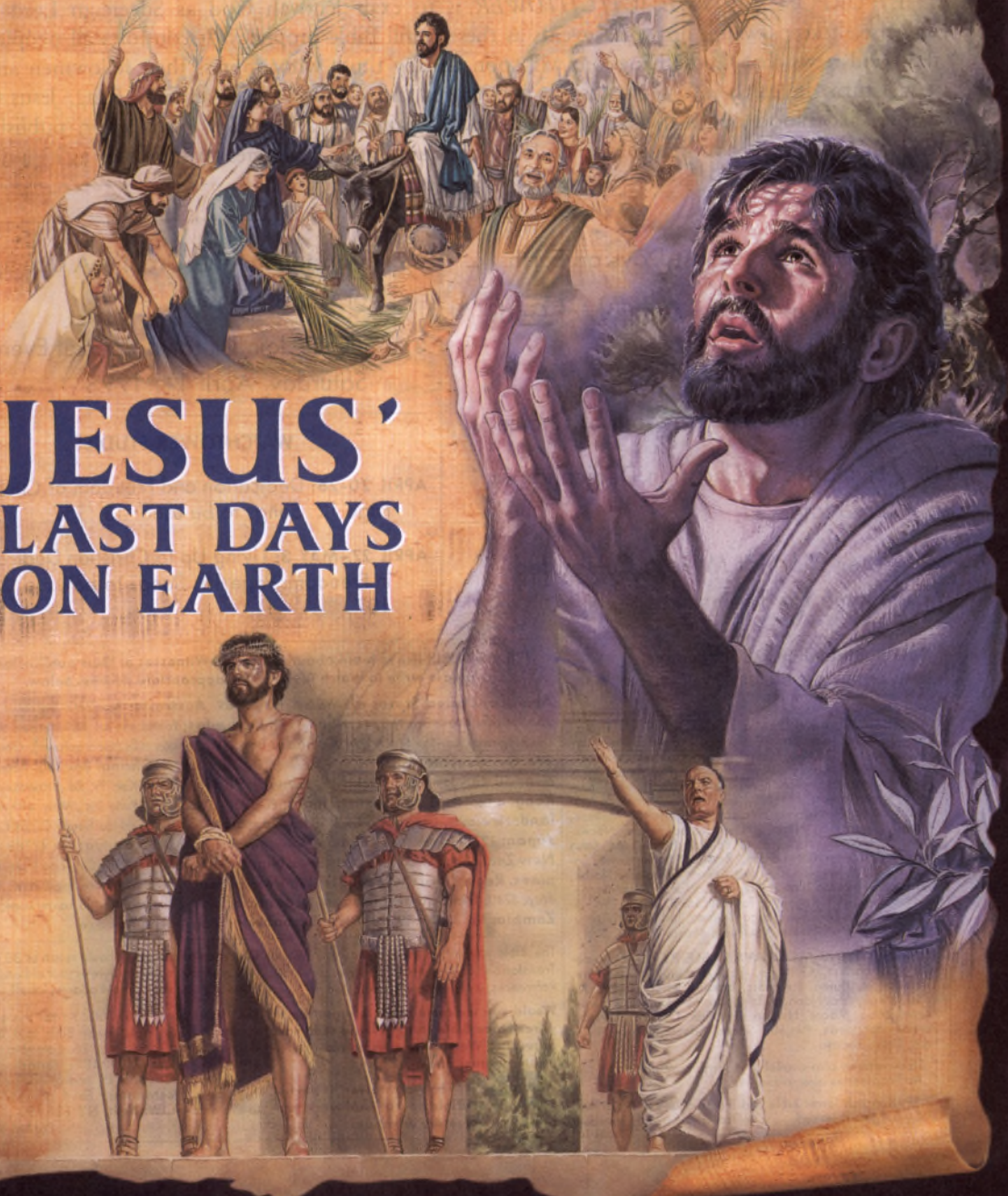
MARCH 15, 1998

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



## JESUS' LAST DAYS ON EARTH

# 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.

## IN THIS ISSUE


3 Reliving Jesus' Last Days on Earth

10 Slaves of Men or Servants of God?

11 The "One-Finger Bible"

12 Dedication and Freedom of Choice

18 Living Up to Christian Dedication in Freedom

24 They Did Not Make a Celebrated Name for Themselves

26 Constantine the Great—A Champion of Christianity?

31 Please Join Us for a Special Event Saturday, April 11, 1998


### *WATCHTOWER* STUDIES

**APRIL 20-26:** Dedication and Freedom of Choice. Page 12. *Songs to be used:* 13, 152.

**APRIL 27–MAY 3:** Living Up to Christian Dedication in Freedom. Page 18. *Songs to be used:* 202, 107.


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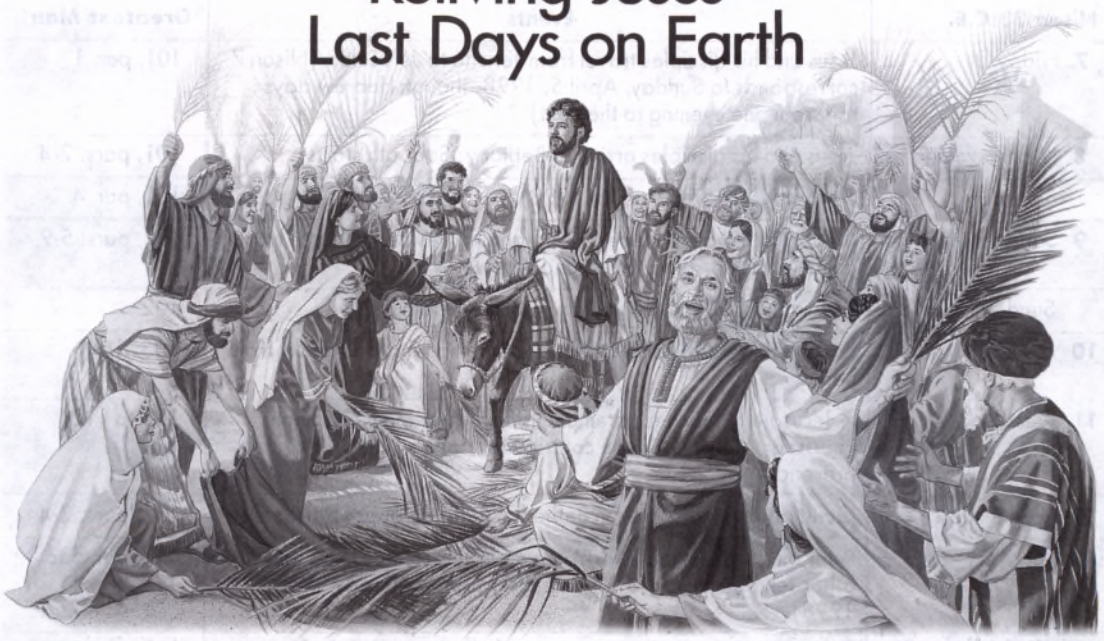
# Reliving Jesus' Last Days on Earth



IT IS the seventh day of the Jewish month Nisan in the year 33 C.E. Imagine that you are observing events in the Roman province of Judea. Leaving Jericho and its lush foliage, Jesus Christ and his disciples are trudging up a dusty, twisting road. Many other travelers are also on their way up to Jerusalem for the annual Passover celebration. However, more than this tiring climb is on the minds of Christ's disciples.

