

THE **WATCHTOWER**
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

DECEMBER 15, 1997

CHRISTMAS

Secular Holiday or
Religious Holy Day?

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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CHRISTMAS

Secular Holiday or Religious Holy Day?

of decorating the house and barn with evergreens at the New Year to scare away the devil and of setting up a tree for the birds during Christmastime.”

Making wreaths of holly or other evergreens is another popular Christmas tradition. This too is deeply rooted in pagan worship. Ancient Romans used holly branches to adorn temples during Saturnalia, a seven-day mid-winter festival devoted to Saturn, the god of agriculture. This pagan festival was especially noted for its unrestrained revelry and licentiousness.

The Christmas custom of kissing under a sprig of mistletoe (depicted here) may seem romantic to some, but it is a throwback to the Middle Ages. The Druids of ancient Britain believed that the mistletoe held magical powers; hence, it was used as protection against demons, spells, and other kinds of evil. In time, the superstition arose that kissing underneath the mistletoe would lead to marriage. This practice is still popular among some people around Christmastime.

These are but a few of the modern Christmas traditions that have been influenced by or that have descended outright from pagan teachings. You may wonder, though, how this all came about. How did a holiday that professes to honor the birth of Christ become so entangled with non-Christian customs? More important, how does God view the matter?



IN China he is called Christmas Old Man. In the United Kingdom, he is known as Father Christmas. People in Russia use the name Grandfather Frost, and in the United States, he is dubbed Santa Claus.

Many view this jolly old man who sports a large belly and snow-white beard as the very personification of Christmas. But it is also common knowledge that Santa Claus is a myth, a legend based on traditions associated with a fourth-century bishop of Myra (in modern-day Turkey).

Customs and traditions have always exerted a powerful influence on celebrations, and Christmas is no different. The Santa myth is just one example of folklore tied to a popular holiday. While some people claim that Christmas customs are based on events recorded in the Bible, in reality most of these customs have pagan sources.

A further example is the Christmas tree. *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* says: “Tree worship, common among the pagan Europeans, survived after their conversion to Christianity in the Scandinavian customs

The Roots of Modern CHRISTMAS

FOR millions of people worldwide, the Christmas season is a very joyful time of the year. It is a time of sumptuous meals, time-honored traditions, and family togetherness. The Christmas holiday is also a time when friends and relatives enjoy exchanging cards and gifts.

Just 150 years ago, however, Christmas was a very different holiday. In his book *The Battle for Christmas*, professor of history Stephen Nissenbaum writes: "Christmas . . . was a time of heavy drinking when the rules that governed people's public behavior were momentarily abandoned in favor of an unrestrained 'carnival,' a kind of December Mardi Gras."

To those who view Christmas with reverential awe, this description might be disturbing. Why would anyone desecrate a holiday that purports to commemorate the birth of God's Son? The answer may surprise you.

Faulty Foundation

From its inception in the fourth century, Christmas has been surrounded by controversy. For example, there was the question of Jesus' birthday. Since the Bible does not specify either the day or the month of Christ's birth, a variety of dates have been suggested. In the third century, one group of Egyptian theologians placed it on May 20, while others favored earlier dates, such as March 28, April 2, or April 19. By the 18th-



century, Jesus' birth had been associated with every month of the year! How, then, was December 25 finally chosen?

Most scholars agree that December 25 was assigned by the Catholic Church as Jesus' birthday. Why? "Most probably the reason," says *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, "is that early Christians wished the date to coincide with the pagan Roman festival marking the 'birthday of the unconquered sun.'" But why would Christians who were viciously persecuted by pagans for over two and a half centuries all of a sudden yield to their persecutors?

Corruption Introduced

In the first century, the apostle Paul warned Timothy that "wicked men and impostors" would slip into the Christian congregation and mislead many. (2 Timothy 3:13) This great apostasy began after the death of the apostles. (Acts 20:29, 30) Following the so-called conversion of Constantine in the fourth century, vast numbers of pagans flocked to the form of Christianity that then prevailed. With what result? The book *Early Christianity and Paganism* states: "The comparatively little body

of really earnest believers was lost in the great multitude of professed Christians.”

How true Paul’s words proved to be! It was as if genuine Christianity were being gobbled up by pagan corruption. And nowhere was this contamination more apparent than in the celebration of holidays.

Actually, the only celebration that Christians are commanded to observe is the Lord’s Evening Meal. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) Because of the idolatrous practices associated with Roman festivals, early Christians did not share in them. For this reason third-century pagans reproached Christians, saying: “You do not visit exhibitions; you have no concern in public displays; you reject the public banquets, and abhor the sacred contests.” Pagans, on the other hand, bragged: “We worship the gods with cheerfulness, with feasts, songs and games.”

By the middle of the fourth century, the grumbling subsided. How so? As more and more counterfeit Christians crept into the fold, apostate ideas multiplied. This led to compromises with the Roman world. Commenting on this, the book *The Paganism in Our Christianity* states: “It was a definite Christian policy to take over the pagan festivals endeared to the people by tradition, and to give them a Christian significance.” Yes, the great apostasy was taking its toll. The willingness of the so-called Christians to adopt pagan celebrations now brought a measure of acceptance within the community. Before long, Christians came to have as many annual festivals as the pagans themselves. Not surprisingly, Christmas was foremost among them.

An International Holiday

As the predominant form of Christianity spread across Europe, Christmas expanded with it. The Catholic Church adopted the viewpoint that it was fitting to perpetuate

a joyous festival in honor of Jesus’ birthday. Accordingly, in 567 C.E., the Council of Tours “proclaimed the 12 days from Christmas to Epiphany as a sacred and festive season.”—*The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home*.

Christmas soon absorbed many features from the profane harvest festivals of northern Europe. Merrymaking remained more common than piety as revelers indulged in gluttonous eating and drinking. Rather than speak out against the loose conduct, the church endorsed it. (Compare Romans 13:13; 1 Peter 4:3.) In 601 C.E., Pope Gregory I wrote to Mellitus, his missionary in England, telling him “not to stop such ancient pagan festivities, but to adapt them to the rites of the Church, only changing the reason of them from a heathen to a Christian impulse.” Thus reports Arthur Weigall, who once was inspector general of antiquities for the Egyptian government.

During the Middle Ages, reform-minded individuals felt the need to speak out against such excesses. They sent out numerous decrees against “the abuses of Christmas merriment.” Dr. Penne Restad, in her book *Christmas in America—A History*, says: “Some clergy stressed that fallen humankind needed a season of abandon and excess, as long as it was carried on under the umbrella of Christian supervision.” This only added to the confusion. It hardly mattered, though, for pagan customs were already so closely fused with Christmas that most people were unwilling to give them up. Writer Tristram Coffin put it this way: “People at large [were] doing just what they ha[d] always done and paying little attention to the debates of the moralists.”

By the time Europeans began settling the New World, Christmas was a well-known holiday. Still, Christmas did not find favor in the colonies. Puritan reformers viewed the

celebration as pagan and banned it in Massachusetts between 1659 and 1681.

After the ban was lifted, the celebration of Christmas increased throughout the colonies, particularly south of New England. In view of the holiday's past, however, it is not surprising that some were more concerned with having a good time than with honoring God's Son. One Christmas custom that was especially disruptive was that of was-sailing. Rowdy bands of young men would enter the homes of wealthy neighbors and demand free food and drink in a trick-or-treat fashion. If the householder refused, he was usually cursed, and occasionally his house was vandalized.

Conditions in the 1820's worsened to the point that "Christmas misrule" became "an acute social threat," says Professor Nissenbaum. In cities like New York and Philadelphia, wealthy landowners began hiring watchmen to guard their estates. It is even said that New York City organized its first professional police force in response to a violent riot during the 1827/28 Christmas season!

Christmas Make-Over

The 19th century brought unprecedented changes to humankind. People, goods, and news began to travel much faster as a network of roads and railroads emerged. The industrial revolution created millions of jobs, and factories churned out a steady supply of merchandise. Industrialization also introduced new and complex social problems, which ultimately affected the way Christmas was celebrated.

People have long used holidays as a means to strengthen family ties, and so it is with Christmas. By selectively reworking some of the older Christmas traditions, its promoters effectively changed Christmas from

a wild, carnivalslike festival to a family-based holiday.

Indeed, by the late 19th century, Christmas came to be viewed as a sort of antidote to the ills of modern American life. "Of all holidays," says Dr. Restad, "Christmas was a perfect agency for transporting religion and religious feeling into the home and for righting the excesses and failures of the public world." She adds: "Gift-giving, gestures of charity, even the friendly exchange of a holiday greeting and the decoration and enjoyment of an evergreen tree set in a parlor or, later, a Sunday school hall, linked members of each nuclear family to one another, to church, and to society."

