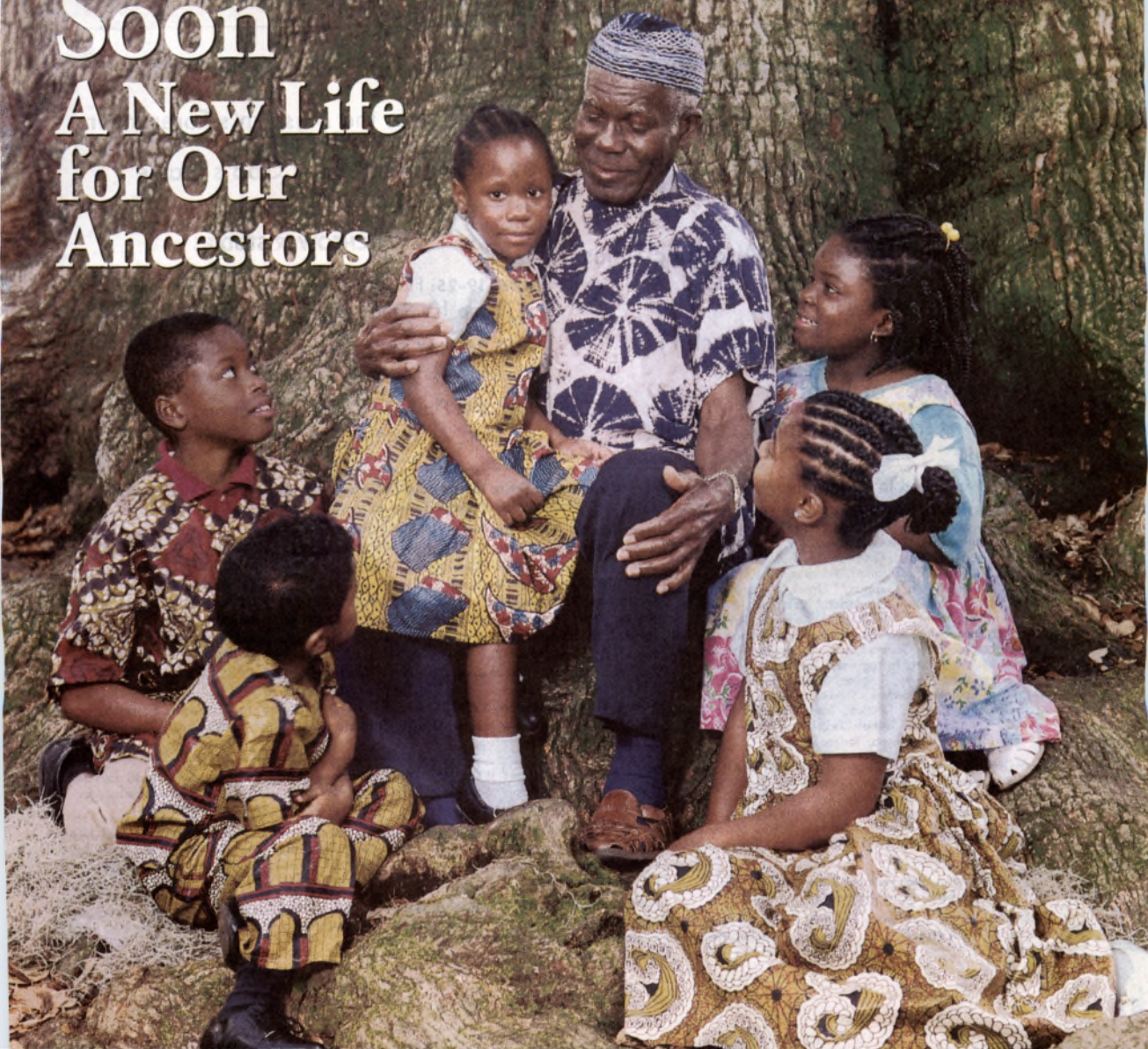


MAY 15, 1995

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Soon
A New Life
for Our
Ancestors



THE WATCHTOWER[®]

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

May 15, 1995

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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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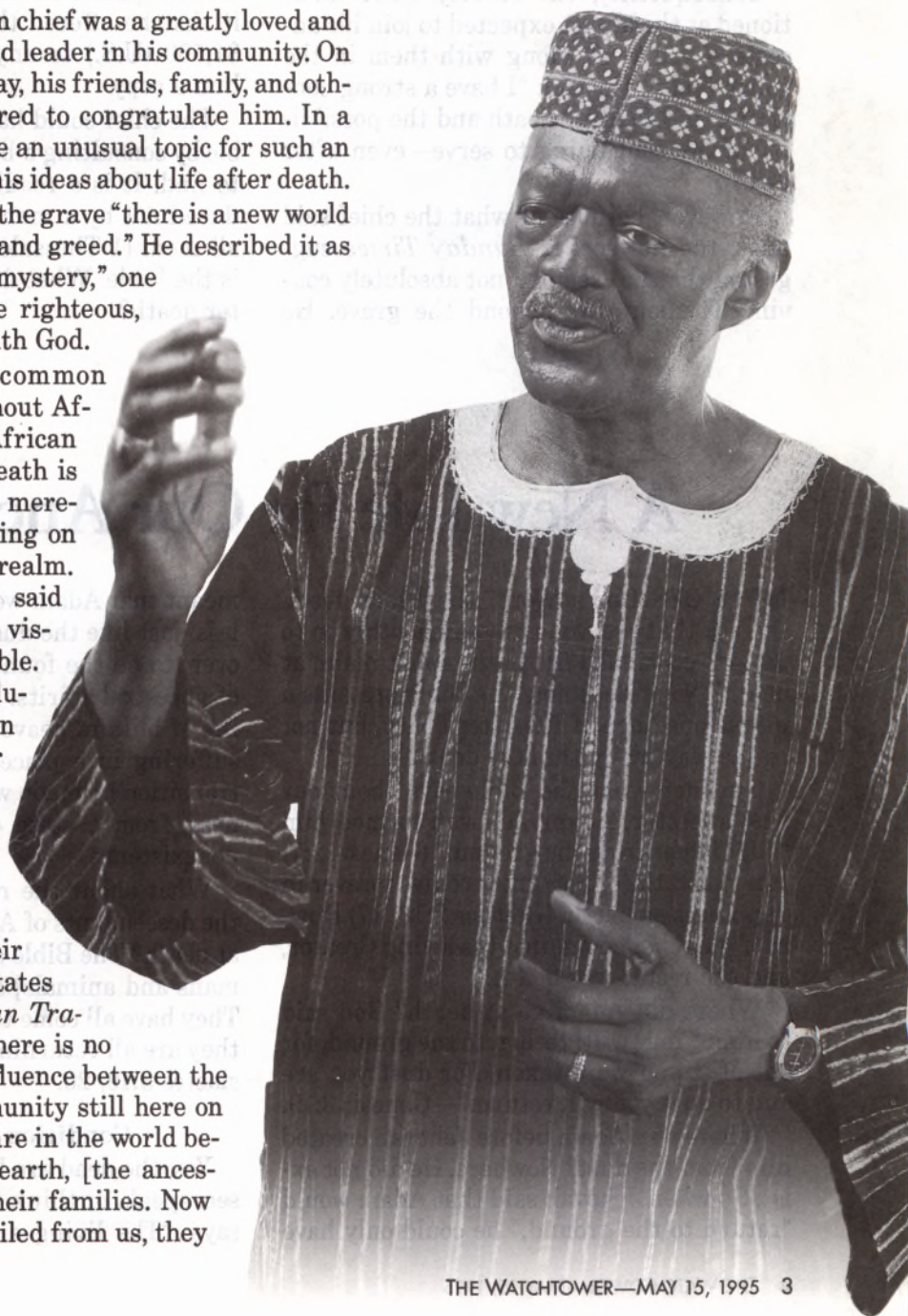
A Chief Considers His Future

THE West African chief was a greatly loved and highly respected leader in his community. On his 78th birthday, his friends, family, and other well-wishers gathered to congratulate him. In a speech, the chief chose an unusual topic for such an occasion. He spoke of his ideas about life after death.

He said that beyond the grave "there is a new world devoid of deceit, envy and greed." He described it as a world "shrouded in mystery," one populated only by the righteous, who would interact with God.

Such beliefs are common among people throughout Africa. According to African traditional religion, death is not an end to life but merely a transition, a passing on to life in the spirit realm. At death a person is said to cross over from the visible world to the invisible. As a spirit, the individual then enters a domain inhabited by his or her ancestors.

Many West Africans believe that the ancestors, or ancestral spirits, ensure the well-being of their families on earth. States the book *West African Traditional Religion*: "There is no rigid distinction of influence between the members of the community still here on earth, and those that are in the world beyond. When here on earth, [the ancestors] were elders of their families. Now that they have been veiled from us, they



are still elders in the world of the spirits. They do not cease to interest themselves in the general welfare of their families.”

Consequently, the elderly chief mentioned at the outset expected to join his ancestors and work along with them in the spirit realm. He said: “I have a strong conviction in life after death and the possibility of my continuing to serve—even after death.”

However, because of what the chief said next, the newspaper *Sunday Times* suggested that he “seemed not absolutely convinced” about life beyond the grave. He

told the assembled crowd that he had heard about a book that discussed life after death. The chief had been searching for the book for five years. So anxious was he to read it that he offered the equivalent of about \$1,500 (U.S.) to anyone who would bring him a copy.

The chief could have saved himself trouble by consulting a book that is not difficult to find. It is a readily available book produced not by a man but by the Creator of all men. (1 Thessalonians 2:13) That book is the Bible. What does it say about life after death?

A New Life for Our Ancestors

DOES God’s Word, the Bible, teach that everyone passes smoothly on to continued life in the spirit realm at death? No, it does not. The Bible presents a marvelous hope of life after death, but not in the way many think it does.

