

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. The sky is filled with dark, textured clouds that are illuminated from below, creating a range of colors from deep purple and blue at the top to bright orange and yellow near the horizon. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of trees and bushes are visible along the edge of a body of water. The water's surface is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky and the dark shapes of the trees.

OCTOBER 15, 1995

THE **WATCHTOWER**
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

**WHY FEAR
THE TRUE GOD
NOW?**

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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Fear—Friend or Foe?



"I think about how I want to die. I don't want to get shot, but if I do, I want to get shot in the head right here, so I die instantly."

A REPORTER for the *Los Angeles Times* heard that from a 14-year-old girl. He was interviewing students about recent killings—youths killing both adults and other youths. The report was entitled: "The World of Fear."

You cannot fail to know that many live in a world of fear. Fear of what? It would be hard to single out any one fear. See if you can find in the adjacent box things that your friends or many people in your area fear. The box is from *Newsweek* of November 22, 1993, and it shows the results of a poll of "758 children between the ages of 10 and 17, along with their parents."

Asked what concerns them and their families most, adults and children say they fear:

CHILDREN		PARENTS
56%	Violent crime against family member	73%
53%	An adult losing a job	60%
43%	Not being able to afford food	47%
51%	Not being able to afford a doctor	61%
47%	Not being able to afford shelter	50%
38%	Family member having drug problem	57%
38%	Their family won't stay together	33%

Source: *Newsweek*, November 22, 1993

If those youths were interviewed now, they might state added reasons for fear, such as earthquakes. Following the disastrous quake in Los Angeles in January 1994, *Time* reported: "Among the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are uncontrollable flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance and anger about the lack of control over one's life." A businessman who had decided to move from the area said: "The damage is nothing. It's the scare. You go to bed downstairs with your shoes on. You don't sleep. You just sit there waiting for it every night. It's bad."

"A String of Disasters Leaves Japanese on Edge" was the title given to an April 11, 1995, report from Tokyo. It said: "The nerve gas attack . . . was a particularly serious blow to the Japanese psyche because it came as part of a string of events that collectively created fundamental new uncertainties about the future. . . . People no longer feel safe in the streets that were once famed for their safety day or night." And it is not just the elderly who fear. "Professor Ishikawa [of Seijo University] said the anxiety . . . was particularly pronounced among young people, who often have no clear image of what the future holds for them."

Evidence suggests that an "instance of overwhelming terror can alter the chemistry of the brain, making people more sensitive to adrenaline surges even decades later." Scientists are trying to understand how the brain interprets a fearful situation—how we size up details and respond with fear. Professor Joseph LeDoux wrote: "By uncovering the neural pathways through which a situation causes a creature to learn about fear, we hope to elucidate the general mechanisms of this form of memory."

Most of us, though, are not so much interested in the chemical or neural basis for fear. We may realistically be more interested in the answers to such questions as, Why are we afraid? How should we respond? Is any fear good?

You probably would agree that sometimes fear can help you. For example, it is dark as you approach your house. The door is ajar, though you left it shut tight. Through the window you seem to see moving shadows. Quickly you tense, sensing that something is very wrong. Perhaps a thief or a knife-wielding intruder is inside.

Your instinctive fear of such situations could save you from blithely walking into a dangerous situation. Fear may help you take precautions or get assistance before you face possible harm. There are many such examples: a sign alerting you to high voltage; a radio announcement of a storm roaring down on your area; a piercing mechanical noise from your car as you are driving on a crowded road.

In some cases a sense of fear certainly can be a friend. It can help us to protect ourselves or to act wisely. You well know, though, that constant or intense fear is truly no friend. It is a foe. It can bring on shortness of breath, heart palpitations, faintness, trembling, nausea, and a sense of being detached from one's surroundings.

You may find it most interesting that the Bible specified that our time would be marked by fearful developments on earth and by intense fear. How is that, and what bearing should it have on your life and thinking? Also, why can it be said that from the Biblical standpoint, there is a daily fear that is particularly helpful and good? Let us see.

Fear—Common Now but Not Forever!

STUDENTS of God's Word are not surprised that fear is so common. As Jehovah's Witnesses have publicized extensively in their ministry, there is abundant evidence that we are living in a marked time in human history. You know it is marked by widespread fear. But long ago Jesus marked, or pointed to, our time. He was responding to the apostles' questions about his presence and the conclusion of the system of things, or 'the end of the world.'—Matthew 24:3.

Here is part of what Jesus foretold:

"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there will be great earthquakes, and in one place after another pestilences and food shortages; and there will be fearful sights and from heaven great signs."—Luke 21:10, 11.

Did you note his comment about "fearful sights"? Later in that same reply, Jesus made another significant observation about fear that may directly and decisively touch you and your loved ones. But before giving attention to that, let us briefly review some additional evidence that we are living in the last days.—2 Timothy 3:1.

Justified Fear of War

Military conflicts have left many parts of the earth devastated. For example, *Geo* magazine called oil wells that were left burning at the end of a recent Middle Eastern conflict "the greatest environmental catastrophe ever inflicted by human hand." Wars have killed or crippled tens of millions of people. Beyond the millions of military and civilian deaths in World War I,

55 million were killed in World War II. Recall that as part of the sign that the end of the world was near, Jesus said that "nation [would] rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

We also cannot overlook man's attempts at genocide—destruction of whole races or peoples. The deaths of millions of Armenians, Cambodians, Jews, Rwandans, Ukrainians, and others have added to mankind's staggering bloodguilt during the 20th century. The slaughter continues in lands where ethnic hatreds are encouraged by religious extremists. Yes, wars still soak the earth with human blood.

Modern wars claim victims even after the fighting ends. For instance, consider the indiscriminate sowing of land mines. According to a report by the research organization Human Rights Watch, "some 100 million mines around the world threaten civilians." Such mines continue to be dangerous to innocent men, women, and children long after the war they were used in has ended. It is said that each month thousands are maimed or killed by land mines in more than 60 countries. Why is this threat to life and limb not systematically removed? *The New York Times* noted: "Far more mines are being planted each day than are deactivated in mine-clearing operations, so the casualty toll is steadily increasing."

That 1993 newspaper article reported that selling these mines has become a business that "pays up to \$200 million annually." It involves "some 100 companies and government agencies in 48 countries" that

"have been exporting 340 different types" of mines. Diabolically, some mines are designed to look like toys in order to make them attractive to children! Imagine, deliberately targeting innocent children for maiming and destruction! An editorial entitled "100 Million Infernal Machines" claimed that mines have "killed or maimed more people than chemical, biological and nuclear warfare."

But land mines are not the only death-dealing commodity sold on the world's markets. Avaricious weapons dealers are doing a multibillion-dollar business earth wide. *The Defense Monitor*, published by the Center for Defense Information, reports: "Over the last decade [a leading nation] exported weapons valued at \$135 Billion." This powerful nation also "authorized the sale of a staggering \$63 Billion worth of weapons, military construction, and training to 142 nations." Seeds are thus being sown for future warfare and human suffering. According to *The Defense Monitor*, in "1990 alone, wars kept 5 million people under arms, cost more than \$50 Billion, and killed a quarter of a million people, most of them civilians." You certainly can think of numerous wars that have raged since that year, bringing fear and death to millions more!

More Ruining of the Earth and Its Life

Professor Barry Commoner warns: "I believe that continued pollution of the earth, if unchecked, will eventually destroy the fitness of this planet as a place for human life." He goes on to say that the problem is not ignorance but willful greed. Do you think that our just and loving God will tolerate this situation indefinitely, leaving us to increased fear of pollution? The despoiling of the earth cries out for an accounting with

the despoilers and then a divine rehabilitation of the planet. That is part of what Jesus dealt with in his reply to the apostles concerning 'the end of the world.'

Before we consider how God will bring about that accounting, let us further examine man's record. Even a partial list of man's desecrations is saddening: acid rain and greedy logging practices that destroy whole forests; careless dumping of nuclear waste, toxic chemicals, and raw sewage; weakening of the protective ozone layer; and careless use of herbicides and pesticides.

Commercial interests befoul the earth in other ways for profit. Tons of waste products are daily dumped into the rivers, oceans, air, and soil. Scientists litter the heavens with space junk, not picking up after themselves, as it were. Earth is fast becoming ringed by an orbiting garbage dump. If it were not for the natural processes that God made so that the earth can renew itself, our terrestrial home would not support life, and man would likely long ago have suffocated in his own refuse.

Man even pollutes himself. Take, for example, tobacco and other drug abuse. In the United States, such substance abuse has been termed "the nation's number one health problem." It costs that country \$238 billion annually, \$34 billion of which is spent on "unnecessary [that is, avoidable] health care." What do you think tobacco's cost in money and lives is where you live?