The Jews have been yearning for a Messiah who can bring relief from the Roman yoke. Many believe Jesus of Nazareth to be that long-awaited Savior. For three and a half years, he has been speaking about God's Kingdom. He has cured the sick and fed the hungry. Yes, he has brought comfort to the people. But the religious leaders are chafing under Jesus' burning denunciation of them and are desperate to have him killed. Yet, there he is, walking purposefully up the parched road in front of his disciples.—Mark 10:32.

As the sun dips behind the Mount of Olives up ahead, Jesus and his companions reach the village of Bethany, where they will spend the next six nights. There to welcome them are their beloved friends Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The evening provides cool relief from the hot journey and marks the start of the Sabbath of Nisan 8.—John 12:1, 2.

### Nisan 9

After the Sabbath, Jerusalem is abuzz with activity. Thousands of visitors have already converged on the city for the Passover. But the noisy commotion we hear is more than usual for this time of the year. Inquisitive crowds are rushing down narrow streets to the city's gateways. As they shove their way out of the congested gates, what a sight greets them! Many jubilant people are making their way down the Mount of Olives on the road from Bethphage. (Luke 19:37) What is the meaning of all of this?

## THE LAST DAYS OF JESUS' HUMAN LIFE

| Nisan 33 C.E. | Events | *Greatest Man** |
|---|---|---|
| **7** Friday | Jesus and his disciples travel from Jericho to Jerusalem (Nisan 7 corresponds to Sunday, April 5, 1998, though Hebrew days ran from one evening to the next) | 101, par. 1 |
| **8** Friday evening | Jesus and his disciples arrive at Bethany; Sabbath starts | 101, pars. 2-4 |
| Saturday | Sabbath (Monday, April 6, 1998) | 101, par. 4 |
| **9** Saturday evening | Meal with Simon the leper; Mary anoints Jesus with nard; many come from Jerusalem to see and hear Jesus | 101, pars. 5-9 |
| Sunday | Triumphal entry into Jerusalem; teaches in temple | 102 |
| **10** Monday | Early trip into Jerusalem; cleanses temple; Jehovah speaks from heaven | 103, 104 |
| **11** Tuesday | In Jerusalem, teaches at temple using illustrations; condemns Pharisees; notes widow's contribution; gives sign of his future presence | 105 to 112, par. 1 |
| **12** Wednesday | Quiet day with disciples in Bethany; Judas arranges betrayal | 112, pars. 2-4 |
| **13** Thursday | Peter and John prepare for Passover in Jerusalem; Jesus and other ten apostles follow in late afternoon (Saturday, April 11, 1998) | 112, par. 5 to 113, par. 1 |
| **14** Thursday evening | Passover celebration; Jesus washes feet of apostles; Judas goes out to betray Jesus; Christ institutes Memorial of his death (After sundown, Saturday, April 11, 1998) | 113, par. 2 to 117 |
| After midnight | Betrayal and arrest in garden of Gethsemane; apostles flee; trial before chief priests and Sanhedrin; Peter denies Jesus | 118 to 120 |
| Friday sunrise to sunset | Before Sanhedrin again; to Pilate, then Herod, then back to Pilate; sentenced to death; impaled; buried | 121 to 127, par. 7 |
| **15** Saturday | Sabbath; Pilate permits guards for Jesus' grave | 127, pars. 8-10 |
| **16** Sunday | Jesus resurrected | 128 |

* Listed here are numbers identifying chapters in the book *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*. For a chart containing the detailed Scriptural references for Jesus' final ministry, see *"All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial,"* page 290. These books are published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

Look! Jesus of Nazareth comes riding on the colt of an ass. People spread garments out on the road ahead of him. Others wave freshly cut palm branches and joyfully shout: "Blessed is he that comes in Jehovah's name, even the king of Israel!"—John 12:12-15.

As the crowd nears Jerusalem, Jesus looks at the city and is deeply moved. He begins weeping, and we hear him foretelling that this city will be destroyed. When Jesus arrives at the temple a short time later, he teaches the crowds and cures blind and lame people who come to him.—Matthew 21:14; Luke 19:41-44, 47.

This does not go unnoticed by the chief priests and the scribes. How vexed they are to see the marvelous things Jesus does and

the jubilation of the crowds! Unable to conceal their indignation, the Pharisees demand: "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." "I tell you," Jesus replies, "If these remained silent, the stones would cry out." Before departing, Jesus notes the commercial activities in the temple.—Luke 19:39, 40; Matthew 21:15, 16; Mark 11:11.

### Nisan 10

Jesus arrives at the temple early. Yesterday, he could not help but be incensed at the gross commercialization of the worship of his Father, Jehovah God. With great fervor, therefore, he begins throwing out those buying and selling in the temple. Then he overturns the tables of the greedy money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," Jesus exclaims, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a cave of robbers."—Matthew 21: 12, 13.

The chief priests, the scribes, and the principal men cannot stand Jesus' actions and public teaching. How they ache to kill him! But they are stymied by the crowd because the people are astounded by Jesus' teaching and they keep "hanging onto him to hear him." (Luke 19:47, 48) As evening approaches, Jesus and his companions enjoy the pleasant walk back to Bethany for a good night's rest.