Consider what the Bible says about our first ancestor, Adam. Jehovah formed him “out of dust from the ground.” (Genesis 2:7) Adam had the opportunity to live forever in happiness on earth. (Genesis 2:16, 17) However, he rebelled against his loving Creator, and the result was death.

Where did Adam go at death? God said to him: “You [will] return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are and to dust you will return.”—Genesis 3:19.

Where was Adam before Jehovah created him from the dust? Nowhere. He did not exist. So when Jehovah said that Adam would “return to the ground,” he could only have

meant that Adam would again become lifeless, just like the dust. Adam did not ‘cross over’ to be the founding father of a world of ancestral spirits. He passed neither to a life of bliss in heaven nor to an eternity of suffering in a place of torment. The only transition he made was from life to lifelessness, from a state of existence to one of nonexistence.

What about the rest of humankind? Do the descendants of Adam also cease to exist at death? The Bible answers: “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.”—Ecclesiastes 3:19, 20.

Condition of the Dead

Yes, the dead are lifeless, unable to hear, see, speak, or think. For example, the Bible says: “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." The Bible also states: "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.

According to God's Word, therefore, while people are alive, they are aware of death. When death occurs, however, they are aware of nothing. They do not stand beside their own corpse, observing what is done to it. In nonexistence there is neither pleasure nor pain, neither joy nor sorrow. Those dead are not aware of the passing of time. Theirs is an unconscious state deeper than any sleep.

Job, a servant of God in ancient times, knew that people did not continue to live on after death. He also understood that without God's intervention, there would be no hope of coming to life again. Job said: "An able-bodied man dies and lies vanquished; and an earthling man expires, and where is he? [He] has to lie down and does not get up." (Job 14:10, 12) Job certainly did not expect that when he died he would join his ancestors in a world of spirits.

The Resurrection Hope

Since the living cease to exist at death, the critical question is the one that Job raised when he went on to ask: "If an able-bodied man dies can he live again?" Job himself gave this answer: "All the days of my compulsory service [time in the grave] I shall wait, until my relief comes. You [Jehovah] will call, and I myself shall answer you. For the work of your hands you will have a yearning."—Job 14:14, 15.

In other words, although Job would pass into nonexistence, God would not forget him. Job had faith that the time would

come when Jehovah God would "call" him back to life by means of a resurrection.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, showed that Job's hope in the resurrection was a realistic one. Jesus proved that the dead can be raised. How? By his doing it! He was not there to resurrect Job, but while on earth Jesus did resurrect the son of a widow from the city of Nain. Jesus also raised to life the 12-year-old daughter of a man named Jairus. And he resurrected his friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days.—Luke 7: 11-15; 8:41, 42, 49-56; John 11:38-44.

In addition to performing these miracles, Jesus spoke of a great future resurrection. He said: "The hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his voice and come out." (John 5:28, 29) Later, the apostle Paul, whom Jehovah used to resurrect a young man, also expressed belief in a future resurrection. He said: "I have hope toward God . . . that there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous."—Acts 20:7-12; 24:15.

These Scriptural references to a future resurrection do not pertain to continued life in the spirit realm. They point to the time when millions of the dead will return to life in physical bodies right here on earth. These resurrected ones will not be people who have no memory of their previous life on earth. They will not be reborn as infants. Instead, they will be the same persons they were when they died, possessing the same memories and personality. They will be recognizable to themselves and to others. What a joy it will be as these people rejoin their friends and families! And how exciting it will be to meet our ancestors!

Resurrection to Life in Heaven

Did Jesus not say that some would go to heaven? Yes, he did. On the evening before

he was put to death, he said: "In the house of my Father there are many abodes. . . . I am going my way to prepare a place for you. Also, if I go my way and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will receive you home to myself, that where I am you also may be." (John 14:2, 3) Jesus was talking to his faithful apostles, but his words do not mean that all good people go to heaven.

Jesus showed that those resurrected to heaven must meet requirements other than just living a good life. One requirement is to have accurate knowledge of Jehovah and his purposes. (John 17:3) Other requirements are to exercise faith in Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice and to obey God. (John 3:16; 1 John 5:3) Still another requirement is to be "born again" as a baptized Christian begotten by God's holy spirit. (John 1:12, 13; 3:3-6) A further requirement for heavenly life is to endure as Jesus did, proving faithful to God even to death.—Luke 22:29; Revelation 2:10.

There is a reason for such high requirements. Those resurrected to heaven have an important work to do. Jehovah knew that human governments could never successfully manage affairs on earth. So he arranged for a heavenly government, or Kingdom, that would rule over humankind. (Matthew 6:9, 10) Jesus would be King of that Kingdom. (Daniel 7:13, 14) Some selected from earth and resurrected to heaven would rule with him. The Bible foretold that these resurrected ones would become "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they [would] rule as kings over the earth."—Revelation 5:10.

Would large numbers of people meet the requirements for a heavenly resurrection? No. Through no fault of their own, most of those sleeping in death do not qualify. Many had little or no opportunity to learn the truth about Jehovah and his purposes. They

lived and died without any knowledge of Jesus Christ or of God's Kingdom.

Jesus called those who would go to heaven a "little flock." (Luke 12:32) Later it was revealed that the number of those "bought from the earth" to rule with Christ in heaven would be 144,000. (Revelation 14:1-3; 20:6) While 144,000 is a number large enough to occupy the "many abodes" Jesus referred to, it is small when compared with the billions of people who have descended from Adam.—John 14:2.

Events Before the Earthly Resurrection

Let us review what we have discussed so far. According to the Bible, those who die are lifeless in death until they are resurrected by Jehovah God. Some are resurrected to life in heaven, where they will rule with Jesus Christ in the Kingdom government. Most people will be resurrected on the earth, to become subjects of that Kingdom.

Partly by means of the earthly resurrection, Jehovah will fulfill his purpose for the earth. Jehovah created it "to be inhabited." (Isaiah 45:18) It was to be the permanent home of humankind. Hence, the psalmist sang: "As regards the heavens, to Jehovah the heavens belong, but the earth he has given to the sons of men."—Psalm 115:16.

Before the resurrection to life on earth begins, great changes must take place. You will probably agree that it was not God's purpose for the earth to become filled with war, pollution, crime, and violence. These problems are caused by people who have no respect for God and his righteous laws. Therefore, God's Kingdom will "bring to ruin those ruining the earth"—a major step in bringing about his will on earth. (Revelation 11:18) The Kingdom will destroy all wicked people, leaving the righteous to live on the earth forever.—Psalm 37:9, 29.

Paradise on Earth

Those who are resurrected on a cleansed earth will be mild-tempered, caring people who do what is right. (Compare Matthew 5:5.) Under the loving oversight of God's Kingdom, they will live happy lives in security. The Bible gives this wonderful preview of conditions that will then prevail: "[God] will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away." —Revelation 21:4.

Yes, the earth will be transformed into a paradise. (Luke 23:43) Think what that will

mean! Hospitals and nursing homes will be obsolete. In Paradise, those who are now racked by the effects of old age will be strong and healthy again. (Job 33:25; Isaiah 35:5, 6) No longer will there be funeral parlors, cemeteries, and tombstones. By means of his Kingdom, Jehovah will "swallow up death forever." (Isaiah 25:8) Such blessings can surely mean a new life for us and for our ancestors.

*Those resurrected on earth
will be subjects of the Kingdom*



Jehovah's Witnesses Around the World

SWEDEN occupies the eastern side of the Scandinavian peninsula and stretches above the Arctic Circle. Renowned the world over for its lush mantle of evergreen forests as well as for its lakes and mountains, Sweden is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe. Nonetheless, Jehovah's Witnesses have successfully sought out truth lovers there since the late 1800's. Consider a recent example.

A woman studied the Bible with the Witnesses, but her husband did not like this. He told his wife to quit studying, and she did. This man worked at a storehouse for brewery products. One day a truck driver came to the storehouse with his ten-year-old grandson. The grandfather asked the man to watch the boy while he loaded his truck. For the sake of conversation, the man asked the boy what presents he had received for his recent birthday. To the man's surprise, the boy told him that he and his family did not celebrate birthdays because they were Jehovah's Witnesses. The boy also told him that he got presents at other times of the year and did not miss anything, since he had a very warm and loving family. No gifts were worth as much as that, he added.

The boy returned with his grandfather several times. Each

time, the man would ask the boy a lot of questions, and he was deeply impressed by the way the boy gave honest, straightforward answers without any hesitation. He was also moved by the boy's appreciation for true values. One night after the man watched a television program that showed the miserable conditions in the world, he realized that he had to examine spiritual things more seriously. He phoned the Witness who had studied with his wife and asked her to come back. Soon the man was being studied with by a Witness and made rapid progress. He was baptized on April 10, 1994. His wife is now baptized as well.

Growth Requires Building

Sweden is home to many refugees from other lands, and the Swedish Witnesses have had good results in preaching to them. In general the work has met with such success that new Kingdom Halls have been needed to accommodate the expansion. From 1986 to 1993, 37 Kingdom Halls were built by the quickly built construction method, while 8 halls were enlarged and renovated. In 1994 alone, seven additional Kingdom Halls were built, and three were renovated.

At present, there are 65 congregations waiting for help to

build a new Kingdom Hall or to enlarge or renovate their present one. Some 2,500 volunteers help out with such construction projects, and the congregations greatly appreciate their loving assistance.

The northern part of Sweden, which extends above the Arctic Circle, is sometimes called the land of the midnight sun. This is so because during part of the summer the sun never sets there. Throughout Sweden, however, the light of truth is also continuing to shine brightly. With Jehovah's blessing, that spiritual light will never grow dim but will go on shining brighter and brighter.