Permissive and deviant life-styles, which many insist on as a right, have produced a frightening crop of death-dealing sexually transmitted diseases, bringing many to an early grave. It has been observed that the obituary columns of major city newspapers now show an increasing number dying in their 30's and 40's. Why? Often because destructive habits soon caught up with them. Such tragic increase in sexual and other



Pollution: Photo: Godo-Foto; rocket: U.S. Army photo; trees burning: Richard Bierregaard, Smithsonian Institution

diseases also fits into Jesus' prophecy, for he said that there would be "in one place after another pestilences."

The worst pollution, however, is that of the human mind and spirit, or attitude. If you review all the forms of contamination we have mentioned until now, is it not true that most of them are the result of polluted minds? Look at the havoc sick minds create in the form of murders, rapes, robberies, and other kinds of violence inflicted by one person on another. Many recognize, too, that the millions of abortions performed annually are a sign of mental and spiritual contamination.

We see much in the attitude of youth. Disrespect for parental and other authority is contributing to family breakdown and defiance of law and order. This lack of a healthy fear of authority is directly linked with youth's lack of spirituality. Therefore, those teaching evolution, atheism, and other faith-destroying theories bear considerable guilt. Also guilty are the many religious educators who, in their efforts to be accepted as modern and "correct," have turned their backs on God's Word. They and others imbued with the wisdom of the world teach contradictory human philosophies.

The results today are obvious. People are driven, not by love of God and fellowman, but by greed and hate. The bad fruitage is widespread immorality, violence, and hopelessness. Sadly, this leaves honest people in fear, including fear that man will destroy himself and the planet.

Will It Get Worse or Better?

What does the near future hold as respects fear? Will fear keep on increasing, or will it be overcome? Let us again note what Jesus told his apostles.

He pointed to something that lies in the near future—great tribulation. Here are his words: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will beat themselves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."—Matthew 24:29, 30.

So we can expect that the great tribulation will soon begin. Other Bible prophecies indicate that its first part will be a reprisal

on false religion around the globe. Then will come the shocking developments just quoted, including celestial phenomena of some sort. What will be the effect on millions of people?

Well, consider a parallel account of Jesus' reply, where we find amplified prophetic comments:

"There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of nations, not knowing the way out because of the roaring of the sea and its agitation, while men become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken."—Luke 21:25, 26.

That lies ahead of us. But not all humans will then be in such fear as to make them become faint. On the contrary, Jesus said: "As these things start to occur, raise yourselves erect and lift your heads up, because your deliverance is getting near."—Luke 21:28.

Jehovah's worshipers happily await the approaching new world



He addressed those encouraging words to his true followers. Rather than being faint or paralyzed with fear, they would have reason to lift their heads fearlessly, even though knowing that the climax of the great tribulation was imminent. Why no fear?

Because the Bible clearly says that there will be survivors of this entire "great tribulation." (Revelation 7:14) The account promising this says that if we are among the survivors, we can enjoy unparalleled blessings from God's hand. It concludes with the assurance that Jesus "will shepherd them, and will guide them to fountains of waters of life. And God will wipe out every tear from their eyes."—Revelation 7:16, 17.

Those—and we can be included—who enjoy such blessings will not have the fears that plague people today. Yet, that does not mean that they will have absolutely no fear, for the Bible does show that there is a good and healthy fear. The following article will consider what this is and how it should affect us.



WHY FEAR THE TRUE GOD NOW?

“Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man.”—ECCLESIASTES 12:13.

A HEALTHY and reverential fear of God is good for man. Yes, though many human fears are emotionally disturbing, even detrimental to our well-being, it is good for us to fear Jehovah God. —Psalm 112:1; Ecclesiastes 8:12.

² The Creator knows this. Out of love for his creation, he commands all to fear him and worship him. We read: “I saw another angel flying in midheaven, and he had everlasting good news to declare as glad tidings to those who dwell on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, saying in a loud voice: ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of the judgment by him has arrived, and so wor-

ship the One who made the heaven and the earth.’” —Revelation 14:6, 7.

³ We certainly should not ignore the Creator of all things, the Source of life, for he owns us and this planet. (Psalm 24:1) In an expression of his great love, Jehovah gave his earthly children life and provided them with a marvelous place to live in—a beautiful paradise. Yet, this wonderful gift was not unconditional. In effect, it was given in trust. Our first parents were to care for their home and expand it until they had populated and subdued the whole earth. They had privileges and responsibilities toward the land animals, the birds, and the fish—all other living creatures that

1, 2. Why is a proper fear of God fitting?

3. What did the Creator do for our first parents?

would share the earth with them and their offspring. For this great trust, man would be accountable.

⁴ Despite that wonderful beginning, look at what man has done to contaminate his beautiful earthly home! In contemptuous disregard for God's ownership of this gem, humans have made the earth filthy. The contamination is at the point of threatening the existence of more and more species of animals, birds, and fish. Our just and loving God will not tolerate this indefinitely. The despoiling of the earth cries out for an accounting, which is something many have reason to fear. On the other hand, for those respectfully trusting God, it is comforting to know what will happen. Jehovah *will* call for an accounting, and the earth *will* be restored. This truly is glad tidings for all righthearted ones on the earth.

⁵ By what means will God carry out his judgment? By means of Jesus Christ, now enthroned as King of God's heavenly Kingdom. Through that heavenly Son, Jehovah will bring to a conclusion the present unclean, rebellious system. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Revelation 19:11) In this way he will bring relief to those who fear him and, at the same time, rescue and preserve our earthly home.

⁶ How will this happen? The Bible tells of a coming great tribulation climaxing in the war of Armageddon. (Revelation 7:14; 16:16) This will be God's judgment against this polluted system of things and its polluters. Will any humans remain alive? Yes! It will be those who have, not a morbid, unhealthy fear of God, but a respectful, reverential fear of him. They will be delivered.—Proverbs 2:21, 22.

4. What has man done to God's creation?
5, 6. How will Jehovah respond to what man has done to His creation?

A Stunning Display of Power

⁷ This dramatic action by Jehovah God was foreshadowed by a mighty act he performed in behalf of his worshipers some 1,500 years before our Common Era. The great military power of Egypt had enslaved its immigrant Israelite work force, even attempting a form of genocide when its ruler, Pharaoh, ordered the death of all newborn male Israelites. God's triumph over Egypt was to bring Israel liberation from that oppressive political system, yes, freedom from a nation polluted by the worship of many gods.

⁸ Exodus chapter 15 records Israel's reaction to liberation from Egypt. Analyzing this account will help us to appreciate how Christians can be delivered from the spiritually and physically defiled system of the present. Let us consider Exodus chapter 15, focusing on selected verses to learn why we should choose to fear Jehovah, the true God. We begin with verses 1 and 2:

⁹ "At that time Moses and the sons of Israel proceeded to sing this song to Jehovah and to say the following: 'Let me sing to Jehovah, for he has become highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has pitched into the sea. My strength and my might is Jah, since he serves for my salvation.'"

¹⁰ People around the globe are familiar with the account of how Jehovah liberated Israel from Egypt. He brought plagues on that mighty world power until Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave. But then the armies of Pharaoh chased after this defenseless people and appeared to

7. Why did God intervene in behalf of Israel in Moses' day?

8, 9. How did Moses and the Israelites respond to God's intervention?

10. What led up to God's destruction of the army of Egypt?

have them trapped on the shore of the Red Sea. Though it seemed that the sons of Israel would quickly lose their newfound freedom, Jehovah had something else in mind. He miraculously opened a path through the sea and brought his people to safety. When the Egyptians followed, he closed the Red Sea over them and drowned Pharaoh and his military forces.—Exodus 14:1-31.

¹¹ Jehovah's destruction of the Egyptian military forces exalted him in the eyes of his worshipers and made his name widely known. (Joshua 2:9, 10; 4:23, 24) Yes, his name was elevated above the powerless, false gods of Egypt, who proved unable to deliver their worshipers. Trust in their deities and in mortal man and military power led to bitter disappointment. (Psalm 146:3) No wonder the Israelites were moved to sing praises that reflected wholesome fear of the living God, who mightily delivers his people!

¹² Similarly, we should recognize that no false gods of our time and no superpower, even with nuclear armaments, can possibly match Jehovah. He can and will deliver his people. "He is doing according to his own will among the army of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth. And there exists no one that can check his hand or that can say to him, 'What have you been doing?'" (Daniel 4:35) When we fully get the sense of these words, we too are moved to sing his praises happily.

¹³ The victory song at the Red Sea continues: "Jehovah is a manly person of war. Jehovah is his name." This invincible Warrior, therefore, is not some anonymous figment of man's imagination. He has a

name! He is 'the One who causes to become,' the Grand Maker, the One "whose name is Jehovah, . . . the Most High over all the earth." (Exodus 3:14; 15:3-5; Psalm 83:18) Do you not agree that it would have been wise for those ancient Egyptians to have a reasonable and respectful sense of fear of the Almighty rather than defy him?