### Nisan 11

It is early in the morning, and Jesus and his disciples are already on their way over the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. As they arrive at the temple, the chief priests and the older men are quick to confront Jesus. Fresh on their minds is his action against the money changers and the traders in the temple. His enemies venomously demand: "By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?" "I, also, will ask you one thing," Jesus counters. "If you tell it to me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism by John, from what source was it? From heaven or from men?" Huddling together, the opponents reason: "If we say, 'From heaven,' he

## "A CAVE OF ROBBERS"

JESUS had ample reason to say that greedy merchants had turned God's temple into "a cave of robbers." (Matthew 21:12, 13) To pay the temple tax, Jews and proselytes from other lands had to exchange their foreign money for acceptable currency. In his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Alfred Edersheim explains that money changers used to set up their businesses in the provinces on Adar 15, a month before Passover. Beginning on Adar 25, they moved into the temple area in Jerusalem to capitalize on the tremendous influx of Jews and proselytes. Dealers ran a thriving business, charging a fee for every piece of money exchanged. Jesus' reference to them as robbers suggests that their fees were so excessive that they were, in effect, extorting money from the poor.

Some could not bring their own sacrificial animals. Anyone who did so had to have the animal examined by an inspector at the temple—for a fee. Not wanting to risk having an animal rejected after bringing it a long distance, many bought a Levitically "approved" one from corrupt dealers at the temple. "Many a poor peasant was well fleeced there," says one scholar.

There is evidence that onetime high priest Annas and his family had a vested interest in the temple merchants. Rabbinic writings speak of "the [temple] Bazaars of the sons of Annas." Revenue from the money changers and from the sale of animals within the temple grounds was one of their main sources of income. One scholar says that Jesus' action in evicting the merchants "was aimed not only at the prestige of the priests but at their pockets." Be that as it may, his enemies surely wanted to do away with him!—Luke 19:45-48.

will say to us, 'Why, then, did you not believe him?' If, though, we say, 'From men,' we have the crowd to fear, for they all hold John as a prophet." Stumped, they weakly answer: "We do not know." Jesus calmly responds: "Neither am I telling you by what authority I do these things."—Matthew 21:23-27.

Jesus' enemies now try to trap him into saying something for which they can have him arrested. "Is it lawful," they ask, "to pay head tax to Caesar or not?" "Show me the head tax coin," Jesus retorts. He asks: "Whose image and inscription is this?" "Caesar's," they say. Confounding them, Jesus states clearly for all to hear: "Pay back, therefore, Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God."—Matthew 22:15-22.

Having silenced his enemies with irrefutable argumentation, Jesus now goes on the offensive before the crowds and his disciples. Listen as he fearlessly denounces the scribes and the Pharisees. "Do not do according to their deeds," he says, "for they say but do not perform." Boldly, he pronounces a series of woes on them, identifying them as blind guides and hypocrites. "Serpents, offspring of vipers," Jesus says, "how are you to flee from the judgment of Gehenna?"—Matthew 23:1-33.

These scathing denunciations do not mean that Jesus is blind to the good points of others. Later, he sees people drop money into the temple treasury chests. How touching to observe a needy widow drop in her entire means of living—two small coins worth very little! With warm appreciation, Jesus points out that, in effect, she has dropped in far more than all who made lavish contributions "out of their surplus." In his tender compassion, Jesus deeply appreciates whatever a person is able to do.—Luke 21:1-4.

Jesus is now leaving the temple for the last time. Some of his disciples remark on its magnificence, that it is "adorned with fine stones and dedicated things." To their surprise, Jesus replies: "The days will come in which not a stone upon a stone will be left here and not be thrown down." (Luke 21:5, 6) As the apostles follow Jesus out of the con-

gested city, they wonder what he could possibly mean.

Well, a little later Jesus and his apostles sit and enjoy the peace and quiet of the Mount of Olives. As they take in the splendid view of Jerusalem and the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew seek clarification of Jesus' startling prediction. "Tell us," they say, "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; Mark 13:3, 4.

In reply the Master Teacher gives a truly remarkable prophecy. He predicts severe wars, earthquakes, food shortages, and pestilences. Jesus also foretells that the good news of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the earth. "Then," he warns, "there will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again."—Matthew 24:7, 14, 21; Luke 21:10, 11.

The four apostles listen attentively as Jesus discusses other aspects of 'the sign of his presence.' He emphasizes the need to "keep on the watch." Why? "Because," says he, "you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."—Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33, 35, 37.

This has been an unforgettable day for Jesus and his apostles. It is, in fact, the last day of Jesus' public ministry before his arrest, trial, and execution. Since it is getting late, they start walking back the short distance over the hill to Bethany.

### Nisan 12 and 13

Jesus spends Nisan 12 quietly with his disciples. He realizes that the religious leaders desperately want to kill him, and he does not want them to hinder his Passover celebration the following evening. (Mark 14:1, 2) The next day, Nisan 13, people are busy making final arrangements for the Passover. Early in the afternoon, Jesus sends Peter and John to prepare the Passover for them in an upper room in Jerusalem. (Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:8) A little before sundown, Jesus and the other ten apostles meet them there for their last Passover celebration.

### Nisan 14, After Sundown

Jerusalem is shrouded in the soft light of dusk as the full moon rises over the Mount of Olives. In a large furnished room, Jesus

and the 12 are reclining at a prepared table. "I have greatly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," he says. (Luke 22: 14, 15) After a while the apostles are surprised to see Jesus get up and put his outer garments to one side. Taking a towel and a basin of water, he begins washing their feet. What an unforgettable lesson in humble service!—John 13:2-15.

However, Jesus knows that one of these men—Judas Iscariot—has already arranged to betray him to the religious leaders. Understandably, he becomes very distressed. "One of you will betray me," he reveals. The apostles are highly grieved at this. (Matthew 26:21, 22) After celebrating the Passover, Jesus tells Judas: "What you are doing get done more quickly."—John 13:27.