In a similar vein, many today celebrate Christmas as a means to affirm their love for one another and to help maintain family unity. Not to be overlooked, of course, are the spiritual dimensions. Millions of people celebrate Christmas in honor of Jesus' birth. They may attend special church services, put up Nativity scenes at home, or offer prayers of thanks to Jesus himself. But how does God view the matter? Do these things meet with his approval? Consider what the Bible has to say.

"Love Truth and Peace"

While Jesus was on earth, he told his followers: "God is a Spirit, and those worshipping him must worship with spirit and truth." (John 4:24) Jesus lived by those words. He always spoke the truth. He perfectly imitated his Father, "Jehovah the God of truth."—Psalm 31:5; John 14:9.

Through the pages of the Bible, Jehovah has made it clear that he hates all forms of deception. (Psalm 5:6) In view of this, is it not ironic that so many features associated with Christmas smack of falsehood? For instance, think of the fairy tale about Santa Claus. Have you ever tried explaining to a child why Santa prefers entering through a

chimney instead of a door, as is widely held in many lands? And how does Santa visit so many millions of homes in just one evening? What about flying reindeer? When a child learns that he has been deceived about believing that Santa is a real person, does it not undermine his trust in his parents?

The Catholic Encyclopedia plainly states: "Pagan customs . . . gravitated to Christmas." Then why do the Catholic Church and other churches of Christendom continue to perpetuate a holiday the customs of which are not of Christian origin? Does that not indicate a condoning of pagan teachings?

While on earth Jesus did not encourage men to worship him. Jesus himself said: "It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service." (Matthew 4:10) Similarly, after Jesus' heavenly glorification, an angel told the apostle John to "worship God," indicating that nothing had changed regarding this matter. (Revelation 19:10) This leads to the question, Would Jesus approve of all the worshipful devotion that is directed to him, not his Father, at Christmastime?

Clearly, the facts about modern Christmas are not very flattering. It is largely a manufactured holiday with much evidence pointing to a degraded past. In all good conscience, then, millions of Christians have decided not to celebrate Christmas. For ex-



"I don't feel deprived. I receive gifts throughout the year"

ample, one youth named Ryan says regarding Christmas: "People get so excited about a couple of days a year when the family gets together and all are happy. But what is so special about that? My parents give me gifts all year!" Another youth, 12 years old, says: "I don't feel deprived. I receive gifts throughout the year, not just on one special day when people feel obligated to purchase gifts."

The prophet Zechariah encouraged fellow Israelites to "love truth and peace." (Zechariah 8:19) If we, like Zechariah and other faithful men of old, "love truth," should we not avoid any false religious celebration that dishonors the "living and true God," Jehovah?—1 Thessalonians 1:9.

THEY 'BOUGHT TRUTH'!

"BUY truth itself and do not sell it." (Proverbs 23:23) So exhorted the wise man Solomon. While this can be said of truth in general, it is especially so when it comes to the truth found in God's Word, the Bible. Such truth can lead to eternal life! (John 17:3, 17) Note, though, that gaining such truth does not come without cost. One must be willing to "buy" it, that is, sacrifice or give up something in order to obtain it. (Compare Matthew 13:45, 46.) By and large, people are not willing to do so. But in many lands, growing numbers of courageous individuals are buying Bible truth—often at great personal cost.

Take, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses in the West African country of Ghana. By June of 1989, there were over 34,000 individuals in that land who had embraced Bible truth and were actively sharing it with others. Then legal restrictions were placed on the public preaching work. Nevertheless, honesthearted ones continued to "buy truth"—despite legal impediments. The freeze ended on October 31, 1991, and by the middle of 1995, just three and a half years after the removal of those restrictions, the number of active Witnesses of Jehovah in Ghana had increased to 46,104! And this year the number has grown to over 52,800.

What has drawn people to the truth of God's Word? What sacrifices have some had to make to "buy truth"? In answer, let us look at the experiences of three Ghanaian Christians.

Attracted by Bible Teachings

Let us first consider a woman in her early 20's. Her father was a pastor, yet she chose

to leave her father's religion. The reason? Her love of truth.

She once explained: "The Witnesses used to come to our house as they made their house-to-house visits. After a few discussions with them, I realized that what they were teaching was well-founded in the Bible. I raised questions on such subjects as the Trinity, hellfire, immortality of the soul, and especially faith healing. I strongly believed that these doctrines were from the Bible. But the Witnesses helped me to see that such was not the case."—For an indication of the Bible's viewpoint on such subjects, please see Mark 13:32; Romans 6:23; Acts 10:40; and 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

The young woman added: "Still, there was strong opposition from my family, especially my father. He felt that I was being misled. However, I knew that what I was learning from Jehovah's Witnesses was the truth. I tried to acquaint my father with these things from the Bible, but he would not listen. In fact, the opposition intensified.

"I was undaunted, though. I knew that only true knowledge leads to eternal life in Paradise, and I was determined to hold on to it. When the local Witnesses heard of the problems I was facing, they lovingly came to my aid, encouraging me and providing me with certain essential needs. This brought home to me Jesus' words found at John 13:35: 'By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.' My conviction that Jehovah's Witnesses practice the true religion deepened. Later, when my parents noticed that I had changed my life for the better, they liked what they saw, and their attitude toward me

changed—so much so that my father asked the Witnesses to study the Bible with my elder brother!”

Proving the Truth to Oneself

‘Buying truth’ is also a challenge for some young ones who have been raised by Witness parents. Some youths are inclined to take the Bible’s truth for granted. If they fail to make such truths their own, their faith tends to be weak, shallow. (Compare Matthew 13:20, 21.) Nathaniel, a Ghanaian man in his 30’s, tells of how he ‘bought truth’ while he was still a youngster.

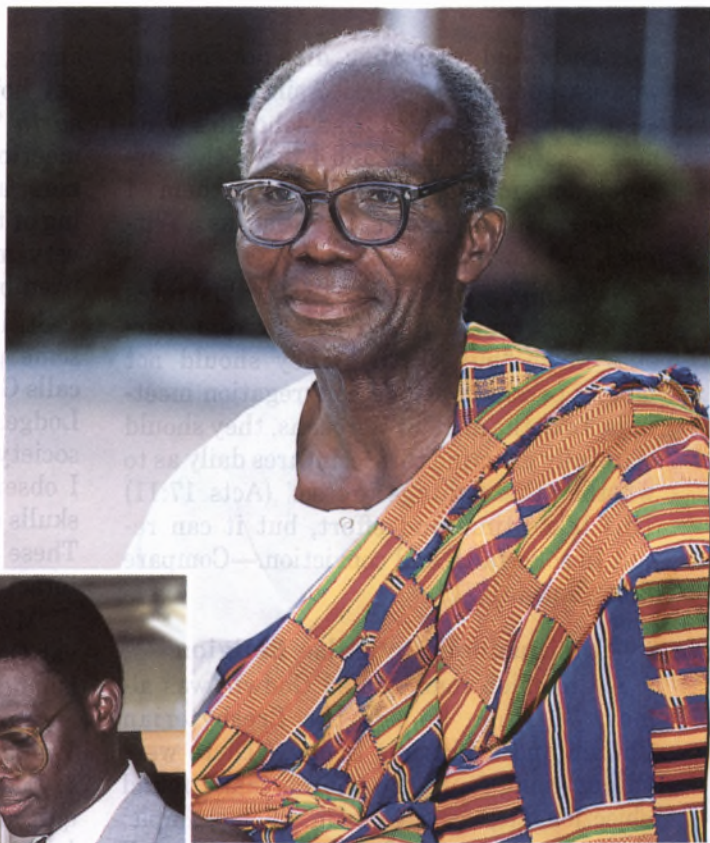
“My parents taught me the Bible from the time I was an infant,” he recalls. “As I grew up, I accompanied them in the preaching work, but I had not really decided to become a Witness. In time, I came to realize that I needed to look into things for myself.

“First, I had to be convinced that the Bible, not any other sacred book of religion, is God’s Word. Through personal study, I learned that it is the only sacred book that contains scores of clear prophecies that were fulfilled *accurately*. I also learned that the Bible contains a number of scientific truths—for instance, that the earth ‘hangs upon nothing.’ (Job 26:7) These words were written thousands of years before scientists knew about our solar system. Only God could inspire men to write such things!*

* For further information, see the book *The Bible—God’s Word or Man’s?*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



Nathaniel



Godwin

“Next, I wanted to find out which religious organization teaches and *practices* the truths taught in the Bible. Most religions teach hellfire, the Trinity, and an immortal soul surviving death. But these doctrines did not make sense to me. I reasoned: Would it not be a wicked father who would hold his child’s hand in a pot of boiling water as a punishment? How, then, could a God of love put his children in a fiery hell and let them suffer? Jehovah’s Witnesses, however, teach in harmony with such Bible texts as Romans 6:23, which says: ‘The wages sin pays is death’—not some fiery hell. This made sense to me.