¹⁴ As Designer of the earth, the Maker of the sea has complete control over the water masses. (Exodus 15:8) Utilizing his control also of the wind, he accomplished what seemed impossible. He split the watery deep at a certain point and forced it back in opposite directions in order to produce a water-lined corridor for his people to pass through. Visualize the scene: millions of tons of sea water piled high in parallel walls, forming a protective escape route for Israel. Yes, those who manifested a healthy fear of God gained protection. Then Jehovah released the water, letting it surge back as a mighty deluge, engulfing Pharaoh's forces and all their equipment. What a display of divine power over worthless gods and human military strength! Certainly, Jehovah is the one to be feared, is he not?—Exodus 14:21, 22, 28; 15:8.

Demonstrating Our Fear of God

¹⁵ Had we stood safely with Moses, we surely would have been moved to sing: "Who among the gods is like you, O Jehovah? Who is like you, proving yourself mighty in holiness? The One to be feared with songs of praise, the One doing marvels." (Exodus 15:11) Such sentiments have been echoed throughout the centuries since then. In the last book of the

11. What resulted from God's action against Egypt?

12, 13. What should we learn from God's victory at the Red Sea?

14. How was the value of godly fear demonstrated at the Red Sea?

15. What should be our response to God's powerful saving acts?

Bible, the apostle John describes a group of faithful anointed servants of God: "They are singing the song of Moses the slave of God and the song of the Lamb." What is this great song? "Great and wonderful are your works, Jehovah God, the Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of eternity. Who will not really fear you, Jehovah, and glorify your name, because you alone are loyal?"—Revelation 15:2-4.

¹⁶ So today too there are liberated worshipers who appreciate not only the creative handiworks of God but also his decrees. People from all nations have been spiritually liberated, separated from this polluted world because they recognize and put into practice the righteous decrees of God. Yearly, hundreds of thousands escape this corrupt world to dwell with the clean, upright organization of Jehovah's worshipers. Soon, after God's fiery judgments against false religion and the rest of this wicked system have been executed, they will live forever in a righteous new world.

¹⁷ In line with Revelation 14:6, 7, mankind now is hearing a warning message of judgment declared by Jehovah's Witnesses under angelic direction. In more than 230 lands last year, some five million Witnesses proclaimed the good news of God's Kingdom and his hour of judgment. To educate their fellow humans for survival, Witnesses made regular visits to people's homes, conducting free Bible studies. Hundreds of thousands each year thus learn enough to fear the true God intelligently, dedicate their lives to him, and be baptized. How delightful that such ones have come to fear the true God!—Luke 1:49-51; Acts 9:31; compare Hebrews 11:7.

16, 17. What marvelous development do we see taking place today?

¹⁸ Is it true that angels are involved in this preaching work? Well, it certainly seems clear that angelic guidance has often brought Jehovah's Witnesses to a home where some distressed soul was yearning, even praying, for spiritual help! For example, two of Jehovah's Witnesses accompanied by a small child were telling the good news on a Caribbean island. As noon approached, the two adults decided they would stop for the day. But the child was unusually keen to visit the next house. When he saw that the adults were not inclined to do so at that time, he went by himself and knocked. A young lady opened the door. When the adults saw this, they went over and talked to her. She invited them in, explaining that right when she heard the knock on the door, she had been praying that God send Witnesses to her to teach her the Bible. Arrangements were made for a Bible study.

¹⁹ As we faithfully deliver God's judgment message, we also teach his righteous decrees. When these are applied in people's lives, both physical and spiritual blessings result. For example, the Bible is very clear in its condemnation of all sexual immorality. (Romans 1:26, 27, 32) Today divine standards are widely ignored in the world. What is the result? Marriages are breaking up. Delinquency is increasing. Crippling sexually transmitted diseases, which have become pandemic in this 20th century, are spreading. Indeed, the frightening disease AIDS is to a great extent spread by sexual immorality. But has not respectful fear of God proved to be a great protection for true

18. What illustrates that the angels are involved in our preaching?

19. What could we point to as a benefit from fearing God?

worshipers?—2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12; see also Acts 15:28, 29.

Results of Fearing God Now

²⁰ Blessings are abundant to those fearing God and following his decrees. Consider an event that illustrates the growing recognition of the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses form a peaceful brotherhood of morally upright Christians. A number of Witnesses, delegates to an international convention in South America, were staying at a hotel that was also used one night for a non-Witness gathering to be addressed by the nation's president. As a security team hastened the president into an elevator, a Witness who did not know who was in the elevator stepped in, to the surprise of the security men! Realizing what she had done, the Witness apologized for the intrusion. She showed her convention badge identifying her as a Witness and said that she was no threat to the president. Smiling, a guard said: "If all people were like Jehovah's Witnesses, we would not need this kind of security."—Isaiah 2:2-4.

²¹ This is the type of people that Jehovah is now gathering and preparing to 'come out of the great tribulation' that ends this system. (Revelation 7:9, 10, 14) Such survival is not going to be a matter of chance. To be a survivor, a person must fear Jehovah, recognize him as the rightful Sovereign, and be dedicated to him. The fact is, though, that most will not cultivate the kind of fear that will merit protection. (Psalm 2:1-6) According to all the available evidence, Jehovah's chosen Ruler, Jesus Christ, has been ruling as King since the critical year 1914. This means that the

20. What illustrates that others know of the reputation of Jehovah's Witnesses?

21. What courses of action are open to people today?

time left is fast running out for individuals to develop and manifest a wholesome fear of Jehovah. Still, our Creator is allowing individuals, even ones in powerful station, to respond: "Now, O kings, exercise insight; let yourselves be corrected, O judges of the earth. Serve Jehovah with fear and be joyful with trembling. Kiss the son, that He may not become incensed and you may not perish from the way, for his anger flares up easily. Happy are all those taking refuge in him."—Psalm 2:7-12.

²² May we be among those who will praise our Creator as the One who rescued us. This calls on us, though, to fear the true God now! (Compare Psalm 2:11; Hebrews 12:28; 1 Peter 1:17.) We must continue to learn his righteous decrees and obey them. The song of Moses and of the Lamb, recorded at Revelation 15:3, 4, will reach a crescendo when Jehovah wipes out all wickedness on earth and begins to heal man and his earthly home of the polluting effects of sin. Then, with all our heart, we will sing: "Great and wonderful are your works, Jehovah God, the Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of eternity. Who will not really fear you, Jehovah, and glorify your name?"

22. What does the future hold for those who now fear God?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ Why does Jehovah deserve our wholesome fear?
- ☐ What was made manifest by God's accomplishments at the Red Sea?
- ☐ What benefits come from our respectful fear of Jehovah?
- ☐ What future awaits those who fear the true God now?

Reaching All Kinds of People in Modern-Day Athens

WHEN the apostle Paul visited Athens about 50 C.E., the city was still an important commercial center, even though it no longer enjoyed the glory of its classical past. One historical work states: “[Athens] continued to be the spiritual and art metropolis of Greece, as well as the enviable place for visits of the educated and the powerful of that era.”

While there, Paul probably had the opportunity to preach to Jews, pagan Athenians, and people from many different places. Being the alert and skillful teacher that he was, he said in one discourse that God gave “*all persons* life and breath,” that he “made out of one man *every nation of men*,” and that “they should *all everywhere* repent” because He will judge “*the inhabited earth*.”—Acts 17:25-31.

A Diverse Territory

In recent decades Athens again has become a city attracting people from everywhere. Diplomats and military personnel have arrived as part of foreign missions. Young people from Africa and the Middle East have taken up residence as university students. Immigrant workers from Africa, Asia, and the Eastern European countries have flocked in. There are many Filipinos and others from Southeast Asia, who have come seeking work as domestics. And there is a constant flow of refugees from neighboring countries and trouble spots around the globe.

This situation presents a challenge for the local preachers of the Kingdom good news. Most of the temporary residents speak English, but some speak only their native tongues. These people represent many different cultural and religious backgrounds. Among the visitors, you can find professed Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, animists, agnostics, and atheists. Jehovah’s Witnesses must learn to adapt their presentations to suit the various backgrounds of these people.

Since many of these newcomers have gone through difficult times, they often have questions about the meaning of life and the prospects for the future. Some highly esteem the Bible and have no difficulty accepting what it says. The majority in this diverse territory are humble, meek, and hungry for the truth. They feel freer to search for the truth because they are away from their family and home environment.

The first English congregation was organized in Athens in 1986 to cover this territory. The growth has been marvelous. During the past five years, about 80 new ones have been baptized. The result is that an Arabic congregation, a Polish congregation, and for a time, a French group have been established in Athens. Some from the English congregation have moved to help other such congregations and groups in Thessalonica to the north, in Heraklion, Crete, and in Piraeus, the port of Athens. Would you like to meet some of the foreigners who have learned the truth in Athens?