COUNTRY PROFILE 1994 Service Year

PEAK NUMBER WITNESSING:
24,246

RATIO:
1 Witness to 362

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE:
40,372

AVERAGE PIONEER PUBLISHERS:
2,509

AVERAGE BIBLE STUDIES:
11,306

NUMBER BAPTIZED:
850

NUMBER OF CONGREGATIONS:
358

BRANCH OFFICE:
ARBOGA



SWEDEN



**The branch office and
Bethel Home at Arboga**



**The early Witnesses in Hjo used this minibus
to cover a territory of some 1,900 square miles**

FLASHES OF LIGHT IN APOSTOLIC TIMES

*“Light itself has flashed up for the righteous one,
and rejoicing even for the ones upright in heart.”—PSALM 97:11.*

HOW much we, as true Christians, appreciate the words of Psalm 97:11! ‘Light has flashed up’ for us repeatedly. Indeed, some of us have seen Jehovah’s flashing illumination for decades. All of this reminds us of Proverbs 4:18, which reads: “The path of the righteous ones is like the bright light that is getting lighter and lighter until the day is firmly established.” In our appreciation for the Scriptures instead of tradition, we Witnesses of Jehovah resemble the early Christians. Their attitude can be clearly seen from the historical books of the Christian Greek Scriptures and from its letters, written under divine inspiration.

1. How do Jehovah’s Witnesses today resemble the early Christians?

² Among the first flashes of light the early followers of Jesus Christ received were those having to do with the Messiah. Andrew told his brother Simon Peter: “We have found the Messiah.” (John 1:41) Some time later, the Father in heaven enabled the apostle Peter to testify to that effect when he said to Jesus Christ: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”—Matthew 16:16, 17; John 6:68, 69.

Light on Their Preaching Commission

³ After his resurrection, Jesus Christ gave flashes of light regarding an obliga-

2. What were among the first flashes of light that Jesus’ followers received?

3, 4. After his resurrection, what enlightenment did Jesus give his followers regarding their future activity?



tion resting on all his followers. Most likely it was to the 500 disciples assembled in Galilee that he said: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. And, look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 15:6) Thereafter, all followers of Christ were to be preachers, and their preaching commission was not to be limited to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:6) Nor were they to perform John's baptism in symbol of repentance for forgiveness of sins. Instead, they were to baptize people "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit."

⁴ Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, his 11 faithful apostles asked: "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" Instead of answering that question, Jesus gave further instructions about their preaching commission, saying: "You will receive power when the holy spirit arrives upon you, and you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." Until then, they had been witnesses solely of Jehovah, but now they would also be witnesses of Christ.—Acts 1:6-8.

⁵ Just ten days later, what brilliant flashes of light Jesus' followers received! On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., for the first time, they appreciated the significance of Joel 2: 28, 29: "I [Jehovah] shall pour out my spirit on every sort of flesh, and your sons and your daughters will certainly prophesy. As for your old men, dreams they will dream. As for your young men, visions they will

see. And even on the menservants and on the maidservants in those days I shall pour out my spirit." Jesus' disciples saw the holy spirit, in the form of tongues as if of fire, resting on the heads of all of them—about 120 men and women—assembled in Jerusalem.—Acts 1:12-15; 2:1-4.

⁶ Also on the day of Pentecost, the disciples first understood that the words of Psalm 16:10 applied to the resurrected Jesus Christ. The psalmist had said: "You [Jehovah God] will not leave my soul in Sheol. You will not allow your loyal one to see the pit." The disciples realized that those words could not have applied to King David, for his tomb was with them until that day. No wonder about 3,000 of those who heard this new light explained were so convinced that they got baptized that very day!—Acts 2:14-41.

⁷ For many centuries, the Israelites appreciated what God had said about them: "You people only have I known out of all the families of the ground." (Amos 3:2) So it was indeed a brilliant flash of light that the apostle Peter and those accompanying him to the house of the Roman army officer Cornelius received when the holy spirit for the first time descended upon uncircumcised Gentile believers. It is noteworthy that this was the only time that the holy spirit was given before baptism. But it had to be that way. Otherwise, Peter would not have known that these uncircumcised Gentiles were qualified for baptism. Fully appreciating the significance of this phenomenon, Peter asked: "Can anyone forbid water so that these [Gentiles] might not be baptized who have received the holy spirit even as we have?" Of course, nobody present could rightly object, and the baptism of

5, 6. What flashes of light did Jesus' disciples receive at Pentecost?

7. What brilliant light did the apostle Peter receive during his visit to the Roman army officer Cornelius?

these Gentiles therefore took place.—Acts 10:44-48; compare Acts 8:14-17.

No More Circumcision

⁸ A further bright flash of truth appeared in connection with the question of circumcision. The practice of circumcision had its beginning in 1919 B.C.E. with Jehovah's covenant with Abraham. God then commanded Abraham that he and all other males of his household were to get circumcised. (Genesis 17:9-14, 23-27) So circumcision became an identifying mark of the descendants of Abraham. And how proud they were of this practice! As a result, "uncircumcised" came to be a term of contempt. (Isaiah 52:1; 1 Samuel 17:26, 27) It is easy to see why certain early Jewish Christians wanted to retain this symbol. Some of them had quite a discussion with Paul and Barnabas about this matter. To settle it, Paul and others went to Jerusalem to consult the Christian governing body.—Acts 15:1, 2.

⁹ This time, it was not by means of an obvious miracle that those early Christians received the light that circumcision was no longer a requirement for Jehovah's servants. Rather, they received that increased light by searching the Scriptures, looking to the holy spirit for guidance, and hearing the experiences of Peter and Paul regarding the conversion of uncircumcised Gentiles. (Acts 15:6-21) The decision was issued in a letter that read in part: "The holy spirit and we ourselves have favored adding no further burden to you, except these necessary things, to keep abstaining from things sacrificed to idols and from blood

8. Why did some early Christians find it difficult to let go of circumcision?

9. What flashes of light were revealed to the early governing body, as recorded in Acts chapter 15?

and from things strangled and from fornication." (Acts 15:28, 29) The early Christians were thus set free from the command to practice circumcision and from the other requirements of the Mosaic Law. Hence, Paul could tell the Galatian Christians: "For such freedom Christ set us free."—Galatians 5:1.

Light in the Gospels

¹⁰ There is no question that the Gospel of Matthew, written about 41 C.E., contains many flashes of light for the benefit of its readers. Comparatively few of the first-century Christians had personally heard Jesus expound his teachings. In particular, Matthew's Gospel emphasized that the theme of Jesus' preaching was the Kingdom. And how strongly Jesus had stressed the importance of having the right motive! What flashes of light there were in his Sermon on the Mount, in his parables (such as those recorded in chapter 13), and in his great prophecy in chapters 24 and 25! All of this was brought to the attention of the early Christians in Matthew's Gospel account, written only some eight years after Pentecost 33 C.E.

¹¹ About 15 years later, Luke penned his Gospel. While much of it is similar to Matthew's account, 59 percent is additional. Luke recorded six of Jesus' miracles and more than twice that many of His illustrations not mentioned by the other Gospel writers. Apparently just a few years later, Mark wrote his Gospel, placing emphasis on Jesus Christ as a man of action, a miracle worker. While Mark mostly related events previously covered by Matthew and Luke, he did record one parable

10. What were some of the flashes of light revealed in Matthew's Gospel?

11. What can be said about the content of the Gospels of Luke and Mark?

that they did not. In that illustration, Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to seed that sprouts, grows tall, and bears fruit gradually.*—Mark 4:26-29.

¹² Then there was John's Gospel, written more than 30 years after Mark wrote his account. What a stream of light John threw on Jesus' ministry, particularly through many references to His prehuman existence! Only John provides the account of Lazarus' resurrection, and he alone gives us many of Jesus' fine remarks to his faithful apostles as well as his heartwarming prayer on the night of his betrayal, as recorded in chapters 13 to 17. In fact, it is said that 92 percent of John's Gospel is unique.

Flashes of Light in Paul's Letters

¹³ The apostle Paul was especially used to bring flashes of truth to Christians living in apostolic times. For instance, there is Paul's letter to the Romans, written about 56 C.E.—approximately the same time that Luke wrote his Gospel. In this letter Paul highlights the fact that righteousness is imputed as a result of God's undeserved kindness and through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's emphasis on this aspect of the good news has caused some to view his letter to the Romans as if it were a fifth Gospel.

¹⁴ Paul wrote about certain matters that were troubling the Christians in Corinth.

* The ground here refers to the environment in which the Christian chooses to cultivate qualities of personality.—See *The Watchtower*, June 15, 1980, pages 18-19.

12. To what extent did John's Gospel provide further enlightenment?

13. Why have some looked upon Paul's letter to the Romans as though it were a Gospel?

14-16. (a) In his first letter to Christians in Corinth, what light did Paul shed on the need for unity? (b) What further light as to conduct does First Corinthians contain?

His letter to the Corinthians includes much inspired counsel that has benefited Christians down to our day. To begin with, he had to enlighten the Corinthians as to the mistake they were making in forming personality cults around certain individuals. The apostle set them straight, boldly telling them: "I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should all speak in agreement, and that there should not be divisions among you, but that you may be fitly united in the same mind and in the same line of thought."—1 Corinthians 1:10-15.

¹⁵ Gross immorality was being tolerated in the Christian congregation at Corinth. A man there had taken his father's wife, thus practicing 'such fornication as was not found even among the nations.' Plainly, Paul wrote: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." (1 Corinthians 5:1, 11-13) That was something new for the Christian congregation—disfellowshipping. Another matter on which the Corinthian congregation needed enlightenment had to do with the fact that some of its members were taking their spiritual brothers to worldly courts in order to settle grievances. Paul strongly rebuked them for doing this.—1 Corinthians 6:5-8.

In Our Next Issue

The Promise of a World
Without Corruption

Although Grieving,
We Are Not Without Hope

Godly Obedience
in a Religiously Divided Family

¹⁶ Still another matter that plagued the congregation in Corinth had to do with sex relations. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, Paul showed that because of the prevalence of sexual immorality, it would be good for every man to have his own wife and every woman her own husband. Paul also showed that while single persons are able to serve Jehovah with less distraction, not all had the gift of singleness. And if a woman's husband should die, she would be free to get married again but "only in the Lord."—1 Corinthians 7:39.