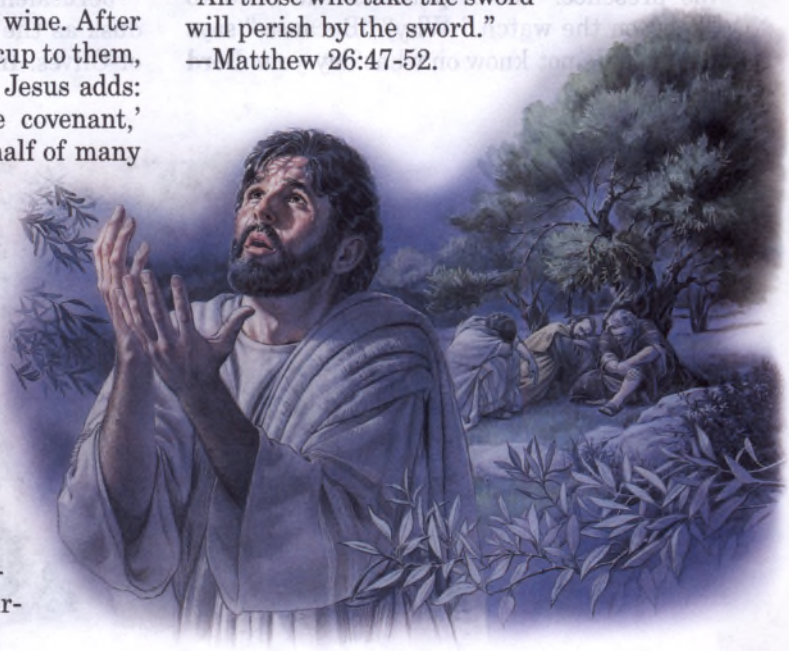
Once Judas has left, Jesus introduces a meal to commemorate his impending death. He takes a loaf of the unleavened bread, expresses thanks in prayer, breaks it, and instructs the 11 to partake. "This means my body," he says, "which is to be given in your behalf. Keep doing this in remembrance of me." He then takes a cup of red wine. After saying a blessing, he passes the cup to them, telling them to drink out of it. Jesus adds: "This means my 'blood of the covenant,' which is to be poured out in behalf of many for forgiveness of sins."—Luke 22:19, 20; Matthew 26:26-28.

During that momentous evening, Jesus teaches his faithful apostles many valuable lessons, and among these the importance of brotherly love. (John 13:34, 35) He assures them that they will receive a "helper," the holy spirit. It will bring back to their minds all the things he has told them. (John 14:26) Later in the evening, they must be very encouraged to hear Jesus say a fervent prayer in their behalf. (John, chapter 17) After singing songs of praise, they leave the upper room and follow Jesus out into the cool late-night air.

Crossing the Kidron Valley, Jesus and his apostles make their way to one of their favorite places, the garden of Gethsemane. (John 18:1, 2) While his apostles wait, Jesus goes a short distance away to pray. His emotional stress is more than words can describe as he earnestly petitions God for help. (Luke 22:44) The very thought of the reproach that would be heaped on his dear heavenly Father if he failed is agonizing to the extreme.

Jesus has barely finished praying when Judas Iscariot arrives with a crowd carrying swords, clubs, and torches. "Good day, Rabbi!" says Judas, kissing Jesus tenderly. This is the signal for the men to arrest Jesus. All of a sudden, Peter slashes out with his sword and cuts off an ear of the high priest's slave. "Return your sword to its place," says Jesus as he heals the man's ear.

"All those who take the sword
will perish by the sword."
—Matthew 26:47-52.



Everything happens so fast! Jesus is arrested and bound. In fear and confusion, the apostles abandon their Master and flee. Jesus is led away to Annas, the former high priest. Then he is taken to Caiaphas, the present high priest, to be tried. In the early hours of the morning, the Sanhedrin falsely charges Jesus with blasphemy. Next, Caiaphas has him taken to Roman governor Pontius Pilate. He sends Jesus to Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee. Herod and his guards mock Jesus. Then he is sent back to Pilate. Jesus' innocence is confirmed by Pilate. But the Jewish religious leaders pressure him to condemn Jesus to death. After considerable verbal and physical abuse, Jesus is taken out to Golgotha where he is mercilessly nailed to a torture stake and suffers an agonizing death.—Mark 14:50–15:39; Luke 23:4-25.

It would have been the greatest tragedy in history if Jesus' death had brought a permanent end to his life. Happily, that was not the case. On Nisan 16, 33 C.E., his disciples were amazed to find that he had been raised from the dead. In time, more than 500 people were able to verify that Jesus was again alive. And 40 days after his resurrection, a group of faithful followers saw him ascend to heaven. —Acts 1:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

### Jesus' Life and You

How does this affect you—indeed, all of us? Well, Jesus' ministry, death, and resurrection magnify Jehovah God and are crucial to the outworking of His grand purpose. (Colossians 1:18-20) They are of vital importance to us in that we can have our sins forgiven on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice and can thus have a personal relationship with Jehovah God.—John 14:6; 1 John 2:1, 2.

Even mankind's dead are affected. Jesus' resurrection opens the way to bring them back to life in God's promised Paradise earth. (Luke 23:39-43; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22) If you want to know more about such matters, we invite you to attend the Memorial of Christ's death on April 11, 1998, at a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in your area.

# Slaves of Men or Servants of God?

"JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES are more or less to be admired." So states the German book *Seher, Grübler, Enthusiasten* (Visionaries, Ponderers, Enthusiasts). Though somewhat critical of the Witnesses, it admits: "In general, they live blameless, middle-class lives. They are diligent and conscientious in their work, are quiet citizens and honest taxpayers. They refrain from madly pursuing riches. . . . Their discipline at conventions is praiseworthy. Their sacrificial spirit is on a par with any other religious group; as regards the ministry they top all others. But what elevates them above every other Christian church and group of our day is the absolutely unbreakable determination with which most of them proclaim their doctrines under all circumstances and in face of all risks."*

* The original 1950 edition did not contain the above statement. Its appearance in the 1982 revised edition thus reveals a trend toward a better understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Despite such a positive appraisal, some voices try to present Jehovah's Witnesses in quite a different light. In most countries around the world, the Witnesses have openly performed their religious services for decades without interference. Millions of people know them, respect them, and agree that they have a right to practice their religion. Why, then, is there any uncertainty about who Jehovah's Witnesses are?

Perhaps one reason for the uncertainty is that in recent times a number of other religious groups have become involved in child abuse, mass suicides, and terrorist attacks. Of course, aberrations like these are everywhere, not merely among those who are religious. As regards religion, however, many people have become skeptical, some even hostile.

### Dangers of Following Men

A "sect" has been defined as "a group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or to a lead-

er." Similarly, those belonging to a "cult" have "great devotion to a person, idea, or thing." Actually, the members of any religious group who strongly adhere to human leaders and their ideas are in danger of becoming slaves of men. A strong leader-oriented relationship can lead to an unhealthy emotional and spiritual dependency. The danger may be compounded when a person is reared in a sectarian atmosphere from childhood.

Those who have such concerns about a religion need reliable information. Some may have been told that Jehovah's Witnesses belong to a religious organization that enslaves its members, exercises authoritarian control over them, unduly restricts their freedom, and throws them out of step with society as a whole.

Jehovah's Witnesses know that these concerns are unwarranted. Therefore, they invite you to check for yourself. After careful consideration, draw your own conclusions. Are the Witnesses servants of God, as they claim, or actually slaves of men? What is the source of their strength? The two articles on pages 12-23 will provide satisfying answers to such questions.