The Desirable Ones of the Nations Are Coming In

Thomas was born in Asmara, Eritrea, and grew up a devout Catholic. At the age of 15, he entered a monastery. He asked the abbot: "How is it possible that one God is three Gods?" The abbot answered: "Because we accept what the pope says about spiritual things. Above all, this is a mystery, and you are too young to grasp it." After five years in the monastery, Thomas left, disillusioned and frustrated by the conduct and the teachings of the church. Yet, he had not given up his search for the true God.

One day shortly after he moved to Athens, he found at his door a copy of *The Watchtower*, which had the cover theme "Health and Happiness Can Be Yours." He read it several times. In the same magazine, he read that we should seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness. (Matthew 6:33) Thomas kneeled and asked God to show him how to do this, promising: "If you show me how to seek your Kingdom, I will devote six months of my life to learn how to serve you." In the fourth week after that, two Witnesses knocked on his door. Immediately Thomas accepted a Bible study, and ten months later he was baptized. He says: "Jehovah real-

ly answered my prayer, and he gave me the opportunity to be one of his Witnesses. Now his love moves me to seek his Kingdom and righteousness first in my life."

While preaching from door to door, two other Witnesses found a foreign name next to a bell.

"What do you want?" came a woman's voice on the intercom.

One of the Witnesses said that they were trying to find English-speaking people who were interested in the Bible.

"What religion are you?" the lady asked.

"We are Jehovah's Witnesses."

"Oh, good! Come up to the top floor."

They did so and, as the elevator door opened, a very large man with a rather negative attitude stood there. But the woman spoke up from inside.

"Let them in. I want to talk to them."

It turned out that she traveled the world with her husband's sports team, and only the day before, she had been praying to find Jehovah's Witnesses. So a Bible study was started right away. As their time to remain in Greece was limited, three studies a week were arranged, the *Live Forever* book being completed in just ten weeks.



People from many lands are hearing the good news in Athens



The next sports season brought them back to Greece. The wife resumed her study and made excellent progress. After a couple of months, she joined the Witnesses in the preaching work as an unbaptized publisher and quickly started her first Bible study. With whom? Her husband, who is very impressed with the Witnesses and with the changes in his wife.

Allan, the son of a Protestant pastor, grew up in South Africa. From a very young age, he was convinced that the Bible is the inspired revelation from God. Not satisfied with his religion, he turned to philosophy and politics, but this left him feeling emptier than ever. After he moved to Greece, his feeling of emptiness grew. He felt that his life was without purpose, that he was on a road leading nowhere.

One night something happened. "I got down on my knees and opened my heart to God," Allan relates. "With tears of sorrow for my life course, I begged God to lead

me to his true followers. I promised that I would walk in the light of his guidance." Within the week, he was in a store and got into a conversation with the proprietor, a woman, who turned out to be a Witness. That conversation proved to be a real turning point in Allan's life. "In the days that followed, I saw my cherished beliefs demolished: Trinity, hellfire, immortality of the soul—all clearly not Bible teachings." At the Kingdom Hall, a Witness couple offered to study the Bible with him. He accepted and made rapid progress. "The truth made me weep with happiness," Allan recalls, "and it set me free." One year later he was baptized. Today he is happy to serve as a ministerial servant in the local congregation.

Elizabeth is from Nigeria, where she had searched for God in various churches but had been left unsatisfied. What horrified her most was the teaching of eternal torment in hellfire. When she came to Athens

with her family, two Witnesses called at her door, and a Bible study was started. Elizabeth was thrilled to learn that God does not torment people, but he does provide the hope for eternal life on a paradise earth. She was pregnant with her fourth child, which she wanted to abort. Then she learned from the Bible Jehovah's view on the sanctity of life. Now she has a beautiful daughter. Elizabeth progressed very quickly and soon was baptized. Although she has four children and a full-time job, she is able to auxiliary pioneer almost every month. She has been blessed to see her husband start studying the Bible. She says: "I finally found the true God and true worship, thanks to Jehovah and his loving organization."

Many of the people in this varied territory are contacted in street work, but it takes perseverance to develop their interest. This was the case with a young woman named Sallay, from Sierra Leone. A Witness gave her a tract, got her address, and arranged for a call to be made on her. Sallay was interested and accepted a Bible study, but because of pressures from work and other difficulties, it was not held regularly. Then she suddenly moved without providing a new address. The Witness persevered by going to the old address, and eventually Sallay sent a message for the Witness to come to her new home.

The study now became much more regular even though Sallay was in the final months of her pregnancy. After the baby's birth, Sallay became an unbaptized publisher. If all of this sounds easy, it was not. At 6:30 a.m., she has to be ready for a half-hour bus ride to take her baby to nursery school, followed by another hour bus ride to work. After working at her cleaning job, she makes the trip back to her home. On meeting nights, or when she goes in field service, she travels another hour by bus each

way, despite opposition from her husband. While showing him love and patience, she progressed to the point of dedication and baptism. What about her husband? He attended the Memorial of Christ's death and agreed to have a Bible study.

Blessed With Fine Results

For most of these people, their stay in Athens is temporary. Many return to their country of origin to share the good news with relatives and friends. Others move to different Western countries and continue serving Jehovah. Those who stay in Greece enjoy good results witnessing to their countrymen who have also immigrated there. In other cases the seeds of truth came to fruition only after the visitors moved to another country and were contacted by the Witnesses.

All of this proves that Jehovah is not partial. He accepts people from every nation who fear him and love righteousness. (Acts 10:34, 35) For such sheeplike people, their move to another country for material advantages resulted in far greater blessings than they had anticipated—knowledge of the true God, Jehovah, and his promise of eternal life in a righteous new world. Yes, Jehovah has indeed richly blessed the efforts to reach foreign-speaking people in modern-day Athens!

In Our Next Issue

The Truth About Angels

Saved From a "Wicked Generation"

**Comfort for Those
With a "Stricken Spirit"**



HOW WILL YOU STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT?

"When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne."—MATTHEW 25:31.

'GUILTY OR INNOCENT?' Many wonder as they hear reports about some court case. Judges and jury members may try to be honest, but does justice usually prevail? Have you not heard of injustice and inequities in the judicial process? Such injustice is not new, as we see in Jesus' illustration found at Luke 18:1-8.

² Whatever your experience with human justice, note Jesus' conclusion: "Shall not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night . . . ?

1-3. What reason for optimism do we have regarding justice?

I tell you, He will cause justice to be done to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man arrives, will he really find the faith on the earth?"

³ Yes, Jehovah will see that his servants finally receive justice. Jesus is involved, too, especially now because we are living in "the last days" of the present wicked system. Jehovah will soon use his powerful Son to wipe wickedness off the earth. (2 Timothy 3:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8; Revelation 19:11-16) We can gain insight into Jesus' role from one of the last illustrations he gave, often called the parable of the sheep and the goats.

⁴ We have long felt that the parable depicted Jesus' sitting down as King in 1914 and since then making judgments—everlasting life for people proving to be like sheep, permanent death for the goats. But a reconsideration of the parable points to an adjusted understanding of its timing and what it illustrates. This refinement reinforces the importance of our preaching work and the significance of people's response. To see the basis for this deeper understanding of the parable, let us consider what the Bible shows about Jehovah and Jesus, both as Kings and as Judges.

Jehovah as the Supreme Judge

⁵ Jehovah rules the universe with power over all. Having no beginning and no end, he is "King of eternity." (1 Timothy 1:17; Psalm 90:2, 4; Revelation 15:3) He has authority to make statutes, or laws, and to enforce these. But his authority includes being a Judge. Isaiah 33:22 says: "Jehovah is our Judge, Jehovah is our Statute-giver, Jehovah is our King; he himself will save us."

⁶ God's servants have long recognized Jehovah as the Judge of cases and issues. For example, after "the Judge of all the earth" had weighed the evidence about the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah, he both judged that the inhabitants merited destruction and enforced that righteous judgment. (Genesis 18:20-33; Job 34:10-12) How it should reassure us to know that Jehovah is a righteous Judge who can always carry out his judgments!

⁷ In ancient Israel, Jehovah sometimes rendered judgment directly. Would you not

have been comforted back then to know that a perfect Judge was deciding matters? (Leviticus 24:10-16; Numbers 15:32-36; 27:1-11) God also provided "judicial decisions" that were altogether good as standards for judging. (Leviticus 25:18, 19; Nehemiah 9:13; Psalm 19:9, 10; 119:7, 75, 164; 147:19, 20) He is "Judge of all the earth," so all of us are affected.—Hebrews 12:23.