¹⁷ What flashes of light the Lord used Paul to shed on the resurrection! With what sort of body will anointed Christians be raised? "It is sown a physical body, it is raised up a spiritual body," wrote Paul. No fleshly bodies will be taken to heaven, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom." Paul added that not all anointed ones will sleep in death but that during Jesus' presence some will be raised to immortal life instantly at death.—1 Corinthians 15:43-53.

¹⁸ In his letter to Christians in Thessalonica, Paul was used to throw light on the future. Jehovah's day would come as a thief in the night. Paul also explained: "Whenever it is that they are saying: 'Peace and security!' then sudden destruction is to be instantly upon them just as the pang of distress upon a pregnant woman; and they will by no means escape."—1 Thessalonians 5:2, 3.

¹⁹ By writing his letter to the Hebrews, Paul passed on flashes of light to the early

17. What light did Paul shed on the teaching of the resurrection?

18. What light regarding the future did Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians contain?

19, 20. What flashes of light did the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea receive in Paul's letter to the Hebrews?

Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. How powerfully he showed the superiority of the Christian system of worship over the Mosaic system of worship! Instead of following the Law transmitted by angels, Christians have faith in a salvation first spoken of by God's Son, who is far superior to such angelic messengers. (Hebrews 2:2-4) Moses was a mere attendant in the house of God. However, Jesus Christ presides over the entire house. Christ is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, having a position far superior to the Aaronic priesthood. Paul also pointed out that the Israelites were unable to enter into God's rest because of a lack of faith and obedience, but Christians enter into it because of their faithfulness and obedience.—Hebrews 3:1-4:11.

²⁰ Then, too, the new covenant is far superior to the Law covenant. As prophesied 600 years earlier at Jeremiah 31:31-34, those in the new covenant have God's law written in their hearts and enjoy true forgiveness of sins. Instead of having a high priest who had to offer sacrifices yearly for his own sins and those of the people, Christians have as their High Priest Jesus Christ, who is without sin and who once and for all offered a sacrifice for sins. Instead of entering a holy place made by hands to present his offering, he entered

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What Bible texts show that understanding of the truth is progressive?
- ☐ What are some of the flashes of light recorded in the book of Acts?
- ☐ What light is found in the Gospels?
- ☐ Paul's letters contain what flashes of light?

heaven itself, there to appear before the person of Jehovah. Moreover, animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law covenant could not completely take away sins, or they would not have been offered annually. But Christ's sacrifice, offered once for all time, does take away sins. All of this sheds light on the great spiritual temple, in the court-yards of which the anointed remnant and the "other sheep" serve today.—John 10:16; Hebrews 9:24-28.

²¹ Space does not permit giving more examples, such as flashes of light found in the letters of the apostle Peter and those of the disciples James and Jude. But the foregoing should suffice to show that Psalm 97:11

21. What has this discussion shown as to the fulfillment of Psalm 97:11 and Proverbs 4:18 in apostolic times?

and Proverbs 4:18 had striking fulfillments in apostolic times. The truth began to advance from types and shadows to fulfillments and realities.—Galatians 3:23-25; 4:21-26.

²² After the death of Jesus' apostles and the onset of the foretold apostasy, the light of truth burned very low. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-11) True to Jesus' promise, however, after many centuries the Master returned and found "the faithful and discreet slave" giving the "domestics" their food at the proper time. As a result, Jesus Christ appointed that slave "over all his belongings." (Matthew 24:45-47) What flashes of light followed? This will be discussed in the following article.

22. What happened after the death of the apostles, and what will the next article show?

FLASHES OF LIGHT —GREAT AND SMALL

P A R T O N E

"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.

IT IS proof of divine wisdom that, in keeping with Proverbs 4:18, the revealing of spiritual truths has taken place gradually by means of flashes of light. In the preceding article, we saw how this text was fulfilled in apostolic times. If the large body of Scriptural truth had been revealed

1. Why has the truth been revealed gradually?

all at once, it would have been both blinding and confusing—much like the effect of coming out of a dark cave into brilliant sunlight. Moreover, gradually revealed truth strengthens the faith of Christians in a continuous way. It makes ever brighter their hope and ever clearer the pathway they are to tread.

"The Faithful and Discreet Slave"

² In apostolic times Jesus Christ saw fit to use supernatural means to give his followers the earliest flashes of light. We have two examples of this: Pentecost 33 C.E. and the conversion of Cornelius in 36 C.E. Subsequently, Christ has seen fit to use a human agency, even as he foretold: "Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time? Happy is that slave if his master on arriving finds him doing so. Truly I say to you, He will appoint him over all his belongings." (Matthew 24:45-47) This slave could not be just one individual because he was to provide spiritual food from when the Christian congregation began at Pentecost until the Master, Jesus Christ, came to make an accounting. The facts indicate that this faithful and discreet slave class comprises all anointed Christians as a group on earth at any given time.

³ Who were included among the first members of the faithful and discreet slave class? One was the apostle Peter, who heeded Jesus' command: "Feed my little sheep." (John 21:17) Other early members of the slave class included Matthew, who wrote the Gospel bearing his name, and Paul, James, and Jude, who penned inspired letters. The apostle John, who recorded the book of Revelation, his Gospel, and his letters, was also a member of the faithful and discreet slave class. These men wrote in keeping with Jesus' commission.

⁴ If all the anointed as a group, no mat-

2. Jesus indicated that he would use whom to bring spiritual light to his followers, and of whom does that instrumentality consist?

3. Who were included among the first members of the slave class?

4. Who are the "domestics"?

ter where on earth they live, are members of the slave class, who are the "domestics"? They are the same anointed ones but considered from a different viewpoint—as individuals. Yes, as individuals they would be of the "slave" or they would be "domestics," depending on whether they were dispensing spiritual food or partaking of it. To illustrate: As recorded at 2 Peter 3:15, 16, the apostle Peter makes reference to Paul's letters. When reading them, Peter would be as one of the domestics feeding on the spiritual food provided by Paul as a representative of the slave class.

⁵ In this regard, the book *God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached* stated: "As to just how the 'faithful and discreet slave' class existed and served down through the centuries after the death of the apostles of the Master Jesus Christ, we do not have a distinct historical picture. Apparently one generation of the 'slave' class fed the next succeeding generation thereof. (2 Timothy 2:2) But in the latter half of the nineteenth century there were God-fearing persons who loved the spiritual food of the Holy Bible and who desired to feed on it . . . Bible study classes . . . were formed and progressed in the understanding of the fundamental truths of the Sacred Scriptures. The sincere unselfish ones among these Bible students were eager to share these vital portions of spiritual food with others. They had the faithful spirit of the 'slave' appointed to give the 'domestics' the needed spiritual 'food at the proper time.' They were 'discreet' in discerning that it was then the right and proper time and what were the best means

5. (a) What happened to the slave during the centuries after the apostles? (b) What developments took place in the latter half of the 19th century?

for serving the food. They endeavored to serve it.”—Pages 344-5.*

Early Flashes of Light in Modern Times

⁶ One fact that stands out prominently in connection with those Jehovah used to bring this gradual increase of spiritual light is that they took no credit to themselves. The attitude of C. T. Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Society, was that the Lord was pleased to use their humble talents. Regarding epithets his enemies were prone to use, Brother Russell strongly made it known that he had never met a “Russellite” and that there was no such thing as “Russellism.” All credit went to God.

⁷ Judging by the results, there can be no doubt that Jehovah’s holy spirit was directing the endeavors of Brother Russell and those associated with him. They gave evidence of being identified with the faithful and discreet slave. Though many clergymen of the time professed to believe that the Bible was God’s inspired Word and that Jesus was the Son of God, they subscribed to false, Babylonish doctrines, such as the Trinity, the immortality of the human soul, and eternal torment. In keeping with Jesus’ promise, it truly was due to the holy spirit that the humble efforts of Brother Russell and his associates caused truth to shine forth as never before. (John 16:13) Those anointed Bible Students gave proof that they were indeed part of the faithful and discreet slave class, whose commission

it is to provide spiritual food for the Master’s domestics. Their efforts were a great aid in the gathering of the anointed ones.

⁸ It is remarkable to see how greatly Jehovah, by means of holy spirit, favored these early Bible Students with flashes of light. To begin with, they firmly established that the Creator exists and that he has the unique name Jehovah. (Psalm 83:18; Romans 1:20) They saw that Jehovah has four cardinal attributes—power, justice, wisdom, and love. (Genesis 17:1; Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 11:33; 1 John 4:8) These anointed Christians clearly established that the Bible is God’s inspired Word and is the truth. (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Further, they held that God’s Son, Jesus Christ, was created and that he gave his life as a ransom for all mankind. (Matthew 20:28; Colossians 1:15) The holy spirit, far from being a third person of a

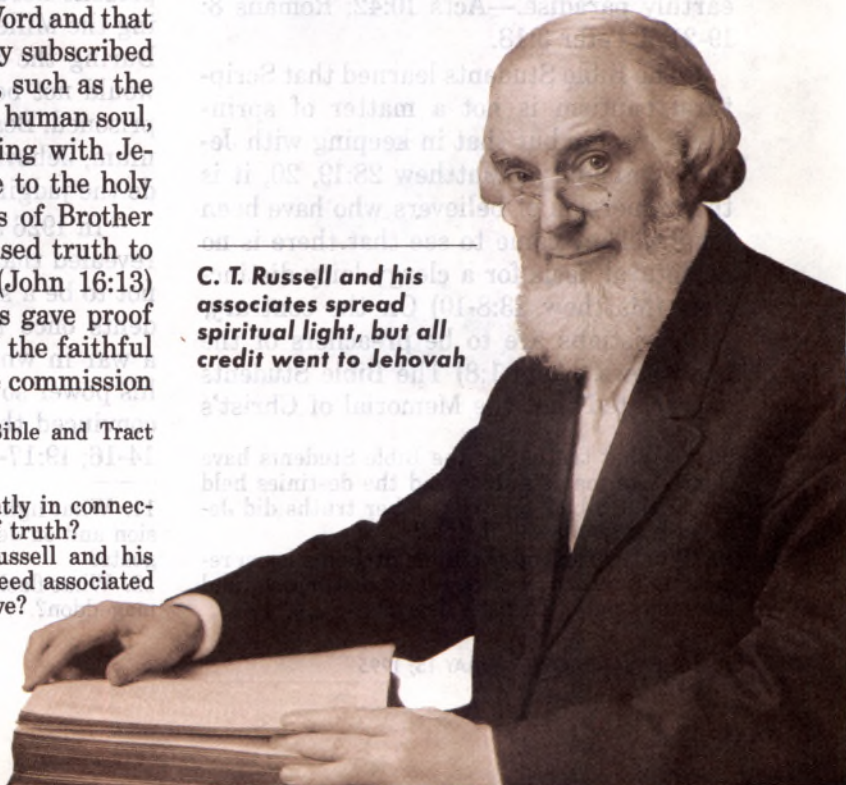
8. What basic facts regarding Jehovah, the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the holy spirit did the Bible Students clearly understand?