“I also observed that Jehovah’s Witnesses require that all members live by the Bible’s

standards and that they disfellowship all who unrepentantly practice sin. In view of all of this, I concluded that Jehovah's Witnesses have the truth, and I made the personal decision to become one of them. I worked hard to qualify for baptism as a Witness."—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Nathaniel's experience well illustrates that even youths raised by Christian parents must "buy truth." They should not merely passively attend congregation meetings. Like the ancient Bereans, they should 'carefully examine the Scriptures daily as to whether these things are so.' (Acts 17:11) This takes time and effort, but it can result in solid faith and conviction.—Compare Ephesians 3:17-19.

Disillusioned by False Religion

A Ghanaian man named Godwin was almost 70 when he left the Presbyterian Church and a Masonic Lodge. "There were things going on in the church that I found objectionable," says Godwin. "For example, there was a lot of infighting, and it is still going on. Sometimes the police had to come to restore peace and order! I did not think this was proper for followers of Christ. Then a problem developed between a fellow Presbyterian and me. A public court heard the case and judged the other man guilty. However, the minister of the church unfairly sided with this man and attempted to censure me before the whole congregation! I gave him a piece of my mind and walked out of the church—never to return.

"Some time passed, and Jehovah's Witnesses called at my home. Initially, I listened simply because I did not want to turn away people who talked about God. But I began to notice that even though I had been a Presbyterian for decades, there was a lot I did not know about the Bible. For ex-

ample, I never knew that the Bible holds out hope of living forever in Paradise *on earth*.* And when I started attending the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses, the manners, and especially the dress and grooming of the youth among them, impressed me very much. These were people who really lived by Bible principles!"

Still, 'buying truth' required him to make some painful adjustments in his life. Recalls Godwin: "I was a member of a Masonic Lodge. And though it is known as a fraternal society that provides help for its members, I observed rituals that involved the use of skulls and bones and the invoking of spirits. These spirits supposedly help those who interact with them to develop spiritually.

"My studies helped me to see that Jehovah God detests any involvement with spiritism because it can bring one under the influence of Satan and his wicked spirit forces.† Would I continue as a member of the Masonic Lodge with all its mysticism, or would I quit and please Jehovah? I chose the latter. I destroyed all the Freemason paraphernalia I had, even the suit I used for Lodge meetings. I experienced the truth of Jesus' promise when he said, 'The truth will set you free!' (John 8:32) Now I am happily sharing the things I have learned with others. I have no regrets whatsoever."

Many thousands of honesthearted ones have likewise made great sacrifices in order to "buy truth." Like the three Christians discussed herein, they have no regrets over the changes they made. Bible truth has given them "a fine foundation for the future, in order that they may get a firm hold on the real life." (1 Timothy 6:19) That "real life" and all its accompanying blessings can also be yours eternally if you will "buy truth."

* See, for example, Psalm 37:9-11, 29.

† See Deuteronomy 18:10-12 and Galatians 5:19-21.

SURVIVING 'JEHOVAH'S DAY'

*"The day of Jehovah is great and very fear-inspiring,
and who can hold up under it?"—JOEL 2:11.*

"FEAR-INSPIRING"! That is how God's prophet Joel describes the great "day of Jehovah." However, we who love Jehovah and have come to him in dedication on the basis of Jesus' ransom sacrifice need not cringe with fear as Jehovah's day approaches. It will be an awesome day indeed, but a day of grand salvation, the day of release from a wicked system of things that has plagued mankind over millenniums of time. In prospect of that day, Joel calls on God's people to "be joyful and rejoice; for Jehovah will actually do a great thing," and he adds the assurance: "It must occur that everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe." Then in God's Kingdom arrangement, "there will prove to be the escaped ones, just as Jehovah has said, and in among the survivors, whom Jehovah is calling."—Joel 2:11, 21, 22, 32.

² Jehovah's fear-inspiring day is not to be confused with "the Lord's day" of Revelation 1:10. This latter day includes the fulfillment of the 16 visions described in Revelation chapters 1 to 22. It includes the time of the fulfillment of all the events that Jesus foretold in answer to his disciples' question: "When will these things be, and what will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?" Jesus' heavenly presence has been marked on earth by frightful 'wars, famines, ha-

treds, pestilences, and lawlessness.' As these sorrows have multiplied, Jesus has provided comfort for God-fearing humans by sending forth his modern-day disciples to preach "this good news of the kingdom . . . in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." Then, as a high point of the Lord's day, "the end" of the present system of things, Jehovah's fear-inspiring day, will break forth. (Matthew 24:3-14; Luke 21:11) That will be Jehovah's day for executing swift judgment on Satan's corrupt world. "Heaven and earth certainly will rock; but Jehovah will be a refuge for his people."—Joel 3:16.

Jehovah Acts in the Days of Noah

³ World conditions today parallel those in "the days of Noah" over 4,000 years ago. (Luke 17:26, 27) At Genesis 6:5, we read: "Jehovah saw that the badness of man was abundant in the earth and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only bad all the time." How like the world today! Wickedness, greed, and lovelessness abound on every hand. Sometimes we may think that mankind's depravity has reached rock bottom. But the apostle Paul's prophecy concerning "the last days" just keeps being fulfilled: "Wicked men and impostors will advance from bad to worse, misleading and being misled."—2 Timothy 3:1, 13.

⁴ Could religion have brought relief for mankind in Noah's time? On the contrary,

1. Why should 'the fear-inspiring day of Jehovah' be an occasion for joy?

2. In the outworking of God's purposes, what takes place (a) in "the Lord's day" (b) at "the day of Jehovah"?

3. How do conditions today parallel those of Noah's day?

4. What effect did false worship have in early times?

apostate religion such as existed then would have contributed greatly to the ruinous conditions. Our first parents had succumbed to the false teaching of "the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan." In the second generation from Adam, "a start was made of calling on the name of Jehovah," apparently blasphemously. (Revelation 12:9; Genesis 3:3-6; 4:26) Later, rebellious angels, who forsook exclusive devotion to God, materialized human bodies in order to have illicit sex relations with the good-looking daughters of men. These women mothered hybrid giants, called Nephilim, who oppressed and bullied mankind. Under this demonic influence, 'all flesh ruined its way on the earth.' —Genesis 6:1-12.

⁵ One family, though, maintained integrity to Jehovah. Hence, God "kept Noah, a preacher of righteousness, safe with seven others when he brought a deluge upon a world of ungodly people." (2 Peter 2:5) That Deluge foreshadowed the fear-inspiring day of Jehovah, which marks the end of this system of things and of which Jesus prophesied: "Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father. For just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be." (Matthew 24:36-39) We are in a similar situation today, so Jesus exhorts us to 'pay attention to ourselves, and to keep awake, all the time making supplication that we may succeed in escaping all these things that are destined to occur.' —Luke 21:34-36.

5. With reference to events in Noah's day, what warning exhortation does Jesus give us?

Jehovah's Judicial Punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah

⁶ Some hundreds of years after the Flood, when Noah's descendants had multiplied in the earth, faithful Abraham and his nephew Lot were eyewitnesses to another fear-inspiring day of Jehovah. Lot and his family lived in the city of Sodom. Along with neighboring Gomorrah, this city had become engulfed in disgusting sexual immorality. Materialism too was a prime focus, finally affecting even Lot's wife. Jehovah had told Abraham: "The cry of complaint about Sodom and Gomorrah, yes, it is loud, and their sin, yes, it is very heavy." (Genesis 18:20) Abraham pleaded with Jehovah to spare those cities for the sake of righteous ones in them, but Jehovah declared that he could not find even ten righteous men there. Angels from God helped Lot and his two daughters to escape to the nearby city of Zoar.

⁷ What followed? Comparing our "last days" to those of Lot, Luke 17:28-30 reports: "Likewise, just as it occurred in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. But on the day that Lot came out of Sodom it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed them all. The same way it will be on that day when the Son of man is to be revealed." The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah on that awesome day of Jehovah conveys a clear warning to us in this time of Jesus' presence. The modern generation of mankind has also "committed fornication excessively and gone out after flesh for unnatural use." (Jude 7) Moreover, the immoral sex mores of our times have been responsible for many of the "pestilences" foretold by Jesus for this day. —Luke 21:11.

6, 7. (a) What is foreshadowed by events in Lot's time? (b) What clear warning does this provide for us?

Israel Reaps the "Storm Wind"

⁸ In due course, Jehovah chose Israel to be his "special property out of all other peoples, . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." But this was contingent on their 'strictly obeying his voice and keeping his covenant.' (Exodus 19:5, 6) Did they honor this grand privilege? Far from it! True, faithful individuals of that nation served him loyally—Moses, Samuel, David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, as well as devoted prophets and prophetesses. Yet the nation as a whole was unfaithful. In time, the kingdom split in two—Israel and Judah. By and large, both nations got enmeshed in the pagan worship and other God-dishonoring customs of neighbor countries.—Ezekiel 23:49.