⁸ We have "eyewitness" testimony bearing on this matter. The prophet Daniel was given a vision of ferocious beasts that stood for governments or empires. (Daniel 7:1-8, 17) He added: "There were thrones placed and the Ancient of Days sat down. His clothing was white just like snow." (Daniel 7:9) Note that Daniel saw thrones "and the Ancient of Days [Jehovah] *sat down*." Ask yourself, 'Was Daniel here witnessing God's becoming King?'

⁹ Well, when we read that someone "sat down" on a throne, we might think of his becoming a king, for the Bible sometimes uses such language. For example: "When [Zimri] began to reign, as soon as he sat down upon his throne, he . . ." (1 Kings 16:11; 2 Kings 10:30; 15:12; Jeremiah 33:17) A Messianic prophecy said: "He must *sit down and rule on his throne*." Hence, to 'sit on a throne' can mean to become king. (Zechariah 6:12, 13) Jehovah is described as a King who sits on a throne. (1 Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Revelation 4:1-3) He is "King of eternity." Yet, as he asserted a new aspect of sovereignty, he could be said to have *become* King, as if sitting down on his throne anew.—1 Chronicles 16:1, 31; Isaiah 52:7; Revelation 11:15-17; 15:3; 19:1, 2, 6.

¹⁰ But here is a key point: A prime function of ancient kings was that of hearing

4. How have we understood the timing of the parable of the sheep and the goats, but why will we give attention to the parable now? (Proverbs 4:18)

5, 6. Why is it appropriate to view Jehovah as both King and Judge?

7. How did Jehovah act as Judge in dealing with Israel?

8. What relevant vision did Daniel have?

9. What is one meaning of 'sitting down' on a throne? Give examples.

10. What was a prime function of Israelite kings? Illustrate.

cases and rendering judgments. (Proverbs 29:14) Recall Solomon's wise judgment when two women claimed the same baby. (1 Kings 3:16-28; 2 Chronicles 9:8) One of his governmental buildings was "the Porch of the Throne where he would do judging," also called "the porch of judgment." (1 Kings 7:7) Jerusalem was described as the place where "the thrones for judgment have been sitting." (Psalm 122:5) Clearly, 'sitting down on a throne' can also mean exercising judicial authority.—Exodus 18:13; Proverbs 20:8.

¹¹ Now let us return to the scene where Daniel saw 'the Ancient of Days *sit down*.' Daniel 7:10 adds: "The Court took its seat, and there were books that were opened." Yes, the Ancient of Days was sitting to render judgment about world domination and to judge the Son of man as worthy to rule. (Daniel 7:13, 14) Then we read that "the Ancient of Days came and *judgment* itself was given in favor of the holy ones," those judged fit to rule with the Son of man. (Daniel 7:22) Finally "the Court itself proceeded to sit" and render adverse judgment on the last world power.—Daniel 7:26.*

¹² Consequently, Daniel's seeing God 'sit on a throne' meant His coming to render judgment. Earlier David sang: "You [Jehovah] have executed my judgment and my cause; you have sat on the throne judging with righteousness." (Psalm 9:4, 7) And Joel wrote: "Let the nations be aroused and come up to the low plain of Jehoshaphat; for there I [Jehovah] shall sit in order to judge all the nations." (Joel 3:12; compare Isaiah 16:5.) Both Jesus and Paul were in ju-

* The word rendered "Court" at Daniel 7:10, 26 is also found at Ezra 7:26 and Daniel 4:37; 7:22.

11, 12. (a) What was the import of Jehovah's sitting down, mentioned in Daniel chapter 7? (b) How do other texts bear out that Jehovah sits down to judge?

dicial situations in which a human sat to hear a case and render judgment.*—John 19:12-16; Acts 23:3; 25:6.

Jesus' Position

¹³ Jehovah is both King and Judge. What of Jesus? The angel announcing his birth said: "Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, . . . and there will be no end of his kingdom." (Luke 1:32, 33) Jesus would be permanent heir of the Davidic kingship. (2 Samuel 7:12-16) He would rule from heaven, for David said: "The utterance of Jehovah to my Lord [Jesus] is: 'Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.' The rod of your strength Jehovah will send out of Zion, saying: 'Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.'" —Psalm 110:1-4.

¹⁴ When would that be? Jesus did not rule as King while a human. (John 18:33-37) In 33 C.E., he died, was resurrected, and ascended to heaven. Hebrews 10:12 says: "This man offered one sacrifice for sins perpetually and sat down at the right hand of God." What authority did Jesus have? "[God] seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above every government and authority and power and lordship . . . and made him head over all things to the congregation." (Ephesians 1:20-22) Because Jesus then had kingly authority over Christians, Paul could write that Jehovah "delivered us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love."—Colossians 1:13; 3:1.

* Regarding Christians' taking one another to court, Paul asked: "Is it the men looked down upon in the congregation that you put in as judges [literally "are you seating"]?"—1 Corinthians 6:4.

13, 14. (a) What assurance did God's people have that Jesus would become King? (b) When did Jesus sit down on his throne, and in what sense did he rule from 33 C.E. onward?

¹⁵ At that time, however, Jesus did not act as King and Judge over the nations. He was seated next to God, awaiting the time to act as King of God's Kingdom. Paul wrote of him: "With reference to which one of the angels has he ever said: 'Sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet?'"—Hebrews 1:13.

¹⁶ Jehovah's Witnesses have published much evidence that Jesus' period of waiting expired in 1914, when he became ruler of God's Kingdom in the invisible heavens. Revelation 11:15, 18 says: "The kingdom of the world did become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will rule as king forever and ever." "But the nations became wrathful, and your own wrath came." Yes, the nations expressed wrath toward one another during World War I. (Luke 21:24) The wars, earthquakes, pestilences, food shortages, and the like, that we have seen since 1914 confirm that Jesus is now ruling in God's Kingdom, and the world's final end is near.—Matthew 24:3-14.

¹⁷ By way of a brief review: God can be said to sit on a throne as King, but in another sense he can sit down on his throne to judge. In 33 C.E., Jesus sat at God's right hand, and he is now King of the Kingdom. But does Jesus, now reigning as King, also serve as Judge? And why should this concern us, especially at this time?

¹⁸ Jehovah, who has the right to appoint judges, chose Jesus as a Judge meeting His standards. Jesus showed this when speaking about people becoming spiritually alive: "The Father judges no one at all, but he

15, 16. (a) Why do we say that Jesus did not become King of God's Kingdom in 33 C.E.? (b) When did Jesus commence ruling in God's Kingdom?

17. What key points have we thus far established?

18. What evidence is there that Jesus would also be Judge?

has committed all the judging to the Son." (John 5:22) Yet, Jesus' judicial role goes beyond that kind of judging, for he is judge of the living and of the dead. (Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1) Paul once declared: "[God] has set a day in which he purposes to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man [Jesus] whom he has appointed, and he has furnished a guarantee to all men in that he has resurrected him."—Acts 17:31; Psalm 72:2-7.

¹⁹ Are we thus justified in concluding that Jesus sits down on a glorious throne in the specific role of Judge? Yes. Jesus told the apostles: "In the re-creation, when *the Son of man sits down upon his glorious throne*, you who have followed me will *also* yourselves sit upon twelve thrones, *judging* the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28) Although Jesus is now King of the Kingdom, his further activity mentioned at Matthew 19:28 will include sitting on a throne to judge during the Millennium. At that time he will judge all mankind, the righteous and the unrighteous. (Acts 24:15) It is helpful to keep this in mind as we turn our attention to one of Jesus' parables that relates to our time and to our lives.

What Does the Parable Say?

²⁰ Shortly before Jesus died, his apostles asked him: "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matthew 24:3) Jesus foretold significant developments on earth before 'the end would come.' Shortly before that end, the nations will "see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."—Matthew 24:14, 29, 30.

19. Why is it correct to speak of Jesus as sitting down as Judge?

20, 21. What did Jesus' apostles ask that relates to our time, leading to what question?

²¹ How, though, will people in those nations fare when the Son of man arrives in his glory? Let us find out from the parable of the sheep and the goats, which begins with the words: "When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before him."—Matthew 25:31, 32.

²² Does this parable apply when Jesus sat down in kingly power in 1914, as we have long understood? Well, Matthew 25:34 does speak of him as King, so the parable logically finds application since Jesus became King in 1914. But what judging did he do soon thereafter? It was not a judging of "all the nations." Rather, he turned his attention to those claiming to make up "*the house of God*." (1 Peter 4:17) In line with Malachi 3:1-3, Jesus, as Jehovah's messenger, judicially inspected the anointed Christians remaining on earth. It was also time for judicial sentence on Christendom, who falsely claimed to be "the house of God."* (Revelation 17:1, 2; 18:4-8) Yet nothing indicates that at that time, or for that matter since, Jesus sat to judge people of *all the nations* finally as sheep or goats.