**C. T. Russell and his
associates spread
spiritual light, but all
credit went to Jehovah**

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

6. What fact stands out prominently in connection with the gradual revealing of truth?

7. What evidence did Brother Russell and his coworkers give that they were indeed associated with the faithful and discreet slave?



Trinity, was seen to be God's active force.—Acts 2:17.

⁹ The Bible Students clearly saw that man does not have an immortal soul but is a mortal soul. They realized that "the wages sin pays is death," not eternal torment, there being no such place as a burning hell. (Romans 5:12; 6:23; Genesis 2:7; Ezekiel 18:4) Moreover, they clearly saw that the evolution theory is not only unscriptural but utterly without factual basis. (Genesis, chapters 1 and 2) They also discerned that the Bible holds out two destinies—a heavenly one for the 144,000 anointed footstep followers of Christ and a paradise earth for an unnumbered "great crowd" of "other sheep." (Revelation 7:9; 14:1; John 10:16) Those early Bible Students recognized that the earth abides forever and will not be burned up, as taught by many religions. (Ecclesiastes 1:4; Luke 23:43) They also learned that Christ's return would be invisible and that he would then execute judgment on the nations and usher in an earthly paradise.—Acts 10:42; Romans 8:19-21; 1 Peter 3:18.

¹⁰ The Bible Students learned that Scriptural baptism is not a matter of sprinkling infants but that in keeping with Jesus' command at Matthew 28:19, 20, it is the immersion of believers who have been taught. They came to see that there is no Scriptural basis for a clergy-laity distinction. (Matthew 23:8-10) On the contrary, all Christians are to be preachers of the good news. (Acts 1:8) The Bible Students appreciated that the Memorial of Christ's

9. (a) What truths did the Bible Students have clear as to man's nature and the destinies held out in the Bible? (b) What other truths did Jehovah's servants see clearly?

10. What truths did the Bible Students learn regarding baptism, a clergy-laity distinction, and the Memorial of Christ's death?

death should be observed just once each year, on Nisan 14. Moreover, they saw that Easter is a pagan holiday. In addition, those anointed ones were so confident that God was backing their work that they never took up collections. (Matthew 10:8) From earliest times, they understood that Christians must live by Bible principles, which includes cultivating the fruitage of God's holy spirit.—Galatians 5:22, 23.

Increasing Flashes of Light

¹¹ Particularly since 1919 have Jehovah's servants been blessed with increasing flashes of light. What a bright flash of light shone at the 1922 Cedar Point convention as J. F. Rutherford, the Watch Tower Society's second president, drove home the point that the prime obligation of Jehovah's servants is to "advertise, advertise, advertise, the King and his kingdom"! The very next year, bright light shone on the parable of the sheep and the goats. It was seen that this prophecy was to be fulfilled in the present Lord's day, not in the future during the Millennium as previously thought. During the Millennium, Christ's brothers would not be sick, nor would they be imprisoned. Besides, at the end of the Millennium, Jehovah God, not Jesus Christ, will do the judging.—Matthew 25:31-46.

¹² In 1926 another brilliant flash of light revealed that the war of Armageddon was not to be a social revolution, as Bible Students once thought. Rather, it would be a war in which Jehovah will demonstrate his power so clearly that all people will be convinced that he is God.—Revelation 16:14-16; 19:17-21.

11. What light shone on the Christian's commission and on Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats?

12. What flash of light was there regarding Armageddon?

Christmas—A Pagan Holiday

¹³ Shortly thereafter, a flash of light caused the Bible Students to stop celebrating Christmas. Before that time Christmas had always been celebrated by the Bible Students worldwide, and its celebration at Brooklyn headquarters was a very festive occasion. But then it was discerned that the observance of December 25 was actually pagan and was chosen by apostate Christendom to make it easier to convert pagans. Moreover, it was found that Jesus could not have been born in the winter, since at the time of his birth, shepherds were grazing their flocks in the fields—something they would not have been doing at night in late December. (Luke 2:8) Rather, the Scriptures indicate that Jesus was born about October 1. The Bible Students also realized that the so-called wise men who visited Jesus about two years after his birth were pagan magi.*

A New Name

¹⁴ In 1931 a bright flash of truth revealed to those Bible Students a fitting Scriptural name. Jehovah's people had understood that they could not accept any of the nicknames that others had given them, such as Russellites, Millennial Dawnists, and "no

* In time, it was seen that if the most important birth that ever took place could not be celebrated, we should not celebrate any birthday. Besides, neither the Israelites nor the early Christians celebrated birthdays. The Bible mentions only two birthdays, one of Pharaoh and the other of Herod Antipas. Each celebration was marred by an execution. Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays because these observances have pagan origins and tend to exalt the ones having a birthday.—Genesis 40:20-22; Mark 6:21-28.

13. (a) What light was shed on Christmas celebrations? (b) Why were birthdays no longer celebrated? (Include footnote.)

14. Why did the name Bible Students not do justice to Jehovah's people?

hellers."* But they also began to appreciate that the name that they themselves had taken—International Bible Students—did not do them justice. They were far more than just Bible students. Besides, there were ever so many others who were students of the Bible but who had nothing in common with the Bible Students.

¹⁵ How did the Bible Students come to have a new name? For years *The Watch Tower* had been making the name of Jehovah prominent. Therefore, it was most appropriate that the Bible Students should adopt the name found at Isaiah 43:10: "You are my witnesses," is the utterance of Jehovah, 'even my servant whom I have chosen, in order that you may know and have faith in me, and that you may understand that I am the same One. Before me there was no God formed, and after me there continued to be none.'"

Vindication and the "Great Crowd"

¹⁶ In the second volume of *Vindication*, published by the Watch Tower Society in 1932, a flash of light revealed that the restoration prophecies recorded by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets did not apply (as once thought) to the fleshly Jews,

* This was a mistake made by a number of Christendom's denominations. Lutheran was a nickname that enemies of Martin Luther gave his followers, who then adopted it. Likewise, the Baptists adopted the nickname that outsiders had given them because they preached baptism by immersion. Somewhat similarly, Methodists adopted a name given them by an outsider. Concerning how the Society of Friends came to be called Quakers, *The World Book Encyclopedia* says: "The word *Quaker* was originally meant as an insult to Fox [the founder], who told an English judge to 'tremble at the Word of the Lord.' The judge called Fox a 'quaker.'"

15. What name did the Bible Students adopt in 1931, and why is it appropriate?

16. Why could the restoration prophecies not apply to the natural Jews' return to Palestine, but to whom do they apply?

who were returning to Palestine in unbelief and with political motivations. Rather, these restoration prophecies, which had a minor fulfillment when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity in 537 B.C.E., had their major fulfillment in spiritual Israel's deliverance and restoration beginning in 1919 and in the resultant prosperity in the spiritual paradise enjoyed by Jehovah's true servants today.

¹⁷ In time, flashes of light revealed that Jehovah's chief purpose was, not the salvation of creatures, but the vindication of his sovereignty. The most important theme of the Bible was seen to be, not the ransom, but the Kingdom, for it will vindicate Jehovah's sovereignty. What a flash of light that was! Dedicated Christians were no longer primarily concerned with their getting to heaven.

¹⁸ In 1935 a bright flash of light revealed that the great crowd mentioned at Revelation 7:9-17 was not a secondary heavenly class. It had been thought that the ones mentioned in those verses were some of the anointed who had not been fully faith-

17, 18. (a) In time, through a flash of light, what was shown to be Jehovah's chief purpose? (b) What flash of light regarding Revelation 7: 9-17 occurred in 1935?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ Who is "the faithful and discreet slave," and who are the "domestics"?
- ☐ What were some of the early flashes of light in modern times?
- ☐ Why was the new name, Jehovah's Witnesses, appropriate?
- ☐ What striking truths were revealed in 1935?

ful and so were standing before the throne instead of sitting on thrones reigning as kings and priests with Jesus Christ. But there simply is no such thing as being partially faithful. One is either faithful or unfaithful. So it was seen that this prophecy referred to the numberless great crowd from all nations who are now being gathered and whose hopes are earthly. They are "the sheep" of Matthew 25:31-46 and the "other sheep" of John 10:16.

The Cross—Not a Christian Symbol

¹⁹ For many years the Bible Students made the cross prominent as a symbol of Christianity. They even had a "cross-and-crown" pin. According to the *King James Version*, Jesus asked his followers to take up their "cross," and many came to believe that he was executed on a cross. (Matthew 16:24; 27:32) For decades this symbol also appeared on the cover of the *Watch Tower* magazine.