⁹ How did Jehovah judge matters? As always, he sounded a warning, in line with the principle stated by Amos: "The Sovereign Lord Jehovah will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets." Amos himself proclaimed woe for the northern kingdom of Israel: "What, then, will the day of Jehovah mean to you people? It will be darkness, and no light." (Amos 3:7; 5:18) Further, Amos' fellow prophet Hosea declared: "It is wind that they keep sowing, and a storm wind is what they will reap." (Hosea 8:7) In 740 B.C.E., Jehovah used the Assyrian army to devastate the northern kingdom of Israel once and for all time.

Jehovah's Accounting With Apostate Judah

¹⁰ Jehovah also sent his prophets to the southern kingdom of Judah. Still, such kings

8. To what extent did Israel keep covenant with Jehovah?

9. How did Jehovah judge the rebellious ten-tribe kingdom?

10, 11. (a) Why did Jehovah not consent to forgive Judah? (b) What detestable things had corrupted the nation?

of Judah as Manasseh and his successor, Amon, continued to do what was bad in His eyes, shedding 'innocent blood in very great quantity and serving dungy idols and bowing down to them.' Even though Amon's son Josiah did what was right in Jehovah's eyes, the kings that followed, as well as the people, became steeped again in wickedness, so that "Jehovah did not consent to grant forgiveness."—2 Kings 21:16-21; 24:3, 4.

¹¹ Jehovah declared through his prophet Jeremiah: "An astonishing situation, even a horrible thing, has been brought to be in the land: The prophets themselves actually prophesy in falsehood; and as for the priests, they go subduing according to their powers. And my own people have loved it that way; and what will you men do in the finale of it?" The nation of Judah had become bloodguilty to the extreme, and its people were corrupted through stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, walking after other gods, and other detestable things. God's temple had become a "cave of robbers."—Jeremiah 2:34; 5:30, 31; 7:8-12.

¹² Jehovah declared: "There is a calamity that I am bringing in from the north [Chaldea], even a great crash." (Jeremiah 4:6) Thus, he brought in the Babylonian World Power, at that time "the forge hammer of all the earth," to batter renegade Jerusalem and its temple. (Jeremiah 50:23) In 607 B.C.E., following a bitter siege, the city fell before the mighty army of Nebuchadnezzar. "And the king of Babylon proceeded to slaughter the sons of [King] Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes, and all the nobles of Judah the king of Babylon slaughtered. And the eyes of Zedekiah he blinded, after which he bound him with copper fetters, in order to bring him to Babylon. And the house of the king and the

12. How did Jehovah proceed to punish renegade Jerusalem?

houses of the people the Chaldeans burned with fire, and the walls of Jerusalem they pulled down. And the rest of the people who were left remaining in the city, and the deserters that had fallen away to him, and the rest of the people who were left remaining Nebuzaradan the chief of the bodyguard took into exile to Babylon.”—Jeremiah 39:6-9.

¹³ A fear-inspiring day indeed! Yet, a few souls who obeyed Jehovah were among those delivered from that fiery judgment. These included the non-Israelite Rechabites, who in contrast with the Judeans displayed a humble and obedient spirit. Also saved were the faithful eunuch Ebed-melech, who had rescued Jeremiah from death in a muddy cistern, and Jeremiah’s loyal scribe, Baruch. (Jeremiah 35:18, 19; 38:7-13; 39:15-18; 45:1-5) It was to suchlike ones that Jehovah declared: “I myself well know the thoughts that I am thinking toward you, . . . thoughts of peace, and not of calamity, to give you a future and a hope.” That promise had a miniature fulfillment in 539 B.C.E. when God-fearing Jews were released by Babylon’s conqueror, King Cyrus, and returned to rebuild Jerusalem’s city and temple. Those today who come out of Babylonish religion and are restored to Jehovah’s pure worship can likewise look forward to a glorious future of eternal peace in Jehovah’s restored Paradise.—Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 37:34; Revelation 18:2, 4.

First-Century “Great Tribulation”

¹⁴ Let us move on to the first century C.E. By that time the restored Jews had again fallen into apostasy. Jehovah sent his only-begotten Son to earth to be his Anointed One, or Messiah. During the years 29

13. Who were saved in the day of Jehovah of 607 B.C.E., and why?

14. Why did Jehovah permanently reject Israel?

to 33 C.E., Jesus preached throughout the land of Israel, saying: “Repent, you people, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.” (Matthew 4:17) Further, he gathered and trained disciples to share with him in proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom. How did the rulers of the Jews respond? They vilified Jesus and finally committed the heinous crime of having him put to an agonizing death on a torture stake. Jehovah cast off the Jews as his people. Now the rejection of that nation was permanent.

¹⁵ On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., the resurrected Jesus poured out holy spirit, and this empowered his disciples to speak in tongues to the Jews and proselytes who had quickly assembled. Addressing the crowd, the apostle Peter declared: “This Jesus God resurrected, of which fact we are all witnesses. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled.” How did honest Jews react? “They were stabbed to the heart,” repented of their sins, and were baptized. (Acts 2:32-41) The Kingdom preaching accelerated, and within 30 years it had been extended to “all creation that is under heaven.”—Colossians 1:23.

¹⁶ The time was now due for Jehovah to execute judgment on his rejected people, natural Israel. Many thousands, out of nations throughout the then known world, had flocked to the Christian congregation and had been anointed as the spiritual “Israel of God.” (Galatians 6:16) Jewry of that time, though, had sunk into a course of hatred and sectarian violence. Contrary to what Paul had written about ‘being in subjection

15. What were repentant Jews privileged to accomplish?

16. How did Jehovah maneuver events leading up to his executing of judgment on natural Israel?



Jehovah provided escape for the families of Noah and Lot, as well as in 607 B.C.E. and 70 C.E.



to the superior authorities,' they openly rebelled against the Roman power that ruled over them. (Romans 13:1) Jehovah apparently maneuvered the events that followed. In the year 66 C.E., Roman legions under General Gallus advanced to besiege Jerusalem. The attacking Romans penetrated the city as far as undermining the temple wall. As Josephus' history records, there truly was tribulation on the city and on the people.* But suddenly the attacking soldiers took to flight. This allowed Jesus' disciples to 'flee to the mountains,' as admonished in his prophecy recorded at Matthew 24:15, 16.

* Josephus relates that the attacking Romans surrounded the city, undermined part of the wall, and were about to set fire to the gate of Jehovah's temple. This caused horrible fear among many Jews trapped inside, for they could see death impending. —*Wars of the Jews*, Book II, chapter 19.

¹⁷ However, the full execution of Jehovah's judgment in the climax of the tribulation was yet to come. In 70 C.E., the Roman legions, now under General Titus, returned to the attack. This time the battle was decisive! The Jews, who had been warring even among themselves, were no match for the Romans. The city and its temple were razed to the ground. More than a million emaciated Jews suffered and died, some 600,000 corpses being thrown out of the city gates. After the city fell, 97,000 Jews were carried off captive, many to die later in gladiatorial spectacles. Truly, the only flesh saved during the years of that tribulation was that of the obedient Christians who had fled

17, 18. (a) By means of what tribulation did Jehovah mete out justice on Jewry? (b) What flesh 'got away safe,' and of what was this a shadow?

to the mountains beyond the Jordan.—Matthew 24:21, 22; Luke 21:20-22.

¹⁸ Thus, Jesus' great prophecy concerning "the conclusion of the system of things" had its first fulfillment, culminating in Jehovah's day for meting out justice on the rebellious Jewish nation in 66-70 C.E. (Matthew 24:3-22) Yet, that was only a shadow of "the coming of the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah," the final tribulation that is about to engulf the entire world. (Joel 2:31) How may you "get away safe"? The following article will tell.

Questions for Review

- ☐ How is "the Lord's day" related to "the day of Jehovah"?
- ☐ Reviewing Noah's day, what warning should we heed?
- ☐ How do Sodom and Gomorrah provide a powerful lesson?
- ☐ Who were saved in the first-century "great tribulation"?

MAKE PUBLIC DECLARATION FOR SALVATION

*"Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah
will be saved."*—ROMANS 10:13.

HISTORY describes several 'days of Jehovah.' The Flood of Noah's day, the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destructions of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. were great and fear-inspiring days of Jehovah. They were days of meting out justice upon those who rebelled against Jehovah. (Malachi 4:5; Luke 21:22) During those days, many perished because of their wickedness. But some survived. Jehovah caused warnings to be sounded, notifying the wicked of the impending cataclysm and giving righthearted ones an opportunity to find salvation.

² The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

1. Down through history, what warnings have been sounded?

2, 3. (a) What prophetic warning was quoted at Pentecost? (b) From Pentecost 33 C.E., what was required in calling on the name of Jehovah?

is an outstanding example of this. Foretelling that event almost 900 years in advance, the prophet Joel wrote: "I will give portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun itself will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah." How could anyone survive such a terrifying time? Joel wrote under inspiration: "It must occur that everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will prove to be the escaped ones, just as Jehovah has said, and in among the survivors, whom Jehovah is calling."—Joel 2:30-32.