²³ If we analyze Jesus' activity in the parable, we observe him finally judging *all the nations*. The parable does not show that such judging would continue over an extended period of many years, as if every person dying during these past decades were judged worthy of everlasting death or everlasting life. It seems that the majority who have died in recent decades have gone to mankind's common grave. (Revela-

* See *Revelation—Its Grand Climax At Hand!*, pages 56, 73, 235-45, 260, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

22, 23. What points indicate that the parable of the sheep and the goats did not begin its fulfillment in 1914?

tion 6:8; 20:13) The parable, though, depicts the time when Jesus judges the people of "all the nations" who are then alive and facing the execution of his judicial sentence.

²⁴ In other words, the parable points to the future when the Son of man will come in his glory. He will sit down to judge people then living. His judgment will be based on what they have manifested themselves to be. At that time "the distinction between a righteous one and a wicked one" will have been clearly established. (Malachi 3:18) The actual pronouncing and executing of judgment will be carried out in a limited time. Jesus will render just decisions based on what has become evident about individuals.—See also 2 Corinthians 5:10.

²⁵ This means, then, that Jesus' 'sitting down on his glorious throne' for judgment, mentioned at Matthew 25:31, applies to the future point when this powerful King will sit down to pronounce and execute judgment on the nations. Yes, the judgment scene that involves Jesus at Matthew 25:

24. When will the parable of the sheep and the goats be fulfilled?

25. What is Matthew 25:31 depicting in speaking of the Son of man sitting down on a glorious throne?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ How does Jehovah serve as both King and Judge?
- ☐ What two meanings can there be to 'sitting down on a throne'?
- ☐ What did we formerly say as to the timing of Matthew 25:31, but what basis is there for an adjusted view?
- ☐ When does the Son of man sit down on his throne, as indicated at Matthew 25:31?

31-33, 46 is comparable to the scene in Daniel chapter 7, where the reigning King, the Ancient of Days, sat down to carry out his role as Judge.

²⁶ Understanding the parable of the sheep and the goats in this way indicates that the rendering of judgment on the sheep and the goats is future. It will take place after "the tribulation" mentioned at Matthew 24:29, 30 breaks out and the Son of man 'arrives in his glory.' (Compare Mark 13: 24-26.) Then, with the entire wicked system

26. What new explanation of the parable comes into view?

at its end, Jesus will hold court and render and execute judgment.—John 5:30; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10.

²⁷ This clarifies our understanding of the timing of Jesus' parable, which shows when the sheep and the goats will be judged. But how does it affect us who are zealously preaching the Kingdom good news? (Matthew 24:14) Does it make our work less significant, or does it bring a greater weight of responsibility? Let us see in the next article how we are affected.

27. What should we be interested in knowing about Jesus' final parable?

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS?

"He will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."—MATTHEW 25:32.

JESUS CHRIST certainly was the greatest Teacher on earth. (John 7:46) One of his teaching methods was the use of parables, or illustrations. (Matthew 13:34, 35) These were simple yet powerful in conveying deep spiritual and prophetic truths.

² In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus pointed to a time for him to act in a special capacity: "When the Son of man arrives in his glory, and . . ." (Matthew 25:31) This should interest us because it is the illustration with which Jesus concludes his reply to the question: "What will be the sign

1, 2. Why should the parable of the sheep and the goats interest us?

of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" (Matthew 24:3) But what does this mean for us?

³ Jesus foretold striking developments to come "immediately after" the outbreak of great tribulation, developments we await. He said that then "the sign of the Son of man" would appear. This will profoundly affect "all the tribes of the earth" who will "see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The Son of man will be accompanied by "his angels."

3. Earlier in his discourse, what did Jesus say would develop immediately after the great tribulation begins?

NOTE THE PARALLELS

Matthew 24:29-31

After the great tribulation begins,
the Son of man comes

Comes with great glory

Angels present with him

All tribes of earth see him

Matthew 25:31-33

Son of man arrives

Arrives in glory and sits on
his glorious throne

Angels arrive with him

All nations gathered; goats judged
finally (the great tribulation ends)

Garo Nalbandian

(Matthew 24:21, 29-31)* What of the parable of the sheep and the goats? Modern Bibles put it in chapter 25, but it is part of Jesus' reply, giving further details about his coming in glory and focusing on his judging of "all the nations."—Matthew 25:32.

Figures in the Parable

⁴ Jesus begins the parable by saying: "When the Son of man arrives." You likely know who "the Son of man" is. Gospel writers often applied that expression to Jesus. Even Jesus himself did so, no doubt having in mind Daniel's vision of "someone like a son of man" approaching the Ancient of Days to receive "rulership and dignity and kingdom." (Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 26:63, 64; Mark 14:61, 62) While Jesus is the principal one in this parable, he is not alone. Earlier in this discourse, as quoted at Matthew 24:30, 31, he said that when the Son of man 'comes with power and great

glory,' his angels will play a vital role. Similarly, the parable of the sheep and the goats shows angels with Jesus when he 'sits down on his glorious throne' to judge. (Compare Matthew 16:27.) But the Judge and his angels are in heaven, so are humans discussed in the parable?

⁵ A glance at the parable reveals three groups that we need to identify. In addition to the sheep and the goats, the Son of man adds the third group whose identity is pivotal to identifying the sheep and the goats. Jesus calls this third group his spiritual brothers. (Matthew 25:40, 45) They must be true worshipers, for Jesus said: "Whoever does the will of my Father . . . , the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:50; John 20:17) More to the point, Paul wrote of Christians who are part of "Abraham's seed" and who are sons of God. He called these Jesus' "brothers" and "partakers of the heavenly calling."—Hebrews 2:9-3:1; Galatians 3:26, 29.

⁶ Why did Jesus mention "the least" of his brothers? Those words echo what the

* See *The Watchtower* of February 15, 1994, pages 16-21.

4. What opening mention does the parable of the sheep and the goats make about Jesus, and who else comes into the picture?

5. How can we identify Jesus' "brothers"?

6. Who are "the least" of Jesus' brothers?

apostles heard him say earlier. When contrasting John the Baptist, who died before Jesus and therefore had an earthly hope, with those attaining to heavenly life, Jesus said: "There has not been raised up a greater than John the Baptist; but a person that is a lesser one in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he is." (Matthew 11:11) Some going to heaven may have been prominent in the congregation, like the apostles, and others less so, but they are all Jesus' spiritual brothers. (Luke 16:10; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Ephesians 3:8; Hebrews 8:11) Thus, even if some seemed insignificant on earth, they were his brothers and should have been treated accordingly.

Who Are the Sheep and the Goats?

⁷ We read concerning the judging of the sheep: "[Jesus] will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I became hungry and you gave me something to eat; I got thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you received me hospitably; naked, and you clothed me. I fell sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the *righteous ones* will answer him with the words, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and receive you hospitably, or naked, and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to you?' And in reply the king will say to them, 'Truly I say to you, To the extent that you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"—Matthew 25:34-40.

⁸ Obviously, the sheep judged worthy of being on Jesus' right side of honor and favor represent a class of humans. (Ephesians

7, 8. What did Jesus say about the sheep, so what can we conclude about them?

1:20; Hebrews 1:3) What did they do and when? Jesus says that they kindly, respectfully, and generously gave him food, drink, and clothing, aiding him when he was sick or in prison. When the sheep say that they had not done this to Jesus personally, he points out that they did support his spiritual brothers, the remnant of anointed Christians, so in that sense they did it to him.

⁹ The parable does not apply during the Millennium, for the anointed will not then be humans suffering hunger, thirst, sickness, or imprisonment. Many of them, though, have experienced such during the conclusion of this system of things. Ever since Satan was cast down to earth, he has made the remnant a special object of his fury, bringing on them ridicule, torture, and death.—Revelation 12:17.

¹⁰ Is Jesus saying that everyone doing a small kindness to one of his brothers, such as offering a piece of bread or a glass of water, qualifies as one of these sheep? Granted, rendering such kindnesses may reflect human kindness, but really, it seems that much more is involved with the sheep of this parable. Jesus was hardly referring, for example, to atheists or clergymen who happen to do a kind act to one of his brothers. On the contrary, Jesus twice called the sheep "righteous ones." (Matthew 25:37, 46) So the sheep must be ones who over a period of time have come to the aid of—actively supporting—Christ's brothers and have exercised faith to the extent of receiving a righteous standing before God.

¹¹ Over the centuries, many such as Abraham have enjoyed a righteous standing. (James 2:21-23) Noah, Abraham, and other

9. Why does the parable not apply during the Millennium?

10, 11. (a) Why is it unreasonable to think that the sheep include everyone doing a kind deed to Jesus' brothers? (b) Whom do the sheep fittingly represent?

faithful ones count among the “other sheep” who will inherit life in Paradise under God’s Kingdom. In recent times millions more have taken up true worship as other sheep and have become “one flock” with the anointed. (John 10:16; Revelation 7:9) These with earthly hopes recognize Jesus’ brothers as ambassadors of the Kingdom and have therefore aided them—literally and spiritually. Jesus counts as done to him what the other sheep do for his brothers on earth. Such ones who are alive when he comes to judge the nations will be judged as sheep.