²⁰ The book *Riches*, published by the Society in 1936, made clear that Jesus Christ was executed, not on a cross, but on an upright pole, or stake. According to one authority, the Greek word (*stau-ros*) rendered "cross" in the *King James Version* "denotes, primarily, an upright pale or stake. [It is] to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed cross. . . . The latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz." Far from being idolized, the instrument on which Jesus was impaled should be viewed with revulsion.

²¹ There are further examples both of great flashes of light and of those that might be considered small. For a discussion of these, please see the following article.

19, 20. Why can the cross not be a symbol of true Christianity?

21. What will be considered in the following article?

FLASHES OF LIGHT —GREAT AND SMALL

P A R T T W O

“By light from you we can see light.”—PSALM 36:9.

THE Bible book of Revelation has intrigued Christians from early times. It provides a fine example of how the light of truth grows ever brighter. In 1917, Jehovah’s people published an explanation of Revelation in the book *The Finished Mystery*. It fearlessly exposed Christendom’s religious and political leaders, but many of its explanations were borrowed from various sources. Still, *The Finished Mystery* served to test the Bible Students’ loyalty to the visible channel Jehovah was using.

² A striking flash of light shone on the book of Revelation with the publication of the article “Birth of the Nation” in *The Watch Tower* of March 1, 1925. It had been thought that Revelation chapter 12 described a war between pagan Rome and papal Rome, with the male child representing the papacy. But that article showed that Revelation 11:15-18 had a bearing on the meaning of chapter 12, indicating that it relates to the birth of God’s Kingdom.

³ All of this led to a much clearer understanding of Revelation that came with the publication of *Light*, in two volumes, in 1930. Still more refinements appeared in

“Babylon the Great Has Fallen!” God’s Kingdom Rules! (1963) and *“Then Is Finished the Mystery of God”* (1969). Yet, there was still more to learn about the prophetic book of Revelation. Yes, brighter light shone on it in 1988, with the publication of *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!* The key to this progressive enlightenment might be said to be the fact that the prophecy of Revelation applies in “the Lord’s day,” which began in 1914. (Revelation 1:10) The book of Revelation would therefore be understood more clearly as that day progressed.

“The Higher Powers” Clarified

⁴ A bright flash of light was seen in 1962 in connection with Romans 13:1, which says: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers [“superior authorities,” *New World Translation*].” (*King James Version*) The early Bible Students understood that “the higher powers” mentioned there referred to worldly authorities. They took this scripture to mean that if a Christian was drafted in wartime, he would be obligated to put on a uniform, shoulder a gun, and go to the front, to the trenches. It was felt that since a Christian could not kill a fellow human, he would be compelled to

1. What early effort was made to understand the symbolism of the book of Revelation?
2. The article “Birth of the Nation” shed what light on the book of Revelation?
3. What publications shed increased light on Revelation?

- 4, 5. (a) How did the Bible Students view Romans 13:1? (b) What was later seen to be the Scriptural position regarding “the higher powers”?

fire his gun into the air if worst came to worst.*

⁵ *The Watchtower* of November 15 and of December 1, 1962, shed clear light on the subject in discussing Jesus' words at Matthew 22:21: "Pay back . . . Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." Relevant were the apostles' words at Acts 5:29: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men." Christians are subject to Caesar—"the higher powers"—only so long as this does not require that the Christian go contrary to God's law. Subjection to Caesar was seen to be *relative*, not absolute. Christians pay back to Caesar only what does not conflict with God's requirements. How satisfying it was to have clear light on that subject!

Flashes of Light on Organizational Matters

⁶ There was the question of who should serve as elders and deacons in the congregations. To get away from the hierarchical structure prevalent in Christendom, it was concluded that these should be elected democratically by the vote of the members of each congregation. But increasing light contained in *The Watchtower* of September 1 and of October 15, 1932, showed that the Scriptures do not provide for elective elders. So these were replaced by a service committee, and a service director was chosen by the Society.

* In reaction to this view, *The Watch Tower* of June 1 and of June 15, 1929, interpreted "the higher powers" as being Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. It was primarily this position that was corrected in 1962.

6. (a) To get away from the hierarchical structure prevalent in Christendom, what principle was adopted? (b) What was finally seen as the correct way for those having congregation oversight to be chosen?

⁷ *The Watchtower* of June 1 and of June 15, 1938, contained flashes of light showing that the servants in the congregation were to be, not elected, but appointed, that is, appointed theocratically. In 1971 another flash of light showed that each congregation was not to be directed by just one congregation servant. Rather, each should have a body of elders, or overseers, assigned by the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. So by the increasing light over some 40 years, it became evident that elders as well as deacons, now known as ministerial servants, should be appointed by "the faithful and discreet slave," through its Governing Body. (Matthew 24:45-47) This was in line with what took place in apostolic times. Men such as Timothy and Titus were appointed as overseers by the first-century governing body. (1 Timothy 3: 1-7; 5:22; Titus 1:5-9) All of this is in striking fulfillment of Isaiah 60:17: "Instead of the copper I shall bring in gold, and instead of the iron I shall bring in silver, and instead of the wood, copper, and instead of the stones, iron; and I will appoint peace as your overseers and righteousness as your task assigners."

⁸ There was also the matter of the operation of the Watch Tower Society. For many years the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses was synonymous with the board of directors of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, and matters were largely in the hands of its president. As shown in the *1977 Yearbook of Jeho-*

7. Flashes of light resulted in what improvements in the way servants in the congregation were appointed?

8. (a) Increasing truth brought what improvements in the way the Society operated? (b) What are the committees of the Governing Body, and what are their respective spheres of activity or oversight?

vah's Witnesses (pages 258-9), in 1976 the Governing Body began to function with six committees, each assigned to care for certain aspects of the worldwide work. The Personnel Committee deals with personnel matters, including the interests of all who serve in the worldwide Bethel family. The Publishing Committee handles all secular and legal matters, such as property and printing. The Service Committee concerns itself with the witness work and supervises traveling overseers, pioneers, and the activities of congregation publishers. The Teaching Committee is responsible for congregation meetings, special assembly days, circuit assemblies, and district and international conventions as well as the various schools for the spiritual education of God's people. The Writing Committee supervises the preparation and translation of publications in all forms, making sure that everything is in line with the Scriptures. The Chairman's Committee cares for emergencies and other urgent matters.* Also in the 1970's, branch offices of the Watch Tower Society began to be directed by a committee instead of an overseer.

Light Relating to Christian Conduct

⁹ Many flashes of light have pertained to Christian conduct. For instance, consider the matter of neutrality. A particularly bright flash of light beamed forth on this subject in the article "Neutrality" appearing in *The Watchtower* of November 1, 1939. How timely it was, coming just after the beginning of World War II! The ar-

* *The Watchtower* of April 15, 1992, announced that selected brothers mainly of the "other sheep" were being assigned to assist the Governing Body committees, corresponding to the Nethinim of Ezra's day.—John 10:16; Ezra 2:58.

9. How did the light of truth affect the relationship of Christians to the governments of the world?

ticle defined neutrality and showed that Christians must not get involved in political affairs or confrontations between nations. (Micah 4:3, 5; John 17:14, 16) This is a factor in their being hated by all the nations. (Matthew 24:9) The battles of ancient Israel provide no precedent for Christians, as Jesus makes plain at Matthew 26:52. Moreover, not one political nation today is a theocracy, ruled by God, as was ancient Israel.

¹⁰ Light also shone on the sanctity of blood. Some Bible Students thought that the prohibition against the eating of blood, at Acts 15:28, 29, was limited to Jewish Christians. However, Acts 21:25 shows that in apostolic times this command was also applied to those of the nations who became believers. So the sanctity of blood applies to all Christians, as shown in *The Watchtower* of July 1, 1945. That means not just refusing to eat animal blood, as in blood sausage, but also abstaining from human blood, as in the case of blood transfusions.

¹¹ As a result of increased light, habits at first merely frowned upon were later handled with appropriate gravity. An example of this was in connection with the use of tobacco. In *Zion's Watch Tower* of August 1, 1895, Brother Russell directed attention to 1 Corinthians 10:31 and 2 Corinthians 7:1 and wrote: "I cannot see how it would be to God's glory, or to his own profit, for any Christian to use tobacco in any form." Since 1973 it has been clearly understood that no tobacco user can be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1976 it was clarified that no Witness could be employed in a gambling establishment and remain in the congregation.

10. What did flashes of light reveal as to how Christians should regard blood?

11. What was seen regarding the Christian's view of the use of tobacco?

Other Refinements

¹² There has also been increased light on the number of symbolic keys Jesus gave to Peter. The Bible Students held that Peter received two keys that opened up the way for people to become Kingdom heirs—one for the Jews, used at Pentecost 33 C.E., and the other for the Gentiles, used first in 36 C.E. when Peter preached to Cornelius. (Acts 2:14-41; 10:34-48) In time, it was seen that there was a third group involved—the Samaritans. Peter used the second key when opening up the Kingdom opportunity to them. (Acts 8:14-17) Thus, the third key was used when Peter preached to Cornelius.—*The Watchtower*, October 1, 1979, pages 16-22, 26.

¹³ From another ray of light, it was seen that Jesus referred not to just two but to three sheepfolds. (John, chapter 10) These were (1) the Jewish sheepfold of which John the Baptizer was the doorkeeper, (2) the fold of anointed Kingdom heirs, and (3) the fold of the “other sheep,” who have an earthly hope.—John 10:2, 3, 15, 16; *The Watchtower*, February 15, 1984, pages 10-20.

12. (a) A flash of light revealed what about the number of keys of the Kingdom entrusted to Peter? (b) What were the circumstances when Peter used each key?