³ At Pentecost 33 C.E., the apostle Peter addressed a crowd of Jews and proselytes in Jerusalem and quoted Joel's proph-

ecy, showing that his listeners could expect a fulfillment in their day: "I will give portents in heaven above and signs on earth below, blood and fire and smoke mist; the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and illustrious day of Jehovah arrives. And everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved." (Acts 2:16-21) The crowds listening to Peter were all under the Mosaic Law, and therefore they knew the name of Jehovah. Peter explained that, henceforth, calling on Jehovah's name would involve something more. Outstandingly, this included getting baptized in the name of Jesus, the one who had been killed and then resurrected to immortal heavenly life.—Acts 2:37, 38.

⁴ From Pentecost on, Christians spread the word about the resurrected Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:23) They made known that humans could be adopted as spiritual sons of Jehovah God and become part of a new "Israel of God," a spiritual nation that would 'declare abroad Jehovah's excellencies.' (Galatians 6:16; 1 Peter 2:9) Those who remained faithful to the death would inherit immortal heavenly life as coheirs with Jesus in his heavenly Kingdom. (Matthew 24:13; Romans 8:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 15:50-54) Moreover, these Christians were to proclaim the coming of the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah. They had to warn the Jewish world that it would experience a tribulation eclipsing anything that had struck Jerusalem and God's professed people up to that time. However, there would be survivors. Who? Those who called on Jehovah's name.

"In the Last Days"

⁵ In many ways, conditions back then fore-

4. What message did Christians declare abroad?
5. What fulfillments of prophecy have taken place today?

shadowed what we see today. Since 1914, mankind has been living in a special time period referred to in the Bible as "the time of the end," "the conclusion of the system of things," and "the last days." (Daniel 12:1, 4; Matthew 24:3-8; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13) In our century, cruel wars, unbridled violence, and the ruination of society and the environment have provided a remarkable fulfillment of Bible prophecy. These are all part of the sign prophesied by Jesus, indicating that mankind is about to experience the final, decisive fear-inspiring day of Jehovah. This culminates in the battle of Armageddon, the climax of a "great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again."—Matthew 24:21; Revelation 16:16.

⁶ As the day of devastation draws ever closer, Jehovah is acting for the salvation of meek ones. During this "time of the end," he has gathered the last ones of the spiritual Israel of God and turned the attention of his earthly servants, from the 1930's onward, to gathering "a great crowd, which no man [is] able to number, out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues." As a group, these "come out of the great tribulation" alive. (Revelation 7:9, 14) But how can each individual make his or her survival sure? The apostle Paul answers that question. In Romans chapter 10, he gives fine counsel for survival—counsel that applied in his day and that applies again in ours.

A Prayer for Salvation

⁷ When Paul wrote the book of Romans, Jehovah had already cast off Israel as a

6. (a) How has Jehovah been acting to save meek ones? (b) Where do we find Paul's counsel on how to survive?
7. (a) What hope is identified at Romans 10:1, 2? (b) Why could Jehovah now have a more expansive "good news" proclaimed?



**God's people are declaring his excellencies in
Puerto Rico, Senegal, Peru, Papua New Guinea—yes, around the globe**

nation. Still, the apostle affirmed: "The goodwill of my heart and my supplication to God for them are, indeed, for their salvation." His hope was that individual Jews might gain accurate knowledge of God's will, leading to their being saved. (Romans 10:1, 2) Moreover, Jehovah would desire salvation for those in the entire world of mankind who exercise faith, as indicated at John 3:16: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life." Jesus' ransom sacrifice opened the way for that grand salvation. As in Noah's day and other days of judgment that followed, Jeho-

vah has "good news" proclaimed, pointing to the way of salvation.—Mark 13:10, 19, 20.

⁸ Showing his own goodwill toward both Jew and Gentile, Paul preached at every opportunity. He "would persuade Jews and Greeks." He told the elders of Ephesus: "I did not hold back from telling you any of the things that were profitable nor from teaching you publicly and from house to house. But I thoroughly bore witness both to Jews and to Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus." (Acts 18:4; 20: 20, 21) In like fashion, Jehovah's Witnesses today expend themselves in preaching, not

8. After Paul's pattern, to whom do true Christians extend goodwill today, and how?

only to professing Christians but to all peoples, even to “the most distant part of the earth.”—Acts 1:8; 18:5.

Confessing “the ‘Word’ of Faith”

⁹ An enduring faith is required for salvation. Quoting Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul declared: “The word is near you, in your own mouth and in your own heart”; that is, the ‘word’ of faith, which we are preaching.” (Romans 10:8) As we preach that “‘word’ of faith,” it becomes more and more deeply engraved in our hearts. It was so with Paul, and his further words can strengthen our resolve to be like him in sharing that faith with others: “If you publicly declare that ‘word in your own mouth,’ that Jesus is Lord, and exercise faith in your heart that God raised him up from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9) Not only is this confession made before others at the time of baptism but it must be a continuing confession, a zealous public testimony about all the grand facets of the truth. Such truth focuses on the precious name of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah; on our Messianic King and Ransomer, the Lord Jesus Christ; and on the magnificent Kingdom promises.

¹⁰ There is no salvation for any who do not accept and apply this “‘word’ of faith,” as the apostle goes on to state: “With the heart one exercises faith for righteousness, but with the mouth one makes public declaration for salvation. For the Scripture says: ‘None that rests his faith on him will be disappointed.’” (Romans 10:10, 11) We must gain accurate knowledge of this “‘word’ of faith” and continue to nurture it in our hearts so that we are motivated to

9. (a) What kind of faith does Romans 10:8, 9 encourage? (b) When and how should we make confession of our faith?

10. In line with Romans 10:10, 11, how must we handle this “‘word’ of faith”?

tell it out to others. Jesus himself reminds us: “Whoever becomes ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man will also be ashamed of him when he arrives in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”—Mark 8:38.

¹¹ As foretold by the prophet Daniel, in this time of the end, “the ones having insight” are seen shining “like the brightness of the expanse,” as the Kingdom witness expands to the ends of the earth. They “are bringing the many to righteousness,” and the true knowledge has indeed become abundant, for Jehovah is throwing ever brighter light on the prophecies concerning this time of the end. (Daniel 12:3, 4) Here is a message of salvation that is vital to the survival of all who love truth and righteousness.

¹² The apostle Paul continues: “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for there is the same Lord over all, who is rich to all those calling upon him.” (Romans 10:12) The “good news” must be preached today on an even wider global scale—to all peoples, to the very ends of the earth. The angel of Revelation 14:6 continues to fly in midheaven, entrusting us with the “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.” How will this benefit those who respond?

Calling on Jehovah’s Name

¹³ Quoting Joel 2:32, Paul declares: “Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will be saved.” (Romans 10:13) How appropriate it is

11. How extensively must the good news be proclaimed, and why?

12. How does Romans 10:12 tie in with the angel’s commission described at Revelation 14:6?

13. (a) What is our 1998 yeartext? (b) Why is this yeartext most appropriate today?

that those words have been chosen as the yeartext of Jehovah's Witnesses for 1998! Never before has it been more important to move forward with trust in Jehovah, making known his name and the grand purposes for which it stands! As in the first century, so in the last days of the present corrupt system of things, the resounding cry goes out: "Get saved from this crooked generation." (Acts 2: 40) It is a trumpetlike invitation for all God-fearing people worldwide to call on Jehovah to grant salvation to them and also to those who listen to their public declaration of the good news.—1 Timothy 4:16.

¹⁴ What will happen when the great day of Jehovah erupts on this earth? Most will not look to Jehovah for salvation. Mankind in general will "keep saying to the mountains and to the rock-masses: 'Fall over us and hide us from the face of the One seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.'" (Revelation 6:15, 16) Their hope will be in the mountainlike organizations and institutions of this system of things. How much better, though, if they would trust in the greatest Rock of all, Jehovah God! (Deuteronomy 32:3, 4) Of him, King David said: "Jehovah is my crag and my stronghold and the Provider of escape

14. On which Rock must we call for salvation?

In Our Next Issue

The Truth Transforms Lives

Do Not Give Up in the Race for Life!

Do You Really Appreciate the Blessings of Jehovah?

for me." Jehovah is "our Rock of salvation." (Psalm 18:2; 95:1) His name is "a strong tower," the only "tower" strong enough to protect us during the coming crisis. (Proverbs 18:10) Hence, it is vital that as many as possible of the almost six billion humans alive today be taught to call upon Jehovah's name in faithfulness and sincerity.