¹² If the other sheep are now preaching the good news with the anointed and aiding them, why would they ask: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink?” (Matthew 25:37) There could be various reasons. This is a parable. By means of it, Jesus shows his deep concern for his spiritual brothers; he feels with them, suffers with them. Jesus had earlier said: “He that receives you receives me also, and he that receives me receives him also that sent me forth.” (Matthew 10:40) In this illustration, Jesus extends the principle, showing that what is done (good or bad) to his brothers reaches even into heaven; it is as if it is done to him in heaven. Also, Jesus here emphasizes Jehovah’s standard for judging, making it clear that God’s judgment, whether favorable or condemnatory, is valid and just. The goats cannot offer the excuse, ‘Well, if only we had seen you directly.’

¹³ Once we appreciate when it is that the judgment shown in this parable is rendered, we get a clearer view of who the goats are. The fulfillment is when “the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and then *all the tribes of the earth* will beat them—

12. Why might the sheep ask how they had done kindnesses to Jesus?

13. Why might goatlike ones address Jesus as “Lord”?

selves in lamentation, and they will see the Son of man coming . . . with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:29, 30) Survivors of the tribulation on Babylon the Great who have treated the King’s brothers despitely may now desperately address the Judge as “Lord,” hoping to save their lives.—Matthew 7:22, 23; compare Revelation 6:15-17.

¹⁴ However, Jesus’ judgment will not be based on desperate claims from former churchgoers, atheists, or others. (2 Thessalonians 1:8) Instead, the judge will review the heart condition and past actions of people toward even “one of these least ones [of his brothers].” Admittedly, the number of anointed Christians left on earth is declining. However, as long as the anointed, making up “the faithful and discreet slave,” continue to provide spiritual food and direction, prospective sheep have an opportunity to do good to the slave class, just as the ‘great crowd out of all nations and tribes and peoples’ have done.—Revelation 7:9, 14.

¹⁵ How have Christ’s brothers and the millions of other sheep united with them as one flock been treated? Many people may not personally have attacked Christ’s representatives, but neither have they treated his people lovingly. Preferring the wicked world, goatlike ones reject the Kingdom message, whether hearing it directly or indirectly. (1 John 2:15-17) Of course, in the final analysis, Jesus is the one who is appointed to render judgment. It is not for us to determine who are sheep and who are goats.—Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; John 2:24, 25; Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 4:5.

What Future for Each Group?

¹⁶ Jesus gave his judgment of the sheep:

14. On what basis will Jesus judge the sheep and the goats?

15. (a) How have many shown themselves to be like goats? (b) Why should we avoid stating whether someone is a sheep or a goat?

16, 17. What future will the sheep have?

"Come, you who have been blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world." What a warm invitation—"Come"! To what? To everlasting life, as he expressed in summation: "The righteous [will enter] into everlasting life."—Matthew 25:34, 46.

¹⁷ In the parable of the talents, Jesus showed what is required of those who will rule with him in heaven, but in this parable he shows what is expected of the Kingdom's subjects. (Matthew 25:14-23) Pointedly, because of their undivided support of Jesus' brothers, the sheep inherit a place in the earthly realm of his Kingdom. They will enjoy life on a paradise earth—a prospect that God prepared for them "from the founding of the world" of redeemable humans.—Luke 11:50, 51.

¹⁸ What a contrast is the judgment executed on the goats! "Then he will say, in turn, to those on his left, 'Be on your way from me, you who have been cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I became hungry, but you gave me nothing to eat, and I got thirsty, but you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not receive me hospitably; naked, but you did not clothe me; sick and in prison, but you did not look after me.' Then they also will answer with the words, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them with the words, 'Truly I say to you, To the extent that you did not do it to one of these least ones, you did not do it to me.'"—Matthew 25:41-45.

¹⁹ Bible students know that this cannot mean that immortal souls of goatlike ones will suffer in an eternal fire. No, for hu-

mans *are* souls; they do not *possess* immortal souls. (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Ezekiel 18:4) By sentencing the goats to "everlasting fire," the Judge means destruction devoid of a future hope, which will also be the permanent end for the Devil and his demons. (Revelation 20:10, 14) Hence, Jehovah's Judge sets out opposites. He tells the sheep, "Come"; the goats, "Be on your way from me." The sheep will inherit "everlasting life." The goats will receive "everlasting cutting-off."—Matthew 25:46.*

What Does It Mean for Us?

²⁰ The four apostles who heard Jesus' reply about the sign of his presence and the conclusion of the system had much to consider. They would need to keep awake and on the watch. (Matthew 24:42) They would also need to do the witnessing work mentioned at Mark 13:10. Jehovah's Witnesses are energetically engaged in that work today.

²¹ What, though, does this fresh understanding of the parable of the sheep and the goats mean to us? Well, people are already taking sides. Some are on 'the broad road leading off into destruction,' while others try to stay on 'the cramped road leading off into life.' (Matthew 7:13, 14) But the time when Jesus will pronounce final judgment on the sheep and the goats depicted in the parable is yet ahead. When the Son of man comes in the role of Judge, he will

* *El Evangelio de Mateo* notes: "Eternal life is definitive life; its opposite is definitive punishment. The Greek adjective *aionios* does not primarily denote duration, but quality. The definitive punishment is death forever."—Retired professor Juan Mateos (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome) and Professor Fernando Camacho (Theological Center, Seville), Madrid, Spain, 1981.

20, 21. (a) Christians have what important work to do? (b) What dividing is now going on? (c) What will be the situation of people when the parable of the sheep and the goats begins to be fulfilled?

18, 19. (a) Jesus will render what judgment of the goats? (b) How can we be sure that the goats will not face eternal suffering?

determine that many true Christians—actually “a great crowd” of dedicated sheep—will qualify to pass through the final part of “the great tribulation” into the new world. That prospect should now be a source of joy. (Revelation 7:9, 14) On the other hand, vast numbers out of “all the nations” will have proved themselves to be like stubborn goats. They “will depart into everlasting cutting-off.” What a relief for the earth!

²² While the judging as described in the parable is in the near future, even *now* something vital is taking place. We Christians are engaged in a lifesaving work of proclaiming a message that causes a division among people. (Matthew 10:32-39) Paul wrote: “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.’ However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith? How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard? How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach?” (Romans 10:13, 14) Our public ministry is reaching people in over 230 lands with the name of God and his message of salvation. The anointed brothers of Christ are still spearheading this work. Some five million of the other sheep have now joined them. And people around the globe are responding to the message proclaimed by Jesus’ brothers.

²³ Many are exposed to our message as we preach from house to house or informally. Others may learn of Jehovah’s Witnesses and what we represent in ways unknown to us. When judgment time arrives, to what extent will Jesus consider community responsibility and family merit? We cannot say, and it is pointless to speculate. (Compare 1 Corinthians 7:14.) Many now turn a deaf ear, ridicule, or share in outright persecution of God’s people. Hence, this is a crucial time, 22, 23. Since the parable’s outworking is yet future, why is our preaching work today vital?

time; such ones may be developing into those whom Jesus will judge as goats.—Matthew 10:22; John 15:20; 16:2, 3; Romans 2:5, 6.

²⁴ Happily, though, many respond favorably, study God’s Word, and become Witnesses of Jehovah. Some who at present seem goatlike may change and become like sheep. The point is that those responding and actively supporting the remnant of Christ’s brothers are thereby now giving evidence that will provide a basis for them to be placed on Jesus’ right hand when, in the near future, he sits down on his throne to render judgment. These are being and will continue to be blessed. Thus, this parable should spur us on to more zealous activity in the Christian ministry. Before it is too late, we want to do all we can to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and in that way give others the opportunity to respond. Then it is up to Jesus to render judgment, condemnatory or favorable.—Matthew 25:46.

24. (a) Why is it important for individuals to respond favorably to our preaching? (b) This study has helped you personally to have what attitude toward your ministry?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What parallels between Matthew 24:29-31 and Matthew 25:31-33 show that the parable of the sheep and the goats has a future application, and when is that?
- ☐ Who are “the least” of Jesus’ brothers?
- ☐ How does Jesus’ use of the expression “righteous ones” help us to identify whom these represent and whom they do not represent?
- ☐ Though the parable will be fulfilled in the future, why is our preaching now important and urgent?

Watch Out for SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS!

IN THE first century, the Pharisees enjoyed the good reputation of being righteous worshipers of God. They were earnest students of the Scriptures and prayed frequently. Some people viewed them as being gentle and reasonable. Jewish historian Josephus wrote: "The Pharisees are affectionate to each other and cultivate harmonious relations with the community." No wonder they were probably the most respected and highly regarded individuals in Jewish society at that time!