## THE "ONE-FINGER BIBLE"

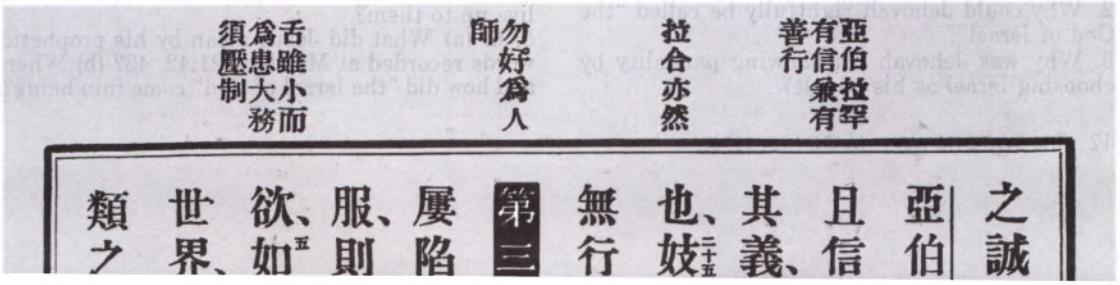
PARALYZED after being stricken by illness, Joseph Schereschewsky could write only by typing, using one finger. Yet he reached his goal—to translate the Bible into Chinese, one of the most difficult languages for a foreigner to master.

Both images: Courtesy of American Bible Society Archives

A Jew by birth, Schereschewsky investigated and accepted Christianity as an adult. He eventually became a missionary in China. There, he participated in many translation projects, beginning as early as 1866 and continuing into the first years of the 20th century. Because of his Jewish background, Schereschewsky was much more familiar with Hebrew than his fellow scholars. Thus, he was entrusted with the translation of the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Toward the end of his long career, he also produced a Chinese translation of the whole Bible with references.

As a Bible translator, Joseph Schereschewsky was an ardent advocate of versions in the common language. But his task was not an easy one. His contribution to the Chinese Bible is unique, states *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, "because it was so comprehensive and was accomplished against so many handicaps."

After Schereschewsky's hands became paralyzed, he still forged ahead with his work. Typing required great effort, since he had lost normal use of his hands. He therefore called this translation his one-finger Bible. To produce it despite his handicaps, Schereschewsky persevered for 25 years. By not giving up, he shared in making God's Word understandable in Chinese—the language spoken by more people than any other.



# DEDICATION AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE

*"For such freedom Christ set us free."*—GALATIANS 5:1.

BIBLE writers used several Hebrew and Greek words to convey the idea of being separated, or set apart, to serve a sacred purpose. In English Bibles these words are translated with words like "dedication," "inauguration," or "consecration." At times these terms are used in connection with structures—generally God's temple in ancient Jerusalem and the worship carried on there. Seldom are these words used in reference to secular matters.

### Dedication to "the God of Israel"

[2] In 1513 B.C.E., God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Shortly thereafter, he set them apart as his special people, taking them into a covenant relationship with himself. They were told: "Now if you will strictly obey my voice and will indeed keep my covenant, then you will certainly become my special property out of all other peoples, because the whole earth belongs to me." (Exodus 19:5; Psalm 135:4) Having made the Israelites his special property, Jehovah could rightfully be called "the God of Israel."—Joshua 24:23.

[3] In making the Israelites his dedicated people, Jehovah was not being partial, for he also lovingly thought of non-Israelites. He instructed his people: "In case an alien resident resides with you as an alien in your land, you must not mistreat him. The alien resident who resides as an alien with you should become to you like a native of yours; and you must love him as yourself, for you became alien residents in the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God." (Leviticus 19:33, 34) Centuries later, God's standpoint was forcefully impressed upon the apostle Peter, who acknowledged: "For a certainty I perceive that God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him."—Acts 10:34, 35.

[4] Note, too, that being God's dedicated people was conditional. Only if they strictly obeyed God's voice and kept his covenant would they be his "special property." Sadly, the Israelites failed to meet these requirements. After rejecting the Messiah sent by God in the first century C.E., they lost their privileged position. Jehovah was no longer "the God of Israel." And the natural Israelites were no longer God's dedicated people. —Compare Matthew 23:23.

### Dedication of "the Israel of God"

[5] Did this mean that Jehovah was now to

1. To what do the Hebrew and Greek words translated "dedication," "inauguration," or "consecration" chiefly apply?
2. Why could Jehovah rightfully be called "the God of Israel"?
3. Why was Jehovah not showing partiality by choosing Israel as his people?
4. What were the conditions of the relationship between God and Israel, and did the Israelites live up to them?
5, 6. (a) What did Jesus mean by his prophetic words recorded at Matthew 21:42, 43? (b) When and how did "the Israel of God" come into being?

be without a dedicated people? No. Quoting the psalmist, Jesus Christ foretold: "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone that the builders rejected is the one that has become the chief cornerstone. From Jehovah this has come to be, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? This is why I say to you, The kingdom of God will be taken from you and be given to a nation producing its fruits."—Matthew 21:42, 43.

6 The "nation producing its fruits" proved to be the Christian congregation. During his earthly sojourn, Jesus chose its first prospective members. But on the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., it was Jehovah God himself who founded the Christian congregation by pouring out his holy spirit upon its first members, numbering about 120. (Acts 1:15; 2:1-4) As the apostle Peter later wrote, this newly formed congregation then became "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for special possession." Chosen for what reason? That they should "declare abroad the excellencies of the one that called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9) Christ's followers, anointed with God's spirit, were now a dedicated nation, "the Israel of God."—Galatians 6:16.

7 Although members of the holy nation were "a people for special possession," they were not to be enslaved. On the contrary, they were to enjoy greater freedom than that possessed by the dedicated nation of natural Israel. Jesus promised the prospective members of this new nation: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) The apostle Paul pointed out that Christians were set free from the requirements of the Law covenant. In this regard he admonished fellow believers in Galatia: "For such freedom Christ set us free. Therefore stand fast, and do not let yourselves be confined again in a yoke of slavery."—Galatians 5:1.

8 Unlike natural Israel of old, to this day the Israel of God has strictly obeyed the requirements of its dedication. This should not be surprising because its members freely chose to obey. Whereas members of natural Israel became dedicated by reason of birth, members of the Israel of God became such by choice. The Christian arrangement thus stood in contrast with the Jewish Law covenant, which imposed dedication upon individuals without allowing them the freedom of choice.