13. What did flashes of light reveal about the sheepfolds mentioned in John chapter 10?

¹⁴ The understanding of the antitypical Jubilee also received some clarification. Under the Law, every 50th year was a grand Jubilee, in which things were restored to their original owners. (Leviticus 25:10) It was long understood that this foreshadowed the Thousand Year Reign of Christ. In more recent times, however, it was seen that the antitypical Jubilee actually began at Pentecost 33 C.E., when those receiving the poured-out holy spirit were set free from bondage to the Mosaic Law covenant.—*The Watchtower*, January 1, 1987, pages 18-28.

Increased Light on Terminology

¹⁵ “The congregator sought to find the delightful words and the writing of correct words of truth.” (Ecclesiastes 12:10) These words might well be applied to our present subject, for light has shone not only on such important matters as doctrine and conduct but also on Christian terminology and its accurate meaning. For example, among the Bible Students, one of the most beloved publications was volume one of *Studies in the Scriptures*, entitled *The Divine Plan of the Ages*. However, in time, it was realized

14. How did increased light clarify matters regarding the start of the antitypical Jubilee?

15. What light was shed on the use of the word “plan”?



that God's Word speaks only of humans as making plans. (Proverbs 19:21) The Scriptures never speak of Jehovah as planning. He does not need to plan. Whatever he purposes is sure to succeed because of his infinite wisdom and power, even as we read at Ephesians 1:9, 10: "It is according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for an administration at the full limit of the appointed times." So it was gradually seen that the term "purpose" is the more appropriate one when referring to Jehovah.

¹⁶ Then there was the matter of getting a clearer understanding of Luke 2:14. According to the *King James Version*, it reads: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." It was seen that this did not express the correct thought, for God's goodwill is not expressed toward the wicked. The Witnesses therefore viewed this as a matter of peace to men who were of goodwill toward God. So they kept referring to those interested in the Bible as persons of goodwill. But then it was understood that what was involved was goodwill, not on the part of men, but on the part of God. Thus, the *New World Translation* footnote on Luke 2:14 speaks of "men whom he [God] approves." All Christians who are living up to their vow of dedication have God's goodwill.

¹⁷ Similarly, for a long time, Witnesses spoke of the vindication of Jehovah's name. But had Satan called Jehovah's name into question? For that matter, had any of Satan's agents done so, as if Jehovah did not have a right to that name? No, not at all. It was not the name of Jehovah that was challenged and that needed to be vindicated.

16. What was gradually seen to be the correct understanding of Luke 2:14?

17, 18. What will Jehovah vindicate, and what will he sanctify?

That is why the Watch Tower Society's recent publications do not speak of Jehovah's name as being *vindicated*. They speak of Jehovah's *sovereignty* as being *vindicated* and of his *name* as being *sanctified*. This is in keeping with what Jesus told us to pray: "Let your *name* be *sanctified*." (Matthew 6:9) Time and again, Jehovah said that he was going to sanctify his name, which the Israelites had not challenged but had profaned.—Ezekiel 20:9, 14, 22; 36:23.

¹⁸ Interestingly, in 1971, the book *"The Nations Shall Know That I Am Jehovah"*—How? made this distinction: "Jesus Christ fights . . . for the vindication of Jehovah's universal Sovereignty and for the glorification of Jehovah's name." (Pages 364-5) In 1973, *God's Kingdom of a Thousand Years Has Approached* said: "The coming 'great tribulation' is the time for Almighty God Jehovah to vindicate his universal sovereignty and to sanctify his worthy name." (Page 409) Then, in 1975, *Man's Salvation Out Of World Distress at Hand!* stated: "The greatest event of universal history will then have been accomplished, the vindication of Jehovah's universal sovereignty and the sanctification of his sacred name." —Page 281.

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What light has been shed on subjection to "the higher powers"?
- ☐ Flashes of light have resulted in what organizational developments?
- ☐ How has increased light affected Christian conduct?
- ☐ Spiritual light has brought about what refinements in our understanding of certain Scriptural points?

¹⁹ How blessed Jehovah's people are to be basking in all this spiritual light! In stark contrast, expressive of the spiritual darkness in which the leaders of Christendom find themselves is this statement by a clergyman: "Why sin? Why suffering? Why the devil? These are questions I want to ask the Lord when I get to heaven." But Jehovah's Witnesses can tell him why: Because of the issue of the rightfulness of Jehovah's sovereignty and the question as to whether

19, 20. How can we show our appreciation for flashes of spiritual light?

human creatures can maintain integrity to God in spite of the Devil's opposition.

²⁰ Through the years, flashes of light both great and small have been illuminating the pathway of Jehovah's dedicated servants. This has been in fulfillment of such scriptures as Psalm 97:11 and Proverbs 4:18. But let us never forget that walking in the light means having appreciation for the increased light and living in harmony with it. As we have seen, this increased light involves both our conduct and our commission to preach.

What Is the Masoretic Text?

IN WHATEVER language you read the Bible, part of the book was likely translated directly or indirectly from the Masoretic text, which covers the Hebrew Scriptures, or the "Old Testament." Actually, there was more than one Masoretic text. So which one was selected, and why? In fact, what is the Masoretic text, and how do we know that it is reliable?

The Word of Jehovah

Bible writing began at Mount Sinai in 1513 B.C.E. Exodus 24:3, 4 tells us: "Moses came and related to the people all the words of Jehovah and all the judicial decisions, and all the people answered

with one voice and said: 'All the words that Jehovah has spoken we are willing to do.' Accordingly Moses wrote down all the words of Jehovah."

The Hebrew Scriptures continued to be

recorded for more than a thousand years, from 1513 B.C.E. down to about 443 B.C.E. Since the penmen were inspired by God, it is reasonable that he would guide matters so that his message would be faithfully preserved. (2 Samuel 23:2; Isaiah 40:8) However, does this mean that Jehovah would exclude all hu-

Bibelmuseum, Münster



The Aleppo Codex contains the Masoretic text

man error so that not a single letter would be changed as copies were made?

The Door to Inaccuracy Cracked Open

Although men with deep respect for God's Word copied it from generation to generation, some degree of human error did nevertheless creep into manuscripts. The Bible writers were inspired, but the copyists did not do their work under divine inspiration.

After returning from Babylonian exile in 537 B.C.E., the Jews adopted a new style of writing that used the square letters learned in Babylon. This major change-over brought with it the inherent problem that certain letters with similar appearance could be mistaken for one another. Since Hebrew is a language based on consonants, with vowel sounds added by the reader according to his understanding of the context, a change of one consonant might easily alter the meaning of a word. In most cases, however, such errors would have been detected and corrected.

The vast majority of Jews did not return to Israel after the fall of Babylon. Thus, synagogues became the spiritual centers for Jewish communities throughout the Middle East and Europe.* Each synagogue needed copies of the scrolls of the Scriptures. As copies multiplied, so did the potential for copyist error.

Attempts to Shut the Door Beginning in the first century C.E.,

* Since many Jews outside Israel were no longer fluent readers of Hebrew, such Jewish communities as the one in Alexandria, Egypt, soon saw the need for translations of the Bible into the vernacular. To meet this need, the Greek Septuagint version was prepared in the third century B.C.E. This version would later become an important source for text comparison.

scribes in Jerusalem attempted to establish a master text by which all other Hebrew Scripture scrolls could be corrected. Yet, there was no definitive system for differentiating between the original of a text and manuscripts that contained copyist errors. From the second century C.E. onward, the consonantal text of the Hebrew Scriptures seems to have been fairly well standardized, although it had not yet been authoritatively fixed. Hebrew Scripture quotations appearing in the Talmud (compiled between the second and the sixth centuries C.E.) quite often indicate a source different from what later became known as the Masoretic text.

The word "tradition" in Hebrew is *ma-soh-rah'* or *ma-so'reth*. By the sixth century C.E., those who guarded the tradition of accurately copying the Hebrew Scriptures became known as Masoretes. The copies they made are referred to as Masoretic texts. What was special about their work and the texts they prepared?

Hebrew had faded as a living, national language, and many Jews were no longer conversant with it. Hence, the very understanding of the consonantal Biblical text was endangered. To protect it, the Masoretes developed a system of vowels represented by dots and dashes, or points. These were placed above and below the consonants. The Masoretes also developed an intricate system of marks that served both as a form of punctuation and as a guide for more accurate pronunciation.

Where the Masoretes felt that the text had been altered or copied incorrectly by previous generations of scribes, instead of changing the text, they made notes in the side margins. They noted unusual word forms and combinations and the frequency with which these appeared within an

individual book or within the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Additional comments to help copyists in cross-checking were also noted. A system of abbreviated "codes" was developed to record this information with extreme brevity. In the top and bottom margins, a type of miniconcordance listed parts of related verses that were commented on in the notes in the side margins.

The most renowned system was perfected by the Masoretes in Tiberias, by the Sea of Galilee. The families of Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali of the ninth and tenth centuries C.E., possibly Karaites, became particularly prominent.* Although differences existed between the pronunciation methods and notes of these two schools, the consonants of their texts differ in fewer than ten places in the entire Hebrew Scriptures.

Both schools of Masoretes, of Ben Asher and of Ben Naphtali, made a great contribution to textual scholarship in their time. After Maimonides (an influential Talmudic scholar of the 12th century) praised the Ben Asher text, others gave it exclusive preference. This was so even to the point that no Ben Naphtali manuscript can presently be found. All that remains are lists of the differences between the two schools. Ironically, Maimonides' comment was related to stylistic considerations, such as paragraph spacing, and not to the more important aspects of accurate transmission.

Can We Find a "Pure" Masoretic Text?

There is much dispute among scholars as to which codex available today is the

* About the year 760 C.E., a Jewish group known as the Karaites called for stricter adherence to the Scriptures. Rejecting the authority of the rabbis, the "Oral Law," and the Talmud, they had greater reason to guard the Bible text systematically. Certain families from this group became expert Masoretic copyists.