¹⁵ Fittingly, the apostle Paul goes on to ask: "However, how will they call on him in whom they have not put faith?" (Romans 10: 14) There are multitudes who may yet be helped to make "the 'word' of faith" their own, in order to call on Jehovah for salvation. Faith is all-important. Paul states in another letter: "Without faith it is impossible to please [God] well, for he that approaches God must believe that he is and that he becomes the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him." (Hebrews 11:6) How, though, will millions more come to put faith in God? In the letter to the Romans, Paul asks: "How, in turn, will they put faith in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14) Does Jehovah provide the means for them to hear? To be sure he does! Listen to Paul's continuing words: "How, in turn, will they hear without someone to preach?"

¹⁶ From Paul's argument it is crystal clear that preachers are needed. Jesus indicated that this would be so, right down "until the conclusion of the system of things." (Matthew 24:14; 28:18-20) Preaching is an essential part of the divine arrangement for helping people to call on the name of Jehovah in order to get away safe. Even in Christendom the majority do nothing to honor God's precious name. Many have Jehovah hope-

15. What does Romans 10:14 indicate as to faith?

16. In the divine arrangement, why are preachers essential?

lessly confused with two other identities in an unexplainable Trinity dogma. Also, many fall into the class spoken of at Psalm 14:1 and 53:1: "The senseless one has said in his heart: 'There is no Jehovah.'" They need to know that Jehovah is the living God, and they must understand all that his name stands for if they are to get away safe in the impending great tribulation.

The 'Comely Feet' of the Preachers

¹⁷ The apostle Paul has one more vital question: "How, in turn, will they preach unless they have been sent forth? Just as it is written: 'How comely are the feet of those who declare good news of good things!'" (Romans 10:15) Paul here quotes Isaiah 52:7, which is part of a restoration prophecy that has applied since 1919. Today, once again, Jehovah sends forth "the one bringing good news, the one publishing peace, the one bringing good news of something better, the one publishing salvation." Obediently, God's anointed "watchmen" and their companions keep crying out joyfully. (Isaiah 52:7, 8) The feet of those publishing salvation today may become tired, even dusty, as they walk from house to house, but how their faces glow with joy! They know that they are commissioned by Jehovah to proclaim good news of peace and to comfort the mourning ones, helping these to call on Jehovah's name with salvation in view.

¹⁸ Whether people "put faith in the thing heard" or they choose to disobey it, Paul's words ring true: "They did not fail to hear, did they? Why, in fact, 'into all the earth their sound went out, and to the extremities of the inhabited earth their utterances.'"

17. (a) Why is it appropriate for Paul to quote a restoration prophecy? (b) What is involved in having 'comely feet'?

18. What does Romans 10:16-18 say as to the final result of sounding forth the good news?

(Romans 10:16-18) Just as "the heavens are declaring the glory of God," as displayed in his creative works, so his Witnesses on earth must proclaim "the year of goodwill on the part of Jehovah and the day of vengeance on the part of our God . . . to comfort all the mourning ones."—Psalm 19:1-4; Isaiah 61:2.

¹⁹ The great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah draws ever closer. "Alas for the day; because the day of Jehovah is near, and like a despoiling from the Almighty One it will come!" (Joel 1:15; 2:31) It is our prayer that multitudes more will respond with urgency to the good news, flocking to Jehovah's organization. (Isaiah 60:8; Habakkuk 2:3) Recall that other days of Jehovah brought ruination to the wicked—in Noah's day, in Lot's day, and in the days of apostate Israel and Judah. We stand now at the brink of the greatest tribulation of all, when Jehovah's storm wind will sweep wickedness from the face of this earth, clearing the way for a paradise of eternal peace. Will you be one who "calls on the name of Jehovah" in faithfulness? If so, rejoice! You have God's own promise that you will be saved.—Romans 10:13.

19. What will result to those who 'call on the name of Jehovah' today?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ What new things were proclaimed following Pentecost 33 C.E.?
- ☐ How should Christians pay attention to "the 'word' of faith"?
- ☐ What is meant by 'calling on the name of Jehovah'?
- ☐ In what sense do Kingdom messengers have 'comely feet'?

A HIDDEN TREASURE COMES TO LIGHT

The Story of the Makarios Bible

IN 1993 a researcher found in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg a stack of old, yellowed *Orthodox Review* magazines. Within the pages of the magazines of 1860 to 1867 lay a treasure that had been hidden from the Russian public for well over a century. It was a translation of the entire Hebrew Scriptures, or "Old Testament," of the Bible in the Russian language!

The translators of the Scriptures were Mikhail Iakovlevich Glukharev, known as Archimandrite Makarios, and Gerasim Petrovich Pavsky. Both were prominent members of the Russian Orthodox Church as well as language scholars. When these men began their work in the early part of the last century, the complete Bible had not yet been translated into Russian.

True, the Bible was in Slavonic, a language that was the forerunner of modern-day Russian. However, by the mid-19th century, the Slavonic language had long since fallen into disuse except in religious services, where it was used by the clergy. A similar situation had existed in the West, where the Roman Catholic Church tried to keep the Bible exclusively in Latin long after Latin had become a dead language.

Makarios and Pavsky attempted to make the Bible accessible to the common people. The discovery of their long-forgotten work,

therefore, has made it possible to restore an important part of the literary and religious heritage of Russia.

However, just who were Makarios and Pavsky? And why did their efforts to put the Bible in the common language of the people run into such resistance? Their story is both fascinating and faith strengthening to all lovers of the Bible.

The Need for a Russian Bible

Makarios and Pavsky were not the first to see the need for the Bible in the common language of the people. A hundred years earlier, the Russian czar, Peter I, or Peter the Great, also saw such a need. Significantly, he viewed the Holy Scriptures with respect and is quoted as saying: "The Bible is a book which towers above all others, and contains everything pertaining to man's duty to God and his neighbour."

Thus, in 1716, Peter commanded his royal court to have a Bible printed in Amsterdam, at his own expense. Each page was to contain a column of Russian text and a column of Dutch text. Just one year later, in 1717, the Christian Greek Scriptures, or "New Testament," portion was ready.

By 1721 the Dutch section of a four-volume translation of the Hebrew Scriptures had also been printed. One column was left blank, to be filled in later with the

Russian text. Peter turned the Bibles over to the “Holy Synod” of the Russian Orthodox Church—the supreme religious authority of the church—to finalize the printing and to manage distribution. However, the synod did not follow through.

Less than four years later, Peter was dead. What happened to his Bibles? The empty columns meant for the Russian text were never filled in. The Bibles were stacked in large piles in a basement, where they rotted—not a single undamaged copy could later be found! The synod’s decision was to “sell all that remained to the merchants.”

Translating Efforts Begin

In 1812, John Paterson, a member of the British and Foreign Bible Society, came to Russia. Paterson aroused the interest of the St. Petersburg intelligentsia in forming a Bible society. On December 6, 1812—the same year that the Russian army repelled the invading troops of Napoleon I—Czar Alexander I approved the charter for a Russian Bible society. In 1815 the czar commanded the chairman of the society, Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, to suggest to the governing synod that “the Russians too should have the opportunity of reading the Word of God in their own Russian mother tongue.”



**The Russian National Library
where the hidden treasure was found**



**Peter the Great tried to have
the Bible published in Russian**

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Commendably, approval was given to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Russian directly from the original Hebrew. The ancient Greek *Septuagint* had been the basis for translations of the Hebrew Scriptures into Slavonic. Those who were to translate the Bible into Russian were told that the main principles of the translation were to be *accuracy, clarity, and purity*. What happened to these early efforts to provide the Bible in the Russian language?

A Deathblow to Bible Translation?

Conservative elements in both the church and the government soon became wary of foreign religious and political influence. Some church leaders further claimed that Slavonic—the language of liturgy—expressed the Bible’s message better than did Russian.



Gerasim Pavsky, who contributed to the translation of the Bible into Russian

The Russian Bible Society was thus dissolved in 1826. Several thousand copies of translations produced by the Bible society were burned. As a result, the Bible took a backseat to ritual and tradition. Following the pattern set by the Roman Catholic Church, the synod ruled in 1836: "It is permissible for any devout layman to hear the Scriptures, but it is not permissible for anyone to read some parts of the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, without guidance." Bible translation had seemingly been dealt a deathblow.

The Work of Pavsky

In the meantime, Gerasim Pavsky, a professor of Hebrew, undertook the task of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Rus-

sian. In 1821 he finished a translation of Psalms. The czar quickly approved it, and by January 1822 the book of Psalms had been released to the public. It met with immediate acceptance and had to be reprinted 12 times—totaling 100,000 copies!

Pavsky's scholarly efforts won him the respect of many language scholars and theologians. He is described as a straightforward and honest man who stood above the intrigues that surrounded him. In spite of church opposition to the Russian Bible Society and the fact that some felt it represented foreign interests, Professor Pavsky continued to translate Bible verses into Russian at his lectures. His admiring students hand-copied his renderings and, in time, were able to compile his work. In 1839 they emboldened themselves to publish 150 copies at the academy press—without the permission of the censors.