9 The prophet Jeremiah foretold a change with regard to dedication when he wrote: "'Look! There are days coming,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'and I will conclude with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant; not one like the covenant that I concluded with their forefathers in the day of my taking hold of their hand to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt, "which covenant of mine they themselves broke, although I myself had husbandly ownership of them," is the utterance of Jehovah.' 'For this is the covenant that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,' is the utterance of Jehovah. 'I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it. And I will become their God, and they themselves will become my people.'"—Jeremiah 31:31-33.

7. What were members of the Israel of God to enjoy, and what were they therefore told to avoid?

8. In what respect does the Christian arrangement offer individuals greater freedom than that experienced under the Law covenant?

9, 10. (a) How did Jeremiah indicate that there would be a change with regard to dedication? (b) Why would you say that not all dedicated Christians today are members of the Israel of God?

[10] Having God's law "within them," written, as it were, "in their heart," members of the Israel of God are moved to live up to their dedication. Their motivation is stronger than that of the natural Israelites, who were dedicated by birth, not by choice. Today, the strong motivation to do God's will, as demonstrated by the Israel of God, is shared by over five million fellow worshipers throughout the world. They likewise have dedicated their lives to Jehovah God to do his will. Although these individuals do not have the hope of heavenly life as do those making up the Israel of God, they rejoice in the prospect of living forever on earth under the rule of God's heavenly Kingdom. They show appreciation for spiritual Israel by actively supporting its few remaining members in fulfilling their assignment to "declare abroad the excellencies of the one that called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light."

**Wisely Exercising God-Given Freedom**

[11] God created humans to treasure freedom. He granted them the capacity of free will. The first human couple made use of their freedom of choice. However, they unwisely and unlovingly made a choice that led to disaster both for them and for their offspring. Still, this clearly demonstrates that Jehovah never forces intelligent creatures to take a course contrary to their inner motives or desires. And since "God loves a cheerful giver," the only dedication acceptable to him is one based on love, one made willingly with cheerfulness, one founded on freedom of choice. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Any other kind is unacceptable.

11. With what capacity was man created, and how should it be used?


## In Our Next Issue

The Family—A Human Necessity!

A Book for All People

Do You Respect Their Dignity?


[12] In full recognition of this requirement, Jehovah's Witnesses advocate the dedicating of oneself to God, but they never coerce anyone into making such a dedication, not even their own children. In contrast with many churches, the Witnesses do not baptize their offspring as infants, as if it were possible to force them into dedication without the benefit of personal choice. The Scriptural pattern to follow is the one followed by the young man Timothy. As an adult, he was told by the apostle Paul: "Continue in the things that you learned and were persuaded to believe, knowing from what persons you learned them and that from infancy you have known the holy writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through the faith in connection with Christ Jesus."—2 Timothy 3:14, 15.

[13] It is noteworthy that Timothy knew the holy writings because he had been taught them from *infancy*. He had been *persuaded*—not forced—to believe Christian teachings by his mother and grandmother. (2 Timothy 1:5) As a result, Timothy saw the wisdom of becoming a follower of Christ and thus made the *personal* choice of Christian dedication. In modern

12, 13. How does Timothy serve as a pattern for proper child training, and to what has his example led many young people?

*In ancient Israel, dedication to God was a matter of birth*

times, tens of thousands of young men and women whose parents are Jehovah's Witnesses have followed this example. (Psalm 110:3) Others have not. It is a matter of personal choice.

### Choosing to Be a Slave of Whom?

[14] No human is totally free. Everyone is restricted in his freedom by physical laws, such as the law of gravity, which cannot be ignored with impunity. Also in a spiritual sense, no one is totally free. Paul reasoned: "Do you not know that if you keep presenting yourselves to anyone as slaves to obey him, you are slaves of him because you obey him, either of sin with death in view or of obedience with righteousness in view?"—Romans 6:16.

[15] The idea of being someone's slave strikes most people as unpleasant. Yet, in today's world the reality is that people often let themselves be manipulated and influenced in so many subtle ways that they end up *involuntarily* doing what others want them to do. For instance, the advertising industry and the entertainment world endeavor to press people into a mold, establishing standards for them to follow. Political and religious organizations get people to support their ideas and goals, not always

14. What does Romans 6:16 tell us about total freedom?
15. (a) How do people feel about being slaves, but what do most end up doing? (b) What appropriate questions might we ask ourselves?

*Christian dedication is a matter of choice*

by means of convincing arguments, but often by appealing to a sense of solidarity or loyalty. Since Paul noted that 'we are the slaves of those whom we obey,' each of us does well to ask himself, 'Of whom am I a slave? Who exercises the greatest influence on my decisions and my way of life? Do religious clergymen, political leaders, financial tycoons, or entertainment personalities? Whom do I obey—God or men?'

[16] Christians do not view obedience to God as an unwarranted infringement upon personal freedom. They willingly exercise their freedom in the manner of their Exemplar, Jesus Christ, bringing personal desires and priorities into line with God's will. (John 5:30; 6:38) They develop "the mind of Christ," submitting themselves to him as Head of the congregation. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:15-18) This is much like a woman who marries and willingly cooperates with the man she loves. In fact, the body of anointed Christians is spoken of as a chaste virgin promised to the Christ in marriage.—2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23, 24; Revelation 19:7, 8.

[17] Each of Jehovah's Witnesses, whether he has a heavenly hope or an earthly one, has made a *personal* dedication to God to do his will and to obey him as Ruler. For each Witness, dedication has been a *personal* choice to become a slave of God in preference to remaining a slave of men. This is in harmony with the apostle Paul's counsel: "You were bought with a price; stop becoming slaves of men."—1 Corinthians 7:23.

16. In what sense are Christians slaves of God, and what is the proper view of such slavery?

17. What have all of Jehovah's Witnesses chosen to become?

### Learning to Benefit Ourselves

[18] Before a person can qualify to become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, he must meet Scriptural qualifications. Elders exercise care in determining if a potential Witness truly understands the implications of Christian dedication. Does he really want to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses? Is he willing to live up to what this entails? If not, he is ineligible for baptism.

[19] If an individual meets all the requirements, however, why should he be criticized for voluntarily making a personal decision to let himself be influenced by God and by His inspired Word? Is it less acceptable to let oneself be influenced by God than by men? Or is this of any less benefit? Jehovah's Witnesses do not think so. They wholeheartedly agree with God's words written down by Isaiah: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk."—Isaiah 48:17.