"pure" Ben Asher text, as if this would then give us the "true" Masoretic text. Actually, there never was one unique, "pure," and authoritative Masoretic text. Instead, there were many Masoretic texts, each one slightly different from the others. All extant codices are mixed texts, with both Ben Asher and Ben Naphtali readings.

The task facing any translator of the Hebrew Scriptures today is formidable. He must familiarize himself not only with the Hebrew text but also with all reasonable options where the text may have been altered through copyist error or otherwise. While the various Masoretic texts serve as a base, he needs to consult other valid sources that could reasonably represent more ancient and perhaps more accurate versions of the consonantal text.

In the introduction to his book *The Text of the Old Testament*, Ernst Würthwein explains: "When faced with a difficult passage we cannot simply gather together the various readings and select the one which seems to offer the simplest solution, at times preferring the Hebrew text, at other times the Septuagint, and yet other times the Aramaic Targum. Textual witnesses are not all equally reliable. Each has its own character and its own peculiar history. We must be familiar with these if we hope to avoid inadequate or false solutions."

We have a firm basis for full confidence that Jehovah has preserved his Word. By the combined efforts of many sincere men over the centuries, the substance, the content, and even the details of the Bible's message are at our fingertips. Any slight changes in letter or word have not affected our ability to understand the Scriptures. Now, the important question is, Will we live by God's Word, the Bible?

He Was the Messiah's Forerunner

A WIDE leather belt accented his sun-darkened skin. Dressed in a camel-hair garment, he did indeed look like a prophet. Many were drawn to him at the river Jordan. There this fascinating man declared boldly that he was ready to baptize repentant sinners.

People were astonished! Who was this man? What was his purpose?

Jesus Christ said of this person: "Why did you go out? To see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet. . . . Among those born of women there has not been raised up a greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew 11:9-11) Why was John such an exceptional man? Because he was the Messiah's forerunner.

His Mission Foretold

More than 700 years prior to John's birth, Jehovah announced that this one would be calling out in the wilderness: "Clear up the way of Jehovah, you people! Make the highway for our God through the desert plain straight." (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3) Over 400 years before John's birth, Almighty God declared: "Look! I am sending to you people Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah." (Malachi 4:5) That John the Baptizer was born some six months prior to Jesus was no mere accident, nor did this occur simply by natural processes. Like the birth of the promised child Isaac, John's birth was a miracle, for both of his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were past the normal age for producing children.—Luke 1:18.

Even before John's conception, his commission, work, and mode of living were dis-

closed by the angel Gabriel. With the vigor and spirit of Elijah, John would turn back disobedient ones from the way of death and would prepare them to accept Jesus as the Messiah. From birth, John was to be a Nazirite, wholly devoted to God, and was to touch no wine or strong drink. Indeed, his food in the desert consisted of "insect locusts and wild honey." (Mark 1:6; Numbers 6:2, 3; Luke 1:13-17) Like Samuel, from childhood John was set apart for the glorious service of the Most High God.—1 Samuel 1:11, 24-28.

Even the name John was chosen by God. The Hebrew name rendered "John" means "Jehovah Has Shown Favor; Jehovah Has Been Gracious."

When the child was circumcised on the eighth day, his father, Zechariah, was divinely inspired to declare: "As for you, young child, you will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go in advance before Jehovah to make his ways ready, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender compassion of our God. With this compassion a daybreak will visit us from on high." (Luke 1:76-78) John's public ministry was to be of prime importance in his life. Compared with it, all other things were of little consequence. Hence, the Scriptures cover the first 30 years of John's life in a single verse: "The young child went on growing and getting strong in spirit, and he continued in the deserts until the day of showing himself openly to Israel."—Luke 1:80.

Voice in the Wilderness

In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was the

governor of Judea, John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness with this startling message: "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near." (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:1, 2) The populace of the whole region was awakened. That bold declaration touched the hearts of people yearning for a sure hope. John's announcement also challenged a person's humility because it called for heartfelt repentance. His sincerity and conviction moved multitudes of honest and sincere people to regard him as a man sent by God.

John's fame spread like the dawning of a new day. As Jehovah's prophet, he was easily recognized by his dress and devotion. (Mark 1:6) Even priests and Levites traveled from Jerusalem to find out what was sparking all this interest. Repent? Why, and of what? Who was this man? They wanted to know. John explained: "I am not the Christ." And they asked him: "What, then? Are you Elijah?" And he said: "I am not." "Are you The Prophet?" And he answered: "No!" Therefore they said to him: "Who are you? that we may give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said: "I am a voice of someone crying out in the wilderness, 'Make the way of Jehovah straight,' just as Isaiah the prophet said." Now those sent forth were from the Pharisees. So they questioned him and said to him: "Why, then, do you baptize if you yourself are not the Christ or Elijah or The Prophet?"—John 1:20-25.

Repentance and baptism were necessary steps for those who would enter the Kingdom. Therefore, John replied: "I baptize repentant sinners with water, but after me someone stronger will baptize you with holy spirit and with fire. Why, I am not even fit to untie his sandals. And beware! He carries a winnowing shovel in his hand and will

gather the wheat into his storehouse but will burn up and destroy the chaff." (Luke 3:15-17; Acts 1:5) Indeed, the holy spirit would be bestowed on followers of the Messiah, but his enemies would experience the fire of destruction.

"People of All Sorts" Warned

Many honesthearted Jews were deeply moved by John's words and openly confessed their sins of unfaithfulness to the Law covenant. They publicly demonstrated their repentance by allowing John to baptize them in the Jordan River. (Matthew 3:5, 6) As a result, their hearts were in the proper condition to receive the Messiah. Quenching their thirst for knowledge of God's righteous requirements, John gladly instructed them as his disciples, even teaching them how to pray.—Luke 11:1.

Concerning this forerunner of the Messiah, the apostle John wrote: "This man came for a witness, in order to bear witness about the light, that people of all sorts might believe through him." (John 1:7) So it was that people of all sorts came to hear John the Baptizer as he "preached publicly to all the people of Israel baptism in symbol of repentance." (Acts 13:24) He cautioned tax collectors against resorting to extortion. He warned soldiers against harassing anyone or making false accusations. And he told the pious, hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees: "You offspring of vipers, who has intimated to you to flee from the coming wrath? So then produce fruit that befits repentance; and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'As a father we have Abraham.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."—Matthew 3:7-9; Luke 3:7-14.

As a class, the religious leaders of John's day refused to believe him and falsely

charged him with being demonized. They rejected the way of righteousness that leads to life eternal. On the other hand, sinful tax collectors and harlots who believed John's testimony repented and were baptized. In due time, they accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah.—Matthew 21:25-32; Luke 7: 31-33.

The Messiah Introduced

For six months—from the spring to the fall of 29 C.E.—God's faithful witness John focused the Jews' attention on the coming Messiah. It was time for the Messianic King to appear. But when he did, he came down to those same Jordan waters and asked to be baptized. At first John protested, but then he complied. Imagine his joy when the holy spirit descended upon Jesus and Jehovah's voice was heard expressing approval of His Son.—Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1: 9-11.

John was the first to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and he introduced his own disciples to this Anointed One. "See," said John, "the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world!" He also declared:

"This is the one about whom I said, Behind me there comes a

man who has advanced in front of me, because he existed before me. Even I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing in water was that he might be made manifest to Israel."—John 1:29-37.

John's work continued parallel to Jesus' ministry for about six months. Each of them understood the work that the other one was doing. John viewed himself as the friend of the Bridegroom and rejoiced to see Christ increase while he and his work decreased.—John 3:22-30.

Jesus identified John as his forerunner, pictured by Elijah. (Matthew 11:12-15; 17: 12) On one occasion, Jesus said: "The Law and the Prophets were until John. From then on the kingdom of God is being declared as good news, and every sort of person is pressing forward toward it."—Luke 16:16.

Faithful to the End

John was arrested and imprisoned because he boldly declared the truth. He did not shirk his responsibility to expose even the sin of King Herod. In violation of God's law, that king was living in adultery with his own brother's wife, Herodias. John spoke out so that the man might repent and obtain God's mercy.

What an example John was of faith and love! At the cost of his personal freedom, he proved his faithfulness to Jehovah God and his love for fellow humans. After a year's imprisonment, John was beheaded as a result of a Devil-inspired scheme engineered by wicked Herodias, who was "nursing a grudge" against him. (Mark 6:16-19; Matthew 14:3-12) But the Messiah's forerunner maintained his integrity to Jehovah and will soon be raised from the dead to enjoy life in God's new world of righteousness.—John 5:28, 29; 2 Peter 3:13.



COINS THAT BEAR GOD'S NAME

LOOK closely at the silver coins shown here. They were minted by German monarch Wilhelm V during his reign from 1627 to 1637. At the time, central Europe was in the grip of the Thirty Years' War, a struggle between Catholics and Protestants. Wilhelm V sided with the Protestant cause. To meet the enormous cost of the conflict, he took all his silver and minted coins from it.

Interestingly, the representations on many of the coins depict the sun encircling God's name, Jehovah, in the form of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. There is also a palm tree, which denotes strength. The implication is that the tree, although bent by the wind, remains unbroken under God's protection. The Latin inscription on the coin contains the name Jehovah and expresses confidence in his protective care.

Instead of invoking God's protection, such use of God's name was truly in vain, for Jehovah does not take sides in the violent conflicts of mankind. Indeed, the Thirty Years' War could not have met with God's approval. "According to conservative estimates," says *Funk & Wagnalls New Encyclopedia*, "no less than half of the German people perished during the war. Countless German cities, towns, villages, and farms were totally destroyed. Approximately two thirds of the industrial, agricultural, and commercial facilities of Germany were in ruins."

The use of the name Jehovah on these coins calls to mind the commandment given to Israel: "You must not take up the name of Jehovah your God in a worthless way." (Exodus 20:7) Nevertheless, these coins bear witness that the divine name, Jehovah, has long been familiar to people in Germany. How well do you know the God who bears that name?