Pavsky's translation made a striking impression on readers, and the demand for it kept growing. But in 1841 an anonymous complaint was made to the synod regarding the "danger" of this translation, claiming that it strayed from Orthodox dogma. Two years later the synod issued a decree: "Confiscate all existing handwritten and lithographed copies of G. Pavsky's translation of the Old Testament and destroy them."

Glorifying the Name of God

Nevertheless, Pavsky had rekindled interest in Bible translation. He had also set an important precedent for future translators when it came to another important issue—God's name.

Russian researcher Korsunsky explained: "The very name of God, the most holy of his names, was composed of four Hebrew characters יהוה and is now pronounced Jehovah.' In ancient copies of the Bible, that

distinctive name of God appears thousands of times in the Hebrew Scriptures alone. However, the Jews mistakenly came to believe that the divine name was too sacred to write or pronounce. Regarding this, Korsunsky observed: 'In speech or writing, it was usually replaced with *Adonai*, a word generally translated "Lord."'

Clearly, the abandoning of the use of the divine name was due to superstitious fear—not godly awe. Nowhere does the Bible itself discourage the use of God's name. God himself told Moses: "This is what you are to say to the sons of Israel, 'Jehovah the God of your forefathers . . . has sent me to you.' This is my name to time indefinite, and this is the memorial of me to generation after generation." (Exodus 3:15) Repeatedly, the Scriptures urge worshipers: "Give thanks to Jehovah, you people! Call upon his name." (Isaiah 12:4) Nevertheless, most Bible translators chose to follow Jewish tradition and avoided using the divine name.

Pavsky, however, did not follow these traditions. In his translation of the Psalms alone, the name Jehovah appears more than 35 times. His boldness was to have a significant influence on one of his contemporaries.

The Archimandrite Makarios

This contemporary was the archimandrite Makarios, a Russian Orthodox missionary who had formidable linguistic skills. At the tender age of seven, he could translate short Russian texts into Latin. By the time he was 20, he knew Hebrew, German, and French. However, a humble attitude and a keen sense of his responsibility before God helped him to avoid the trap of overconfidence. He repeatedly sought the advice of other linguists and scholars.

Makarios wanted to reform missionary



The archimandrite Makarios, after whom the new Russian Bible is named

activity in Russia. He felt that before Christianity could be taken to Muslims and Jews in Russia, the church had to "enlighten the masses by founding schools and distributing Bibles *in the Russian language*." In March 1839, Makarios arrived in St. Petersburg, hoping to receive permission to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Russian.

Makarios had already translated the Bible books of Isaiah and Job. However, the synod refused to grant him permission to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Russian. In fact, Makarios was told to rid himself of the very thought of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into the Russian language. The synod issued a ruling, dated April 11, 1841, ordering Makarios "to serve a three-to-six-week penance at the home of



Release of the Makarios Bible was announced at this press conference

Bible Receives Critical Acclaim

"YET another monument of literature has been released: the Makarios Bible." With that introduction, the newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* announced the release of the Makarios Bible.

After noting that it was not until some "120 years ago" that the Bible first appeared in the Russian language, this paper lamented: "For many years the church was opposed to the translation of holy books into an easy-to-read language. Having rejected several translations, the church finally agreed with one of them in 1876, and it came to be known as the synodal translation. However, it was not allowed into the churches. There, to this day, the only Bible that is recognized is in Slavonic."

The newspaper *St. Petersburg Echo* also pointed to the value of publishing the Makarios Bible, observing: "Authoritative scholars from St. Petersburg State University, Herzen Pedagogical University, and the State Museum of Religious History gave high marks to this new edition of the Bible." Pointing to the translating of the Bible into Russian by Makarios and Pavsky in the first half of the last century, the newspaper noted: "Up to that time, in Russia the Bible could be read only in Slavonic, which was understandable only to members of the clergy."

The release of the Makarios Bible by Jehovah's Witnesses was reported during a press conference in St. Petersburg earlier this year. The local

daily *Nevskoye Vremya* observed: "Authoritative scholars . . . emphasized that the edition should be evaluated as a fact of enormous significance in the cultural life of Russia and St. Petersburg. Regardless of what one thinks about the activity of this religious organization, the publication of this heretofore unknown translation of the Bible is undoubtedly of great benefit."

Surely, all lovers of God are delighted when his written Word is made available in a language that can be read and understood by the common people. Bible lovers everywhere are delighted that another Bible translation has been made available to the millions of Russian-speaking people around the world.

a bishop in Tomsk so as to clean his conscience through prayer and genuflections.”

Makarios' Bold Stand

From December 1841 through January 1842, Makarios fulfilled his penance. But once that was satisfied, he immediately began translating the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. He had obtained a copy of Pavsky's translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and used it to check his own renderings. Like Pavsky, he refused to obscure the divine name. In fact, the name Jehovah occurs more than 3,500 times in the Makarios translation!

Makarios sent copies of his work to sympathetic friends. Though a few handwritten copies went into circulation, the church continued to block the publishing of his work. Makarios made plans to promote his Bible abroad. On the eve of his departure, he fell ill and then died shortly thereafter, in the year 1847. His Bible translation was never published in his lifetime.

Published at Last!

Eventually, the political and religious winds shifted. A new liberalism swept through the land, and in 1856 the synod once again approved the translation of the Bible into Russian. In this improved climate, the Makarios Bible was published in installments in the *Orthodox Review* between 1860 and 1867, under the title *An Experiment of Translation Into the Russian Language*.

Archbishop Filaret of Chernigov, a scholar of Russian religious literature, gave this appraisal of the Makarios Bible: “His translation is faithful to the Hebrew text, and the language of the translation is pure and befits the subject.”

However, the Makarios Bible was never released to the general public. In fact, it was all but forgotten. In 1876 the entire Bible,

including both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures, was finally translated into Russian with the approval of the synod. This complete Bible is often called the synodal translation. Ironically, the Makarios translation, along with Pavsky's, served as a primary source for this “official” Russian Orthodox Church translation. But the divine name was used in only a few of the places where it occurs in the Hebrew language.

The Makarios Bible Today

The Makarios Bible remained in obscurity until 1993. As noted in the introduction, at that time a copy of it was located in old *Orthodox Review* magazines in the rare-books section of the Russian National Library. Jehovah's Witnesses recognized the value of making this Bible available to the public. The library granted permission to the Religious Organization of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia to have a copy of the Makarios Bible made so that it could be prepared for publishing.

Jehovah's Witnesses then arranged for nearly 300,000 copies of this Bible to be printed in Italy for distribution throughout Russia and the many other countries where Russian is spoken. In addition to Makarios' translation of most of the Hebrew Scriptures, this edition of the Bible contains Pavsky's translation of Psalms as well as the Orthodox Church-authorized synodal translation of the Greek Scriptures.

In January of this year, it was released during a news conference in St. Petersburg, Russia. (See page 26.) Russian readers will surely be enlightened and edified by this new Bible.

The publication of this Bible is thus a religious and literary triumph! It is also a faith-strengthening reminder of the truthfulness of the words of Isaiah 40:8: “The green grass has dried up, the blossom has withered; but as for the word of our God, it will last to time indefinite.”

Jehovah Rules With Compassion

THROUGHOUT history many human rulers have wielded power in callous disregard for the suffering of their subjects. However, Jehovah provided a contrast by choosing a nation—Israel—and ruling it compassionately.

While the Israelites were still slaves in ancient Egypt, Jehovah heard their cries for help. "During all their distress it was distressing to him. . . . In his love and in his compassion he himself repurchased them." (Isaiah 63:9) Jehovah saved Israel, provided them with miraculous food, and delivered them into a land of their own.

Jehovah's quality of compassion was further manifested in the laws he gave to this nation. He commanded the Israelites to deal compassionately with orphans, widows, and alien residents. They were not to take unfair advantage of the disabled.

The Law required compassion to be shown for those in need. The poor could glean after the harvest. Debts were canceled in the Sabbath (seventh) year. All hereditary land that had been sold had to be returned in the Jubilee (50th) year. *Ancient Israel—Its Life and Institutions* reports: "In Israel, there never really existed social classes in the modern sense." "In the early days of the settlement, all the Israelites enjoyed more or less the same standard of living."—Leviticus 25:10; Deuteronomy 15:12-14; 24:17-22; 27:18.



Imitating Jehovah's Compassion

God's servants are inspired by his compassion. For example, throughout history, some new kings have killed surviving members of the previous royal dynasty. But

Jehovah's servant David did not do this. After King Saul's death, David protected Mephibosheth, Saul's surviving grandson and heir. "The king felt compassion upon Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul." —2 Samuel 21:7.

No other human has imitated Jehovah's compassion as Jesus did. Many of his miracles were motivated by godly compassion. On one occasion a leper entreated him: "If you just want to, you can make me clean." Jesus was moved with pity and touched him, saying: "I want to. Be made clean." (Mark 1:40-42) Another time great crowds followed Jesus. Amid the clamor, Jesus paid attention to two blind men who cried: "'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' . . . Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes, and immediately they received sight."—Matthew 20:29-34.