[20] Bible truth frees people from believing false religious doctrines, such as eternal torment in a fiery hell. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) Instead, it fills their hearts with gratitude for the true hope for the dead—the resurrection made possible on the basis of Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice. (Matthew 20:28; Acts 24:15; Romans 6:23) Bible truth frees people from the frustrations of relying on political promises that consistently fall short. Instead, it causes their hearts to overflow with joy at knowing that Jehovah's Kingdom already rules in the heavens and will shortly rule over the entire earth. Bible truth frees people from practices that, although appealing to the fallen flesh, dishonor God and exact a heavy toll in the form of failed relationships, sickness, and premature death. In short, being a slave of God is exceedingly more beneficial than being a slave of men. In fact, dedication to God promises benefits "in this period of time . . . and in the coming system of things everlasting life."—Mark 10:29, 30.

[21] Jehovah's Witnesses today did not become part of a dedicated nation by birth as did the Israelites of old. The Witnesses are part of a congregation of dedicated Christians. Each baptized Witness has become such by individually exercising freedom of choice in making a dedication. Indeed, for Jehovah's Witnesses, dedication results in a warm personal relationship with God marked by willing service to him. This joyful relationship they wholeheartedly desire to maintain, forever holding fast to the freedom for which Jesus Christ set them free.

18. When does a potential Witness qualify for baptism?

19. Why is there no reason to criticize someone who decides to become a dedicated servant of God?

20. In what respects are people freed by Bible truth?

21. How do Jehovah's Witnesses view dedication to God, and what is their wish?

#### How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why was God not partial in choosing Israel to become his "special property"?
- ☐ Why would you say that Christian dedication does not entail a loss of freedom?
- ☐ What are the benefits of dedication to Jehovah God?
- ☐ Why is it better to be a servant of Jehovah than a slave of men?

# LIVING UP TO CHRISTIAN DEDICATION IN FREEDOM

*"Where the spirit of Jehovah is, there is freedom."*
—2 CORINTHIANS 3:17.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES believe that their religion will last forever. They therefore anticipate serving God "with spirit and truth" for all eternity. (John 4:23, 24) As free moral agents, these Christians have made an unreserved dedication to Jehovah God and are determined to live up to it. To that end, they rely on God's Word and on his holy spirit. As they wholeheartedly pursue their course of Christian dedication in God-given freedom, the Witnesses show due respect for the role of governmental "superior authorities" and make proper use of legal means and provisions. (Romans 13:1; James 1:25) For instance, the Witnesses use the Watch Tower Society as a legal instrument—one of many in various lands—to enable them to accomplish their work of helping fellow humans, especially in spiritual ways. But the Witnesses are dedicated to God, not to any legal agency, and their dedication to Jehovah will last forever.

[2] As servants dedicated to God, Jehovah's Witnesses are obligated to follow Jesus' instructions to "make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them." (Matthew 28:19, 20) This work will continue until the end of the system of things, for Jesus also said: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:3, 14) Each year, printing plants of the Watch Tower Society and similar legal bodies supply Jehovah's Witnesses with millions of Bibles, books, brochures, and magazines for use in their worldwide preaching activity. These legal entities are therefore invaluable in helping dedicated servants of God to live up to their dedication to him.

[3] Someone may argue that the way the Witnesses speak about the Watch Tower Society—or more often just "the Society"—indicates that they view it as more than a legal instrument. Do they not consider it to be the final authority on matters of worship? The book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* clarifies this point by explaining: "When *The Watchtower* [June 1, 1938] referred to 'The Society,' this meant, not a mere legal instrumentality, but the body of anointed Christians that had formed that legal entity and used it."* The expression therefore stood for "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45) It is in this sense that the Witnesses generally used the term "the Society." Of

1. To whom are Jehovah's Witnesses dedicated, and why do they use legal agencies?
2. Why are the Watch Tower Society and similar legal agencies greatly appreciated by Jehovah's Witnesses?

* Published in 1993 by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

3. In what sense did Jehovah's Witnesses formerly use the term "the Society"?

*The first-century governing body preserved unity of doctrine*

course, the legal corporation and "the faithful and discreet slave" are not interchangeable terms. Directors of the Watch Tower Society are elected, whereas Witnesses who make up 'the faithful slave' are anointed by Jehovah's holy spirit.

4 In order to avoid misunderstandings, Jehovah's Witnesses try to be careful about how they express themselves. Instead of saying, "the Society teaches," many Witnesses prefer to use such expressions as, "the Bible says" or, "I understand the Bible to teach." In this way they emphasize the personal decision that each Witness has made in accepting Bible teachings and also avoid giving the false impression that Witnesses are somehow bound to the dictates of some religious sect. Of course, suggestions as regards terminology should never become a subject of controversy. After all, terminology is of importance only to the extent that it prevents misunderstandings. Christian balance is required. The Bible admonishes us "not to fight about words." (2 Timothy 2:14, 15) The Scriptures also state this principle: "Unless you through the tongue utter speech easily understood, how will it be known what is being spoken?"—1 Corinthians 14:9.

4. (a) How do many Witnesses express themselves so as to avoid misunderstandings? (b) Why should we be balanced as regards terminology?

## God's Spirit Reduces the Need for Rules

5 "All things are lawful; but not all things are advantageous," noted the apostle Paul. He added: "All things are lawful; but not all things build up." (1 Corinthians 10:23) Paul obviously did not mean that it is

5. How is 1 Corinthians 10:23 to be understood?

lawful to do things that God's Word expressly condemns. Compared to the some 600 laws given to ancient Israel, there are comparatively few explicit commands regulating Christian life. Hence, many matters are left to individual conscience. A person who has made a dedication to Jehovah enjoys the freedom that results from guidance by God's spirit. Having made the truth his own, a Christian follows his Bible-trained conscience and relies on God's direction by holy spirit. This helps the dedicated Christian to determine what will "build up" and be "advantageous" for himself and others. He realizes that the decisions he makes will affect his personal relationship with God, to whom he is dedicated.

[6] A Witness demonstrates that he has made the truth his own by commenting at Christian meetings. At first, he may recite what is stated in the publication being studied. In time, however, he will progress to the point of expressing Bible teachings in his own words. He thus gives evidence that he is developing his thinking ability, not merely repeating what others have said. Framing thoughts in his own words and expressing correct words of truth in a heartfelt way will bring him delight and show that he is convinced in his own mind.—Ecclesiastes 12:10; compare Romans 14:5b.