However, today the word "Pharisaic" and related terms are derogatory, synonymous with sanctimonious, self-righteous, holier-than-thou, overpious, and giving lip service. Why did the Pharisees lose their good name?

It was because, unlike most Jews, Jesus Christ was not deceived by the Pharisees' outer appearance. He compared them to "whitewashed graves, which outwardly indeed appear beautiful but inside are full of dead men's bones and of every sort of uncleanness."—Matthew 23:27.

True, they offered long prayers while standing in public places, but this was just to be seen by others, as Jesus said. Their worship was a mere charade. They were fond of prominent places at evening meals and the front seats in the synagogues. While all Jews were obliged to wear fringes on their garments, the Pharisees tried to impress people by wearing excessively long fringes. They were proud to display their enlarged scripture-containing cases worn

as amulets. (Matthew 6:5; 23:5-8) Their hypocrisy, their greed, and their arrogance finally brought them disgrace.

Jesus voiced God's rejection of the Pharisees: "You hypocrites, Isaiah aptly prophesied about you, when he said, 'This people honors me with their lips, yet their heart is far removed from me. It is in vain that they keep worshiping me, because they teach commands of men as doctrines.'" (Matthew 15:7-9) Their righteousness was really self-righteousness. Understandably, Jesus warned his disciples: "Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees." (Luke 12:1) Today, we too must "watch out" for self-righteousness or guard against becoming religious hypocrites.

In doing so, we should recognize that a person does not become self-righteous overnight. Rather, this tendency creeps in progressively over a period of time. Even inadvertently an individual can acquire the undesirable traits of the Pharisees.

A Superior Attitude

What are some of the traits that we must "watch out" for? Self-righteous individuals usually "speak, and stand, and look as if they had never done a wrong," explains the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. The self-righteous are also boastful and self-promoting, which was a major problem with the Pharisees.

Jesus described this Pharisaic attitude with an illustration: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee

and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and began to pray these things to himself, 'O God, I thank you I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unrighteous, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give the tenth of all things I acquire.'" In contrast the tax collector humbly admitted his faults and proved to be more righteous than the boastful Pharisee. Jesus addressed this illustration to those "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and who considered the rest as nothing."—Luke 18:9-14.

As imperfect humans we may occasionally feel that we are better than others because of our natural abilities or advantages. But Christians should quickly dismiss such thoughts. You may have many years of experience in Christian living. You may be a skillful Bible teacher. Or perhaps you profess to have been anointed to reign with Christ in heaven. Some in the congregation enjoy special privileges as full-time ministers, elders, or ministerial servants. Ask yourself, 'How would Jehovah feel if I were to use what he has given me as a basis to feel superior to others?' Surely, this would displease him.—Philippians 2:3, 4.

When a Christian displays a spirit of superiority because of his God-given abilities, privileges, or authority, he is in fact robbing God of the glory and the credit that only He deserves. The Bible clearly admonishes the Christian "not to think more of himself than it is necessary to think." It urges us: "Be minded the same way toward others as to yourselves; do not be minding lofty things, but be led along with the lowly things. Do not become discreet in your own eyes."—Romans 12:3, 16.

"Stop Judging"

According to one Bible encyclopedia, a self-righteous person "considers himself ei-

ther morally upright or in right standing with God because of his adherence to the letter of legal requirements without regard to their spirit." Another work describes the self-righteous as "excessively religious people who spend all their time seeking out wickedness in others."

The Pharisees were guilty of this. In time their man-made rules seemed more important than God's laws and principles. (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:41-44) They appointed themselves judges and were prone to condemn anyone who did not meet their self-righteous standards. Their superior attitude and exaggerated self-esteem generated a need to control other people. Their inability to control Jesus enraged them, so they plotted his murder.—John 11:47-53.

How unpleasant it is to be in the company of someone who sets himself up as judge, always looking for faults, scrutinizing and policing everyone around him. Really, no one in the congregation has the authority to impose on others his opinions and self-made rules. (Romans 14:10-13) Balanced Christians realize that many aspects of daily life fall into the realm of personal decision. Especially must those who have a tendency to be perfectionists and demanding avoid judging others.

True, the Christian congregation is authorized to have guidelines that contribute to the smooth operation of Jehovah's earthly organization. (Hebrews 13:17) But some have distorted these guidelines or have added their own rules. In one area all students in the Theocratic Ministry School had to wear suits and button up their jackets when delivering a talk. A student who failed to do so would be disqualified from giving future talks. Rather than make such hard-and-fast rules, would it not be more reasonable and in harmony with the spirit of

God's Word to give kindly, personal guidance as needed?—James 3:17.

Self-righteousness may also promote the view that if a Christian is undergoing many personal difficulties, he must be spiritually deficient. That is precisely what self-righteous Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar thought about faithful Job. They did not have a complete picture of the situation, so it was presumptuous for them to accuse Job of wrongdoing. Jehovah disciplined them for their distorted evaluation of Job's trials.—See Job, chapters 4, 5, 8, 11, 18, 20.

Misguided Zeal

Self-righteousness and zeal are often interrelated. The apostle Paul spoke of religiously inclined Jews as having "zeal for God; but not according to accurate knowledge; for, because of not knowing the righteousness of God but seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." (Romans 10:2, 3) As a Pharisee, Paul himself had been extremely zealous, though his zeal was misguided, not based on Jehovah's righteousness.—Galatians 1:13, 14; Philippians 3:6.

Appropriately the Bible admonishes: "Do not become righteous overmuch, nor show yourself excessively wise. Why should you cause desolation to yourself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16) In the congregation a Christian may start out conscientious, but his conscientiousness and zeal can degenerate into self-righteousness. When guided by human wisdom rather than by Jehovah's righteousness, religious zeal can hurt others. How?

Parents, for example, may become overly occupied in attending to the spiritual needs of others, and in the process they may neglect the needs of their own family. Or parents may be excessively zealous, demanding more of their children than they can possibly do. (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians

3:21) Some children, unable to meet such unreasonable demands, respond by leading a double life. A reasonable parent will take into account the limitations of his family and make appropriate adjustments.—Compare Genesis 33:12-14.

Extreme zeal can also deprive us of tact, empathy, and tenderness, which are vital in our dealings with others. A person may work very hard to advance Kingdom interests. However, his extreme zeal may hurt people along the way. Paul said: "If I have the gift of prophesying and am acquainted with all the sacred secrets and all knowledge, and if I have all the faith so as to transplant mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my belongings to feed others, and if I hand over my body, that I may boast, but do not have love, I am not profited at all."—1 Corinthians 13:2, 3.

God Favors the Humble Ones

As Christians we need to identify the threat of self-righteousness before it strikes. We must avoid a superior attitude, the habit of judging others, and blind zeal based on human wisdom.

As we "watch out" for Pharisaic attitudes, instead of judging others as self-righteous, it would be better to focus on our own tendencies and inclinations. True, Jesus judged the Pharisees and condemned them as "offspring of vipers" deserving of eternal destruction. But Jesus could read people's hearts. We cannot.—Matthew 23:33.

Let us seek God's righteousness and not our own. (Matthew 6:33) Only then can we have Jehovah's favor, for the Bible admonishes all of us: "Gird yourselves with lowliness of mind toward one another, because God opposes the haughty ones, but he gives undeserved kindness to the humble ones."—1 Peter 5:5.

They Did It for Love

A FAITHFUL, hospitable widow in Canada was raising four young daughters as true Christians. The elders in the congregation noticed that her home was in need of extensive repairs. She had neither the money nor the skill to do the work herself. So in accord with the principle set out at 1 Timothy 5:9, 10, the elders discreetly arranged to have the work done for her. How?

Plans were made for the widow and her children to be away for five days. More than 80 in the congregation gave their wholehearted support, donating materials, funds, and time. Minutes after the family departed, eager workers swarmed over the house like bees. The entire exterior of the house was repaired. Walls were patched and painted. Floors were sanded and refinished. New floor tile and carpet were installed. All necessary electrical and lighting fixtures were upgraded. Even worn-out furniture was replaced. A complete renovation was accomplished in just five days!

The buzz of excitement and activity generated quite a stir in the neighborhood. An 80-year-old neighbor was so moved by the Witnesses' efforts that he brought his paintbrush and insisted on helping. The employer of one of the volunteers contributed a ventilation hood for the kitchen stove. Another employer donated new kitchen cupboards. One man was so impressed that he wanted to learn more about Jehovah's Witnesses. He eagerly accepted the publication *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*.



Complete surprise was written on the faces of the widow and her daughters upon their return. There was an abundance of tears, laughter, and hugs—an unforgettable moment of Christian love and emotion. Indeed, genuine love and concern for needy members of the congregation is a mark of true Christianity, for Paul wrote: "Really, then, as long as we have time favorable for it, let us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to us in the faith."—Galatians 6:10.