Large crowds did not numb Jesus' feelings for others. Because they had not eaten for some time, he said on one occasion: "I feel pity for the crowd." So he fed them miraculously. (Mark 8:1-8) When Jesus toured, he not only taught multitudes but was observant of their needs. (Matthew 9:35, 36) After such a tour, Je-

sus and his disciples had no leisure time even to eat a meal. The Bible account tells us: "So off they went in the boat for a lonely place to themselves. But people saw them going and many got to know it, and from all the cities they ran there together on foot and got ahead of them. Well, on getting out, he saw a great crowd, but he was moved with pity for them, because they were as sheep without a shepherd. And he started to teach them many things."—Mark 6:31-34.

What moved Jesus was not just the sickness and poverty of the people but their spiritual condition. Their leaders had been taking advantage of them, so Jesus "was moved with pity for them." The Greek word for "was moved with pity" means "to feel the bowels yearn." Jesus was indeed a compassionate man!

Compassion in a Cruel World

Jesus Christ is now the King of Jehovah's heavenly Kingdom. As he did in ancient Israel, today God rules his people with compassion. "'They will certainly become mine,' Jehovah of armies has said, 'at the day when I am producing a special property. And I will show compassion upon them.'"—Malachi 3:17.

Those who want to be recipients of Jehovah's compassion must imitate his ways. True, we live in a world where people are more interested in preserving their life-style than in helping those in need. Men in power often seek profit at the expense of the safety of workers and consumers. At 2 Timothy 3:1-4, the Bible accurately describes the moral climate of our time that has killed compassion in the hearts of so many.

Still, we can likely find opportunities to show compassion. Could we offer some needed assistance to our neighbors? Is there someone sick whom we could visit? Could we cheer up those who are depressed, in line with the advice: "Speak consolingly to the depressed souls, support the weak"?—1 Thessalonians 5:14.

Compassion will also help us to avoid reacting harshly when others make mistakes. We are told: "Let all malicious bitterness and anger and

wrath and screaming and abusive speech be taken away from you along with all badness. But become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another just as God also by Christ freely forgave you."—Ephesians 4:31, 32.

Compassion will help us to avoid the tendency to abuse power. The Bible says: "Clothe yourselves with the tender affections of compassion, kindness, lowliness of mind, mildness, and long-suffering." (Colossians 3:12) Lowliness of mind enables us to put ourselves in the position of those under our supervision. To be compassionate involves being humble and reasonable rather than hard to please. Efficiency should not be an excuse for treating people as mere parts of a machine. Also, in the family compassionate husbands remember that their wives are weaker vessels. (1 Peter 3:7) Contemplating Jesus' compassionate example can help us in all of this.

Since Jesus felt so deeply for people during his earthly ministry, we can be sure that he is now, and will continue to be, a compassionate Ruler. Psalm 72 says prophetically of him: "Let him judge the afflicted ones of the people, let him save the sons of the poor one, and let him crush the defrauder. And he will have subjects from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. He will feel sorry for the lowly one and the poor one, and the souls of the poor ones he will save."—Psalm 72:4, 8, 13.

God's Word foretells: "With righteousness he must judge the lowly ones, and with uprightness he must give reproof in behalf of the meek ones of the earth. . . . He will put the wicked one to death." After describing how even some cruel, beastlike people will change their ways, the prophecy continues: "They will not do any harm or cause any ruin in all my holy mountain; because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea." (Isaiah 11:4-9) This prophecy promises nothing less than an earth-wide society of people who know Jehovah and imitate his compassionate ways!

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*? Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

□ **What is the main purpose of education for a Christian youth?** The main purpose of education should be to equip a youth to be an effective minister of Jehovah. And the most important education to that end is a spiritual education.—8/15, page 21.

□ **What are the reasons for reporting the serious wrongdoing of a fellow Christian to the elders?** One reason for reporting serious wrongdoing is that it works to preserve the cleanness of the congregation. Another reason is that doing so is an act of Christian principled love shown toward God, toward the congregation, and toward the wrongdoer.—8/15, pages 28, 30.

□ **What does it mean to keep “close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah”? (2 Peter 3:12)** This means not putting “the day of Jehovah” off in our minds. We should not forget that the day when Jehovah destroys this system of things is near. It should be so real to us that we see it clearly, as being immediately ahead of us. (Zephaniah 1:7, 14)—9/1, page 19.

□ **Why have the last days of this wicked system continued longer than many expected?** Jehovah takes into consideration what is in the best interests of all humankind. His concern is with the lives of people. (Ezekiel 33:11) We can be confident that the end will come at the right time to fulfill the purpose of our all-wise, loving Creator.—9/1, page 22.

□ **How can those in full-time service maintain their joy despite problems that may confront them?** They should reflect on the many blessings they have and recognize that thousands of others suffer greater hardships. (1 Peter 5:6-9)—9/15, page 24.

□ **What was William Tyndale’s goal in translating the Bible?** Tyndale’s goal was to let the Scriptures speak to the common man in terms as exact and simple as possible.—9/15, page 27.

□ **How can we show that we are loyal advocates of God’s Word?** We show our loyalty to God’s Word by zealously preaching it to others. As teachers, we should use the Bible carefully, never twisting it or stretching what it says to fit our ideas. (2 Timothy 2:15)—10/1, page 20.

□ **How can the poisonous spirit of the world weaken our integrity?** The world’s spirit can weaken our

integrity by making us dissatisfied with what we have and anxious to put our own needs and interests ahead of God’s. (Compare Matthew 16:21-23.)—10/1, page 29.

□ **What does it mean to serve Jehovah whole-souled?** The “soul” refers to the entire person, with all his physical and mental abilities. Serving Jehovah whole-souled means giving of ourselves, using all our faculties and directing our energies to the fullest extent possible in God’s service. (Mark 12:29, 30)—10/15, page 13.

□ **What is the key to being a person of godly principle?** The key is really to know Jehovah, his likes, his dislikes, and his purposes. When these fundamentals related to God govern our lives, they become, in effect, living principles. (Jeremiah 22:16; Hebrews 4:12)—10/15, page 29.

□ **Jehovah’s servants have what balanced approach toward human rulership?** They are neutral in political matters because they serve as ambassadors or envoys of God’s Kingdom. (2 Corinthians 5:20) On the other hand, they are in conscientious subjection to those in authority.—11/1, page 17.

□ **What lesson can we learn from the course taken by Elisha the prophet?** When extended the invitation to special service with Elijah, Elisha immediately left his field to minister to Elijah, even though some of his duties would be menial. (2 Kings 3:11) Some of God’s ministers today have displayed a similar spirit of self-sacrifice by leaving their livelihoods to preach the good news in distant territories.—11/1, page 31.

□ **What beneficial counsel does the letter of James contain?** It shows us how to meet trials, counsels us against favoritism, and urges us to engage in upright works. James urges us to control the tongue, to resist worldly influences, and to promote peace. His words also can help us to be patient and prayerful.—11/15, page 24.

□ **Why is Jehovah “ready to forgive”? (Psalm 86:5)** Jehovah readily forgives because he does not forget that we are creatures of dust, having frailties, or weaknesses, as a result of imperfection. (Psalm 103:12-14)—12/1, pages 10, 11.

□ **Why should we be willing to forgive others?** If we refuse to forgive others when there is a basis for mercy, it can adversely affect our own relationship with God. (Matthew 6:14, 15)—12/1, page 17.

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ADORNED WITH AN EARRING of GOLD



FROM the earliest of times, gold jewelry has been highly esteemed for its value and beauty. Upon becoming prime minister in Egypt, Joseph received a gold necklace from Pharaoh. (Genesis 41:42) Rebekah was given a gold nose ring and two gold bracelets, worth about \$1,400 (U.S.) in today's values. (Genesis 24:22) Without a doubt, these precious gifts were accepted with gratitude and worn with pleasure.

The Bible speaks of figurative jewelry that is worth far more than that worn by Joseph and Rebekah. Proverbs 25:12 states: "An earring of gold, and an ornament of special gold, is a wise reprover upon the hearing ear." When a counselor gives advice based on God's Word rather

than on his own opinion, he is truly imparting a valuable gift. Why? Because ultimately such counsel comes from Jehovah himself. The Bible tells us: "The discipline of Jehovah, O my son, do not reject; and do not abhor his reproof, because the one whom Jehovah loves he reproves, even as a father does a son in whom he finds pleasure." (Proverbs 3:11, 12) When the listener humbly accepts and applies the counsel, he is as if adorning himself with an earring of gold. It is just as the inspired Bible proverb says: "Happy is the man that has found wisdom, and the man that gets discernment, for having it as gain is better than having silver as gain and having it as produce than gold itself."—Proverbs 3:13, 14.