[7] Jehovah's Witnesses are motivated by love for God and their fellow humans. (Matthew 22:36-40) True, they are closely knit together by the bond of Christlike love as a worldwide association of brothers. (Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 5:9) But as a free moral agent, each one has personally decided to declare the good news of God's Kingdom, to remain politically neutral, to abstain from blood, to avoid certain types of entertainment, and to live by Bible standards. These are not decisions forced upon them. They are decisions that fall within the framework of a way of life freely chosen by potential Witnesses before they ever take the step of Christian dedication.

6. At Christian meetings, how can we demonstrate that we have made the truth our own?
7. What decisions have been made freely by servants of Jehovah?

### Accountable to a Governing Body?

[8] The Bible clearly shows that true Christians do not serve God under coercion. It says: "Jehovah is the Spirit; and where the spirit of Jehovah is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17) But how can this fact be harmonized with the idea of a "faithful and discreet slave" with its Governing Body?—Matthew 24:45-47.

[9] To answer this question, we must keep in mind the Scriptural principle of headship. (1 Corinthians 11:3) At Ephesians 5:21-24, Christ is identified as "head of the congregation," the one to whom it is "in subjection." Jehovah's Witnesses understand that the faithful and discreet slave is made up of Jesus' spiritual brothers. (Hebrews 2:10-13) This faithful slave class has been appointed to provide God's people with spiritual "food at the proper time." In this time of the end, Christ has appointed this slave "over all his belongings." Its position therefore merits the respect of anyone claiming to be a Christian.

[10] The purpose of headship is to preserve unity and ensure that "all things take place decently and by arrangement." (1 Corinthians 14:40) To achieve this in the first century, a number of anointed Christians from

8. What question needs to be clarified?
9, 10. (a) How does the principle of headship apply in the Christian congregation? (b) What did following the principle of headship necessitate in the first-century Christian congregation?

the faithful and discreet slave class were chosen to represent the entire group. As subsequent events proved, the supervision exercised by this first-century governing body had Jehovah's approval and blessing. First-century Christians gladly accepted the arrangement. Yes, they actually welcomed and were grateful for the fine results it produced.—Acts 15:1-32.

[11] The value of such an arrangement still exists. Presently, the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses is composed of ten anointed Christians, all with decades of Christian experience behind them. They offer spiritual direction to Jehovah's Witnesses, as did the first-century governing body. (Acts 16:4) Like the early Christians, the Witnesses gladly look to the mature brothers of the Governing Body for Bible-based direction and guidance in matters of worship. Though members of the Governing Body are slaves of Jehovah and of Christ, as are their fellow Christians, the Bible instructs us: "Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account; that they may do this with joy and not with sighing, for this would be damaging to you."—Hebrews 13:17.

[12] Does the position of oversight that the Scriptures assign the Governing Body mean that each of Jehovah's Witnesses must render to it an account of his works? Not according to Paul's words to Christians in Rome: "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also look down on your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God . . . Each of us will render an account for himself to God."—Romans 14:10-12.

[13] Is it not true, however, that individual Witnesses are expected to report their preaching activity? Yes, but the purpose of this is clearly explained in a Witness handbook, which says: "Early followers of Jesus Christ took interest in reports of progress in the preaching work. (Mark 6:30) As the work prospered, statistical reports were compiled along with accounts of outstanding experiences of those having a share in preaching the good news. . . . (Acts 2:5-11, 41, 47; 6:7; 1:15; 4:4) . . . How encouraging it was for those faithful Christian workers to hear reports of what was being accomplished! . . . In like manner, Jehovah's modern-day organization endeavors to keep precise records of the work being done in fulfillment of Matthew 24:14."

[14] The Governing Body is a loving provision and an example of faith worthy of imitation. (Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7) By their adhering to and following Christ as a model, they can echo Paul's words: "Not that we are the masters over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your joy, for it is by your faith that you are standing." (2 Corinthians 1:24) By observing trends, the Governing Body draws attention to the benefits of heeding Bible counsel, offers suggestions about applying Bible laws and principles, warns of hidden dangers, and provides "fellow workers" needed encouragement. It thus discharges its Christian stewardship, helps them to maintain their joy, and builds them up in faith so that they can stand firm.—1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; Titus 1:7-9.

11. How should the present-day Governing Body be viewed?
12. To whom must each individual Christian render an account?
13. Why do Jehovah's Witnesses report their preaching activity?
14, 15. (a) How does 2 Corinthians 1:24 apply to the Governing Body? (b) On what basis must individual Christians make personal decisions, in recognition of what fact?

[15] If a Witness makes decisions on the basis of Bible counsel offered by the Governing Body, he does so of his own volition because his own study of the Bible has convinced him that this is the proper course. Each Witness is influenced by God's own Word to apply sound Scriptural counsel offered by the Governing Body, in full recognition that decisions he makes will affect his *personal* relationship with God, to whom he is dedicated.—1 Thessalonians 2:13.

### Students and Soldiers

[16] But if decisions as to conduct are a personal matter, why are some of Jehovah's Witnesses disfellowshipped? Nobody arbitrarily determines that the practice of a particular sin requires disfellowshipping. Rather, this action is Scripturally required only when a member of the congregation unrepentantly engages in gross sins, such as those enumerated in the 5th chapter of First Corinthians. Thus, while a Christian may be disfellowshipped for practicing fornication, this occurs only if the individual refuses to accept the spiritual assistance of loving shepherds. Jehovah's Witnesses are not alone in following this Christian practice. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* notes: "Any community claims the right to protect itself against nonconforming members who may threaten the common welfare. In a religious setting this right has often been reinforced by the belief that the sanction [of excommunication] affects one's standing before God."

16. Although decisions regarding conduct are a personal matter, why are some disfellowshipped?

#### How Would You Answer?

- ☐ How do the Watch Tower Society and similar legal agencies help Jehovah's Witnesses?
- ☐ How do Christians benefit from the role of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses?
- ☐ Why do Jehovah's people report their preaching activity?
- ☐ Under what circumstances is disfellowshipping of a dedicated Christian appropriate?

[17] Jehovah's Witnesses are students of the Bible. (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Acts 17:11) The program of Bible education provided by the Governing Body might be compared to a school curriculum outlined by a board of education. Although the board is itself not the source of the material being taught, it does set up the curriculum, determine the method of instruction, and issue necessary directives. If anyone flagrantly refuses to live according to the requirements of the institution, creates difficulties for fellow students, or brings disgrace upon the school, he can be expelled. The school authorities have the right to act for the benefit of the students as a whole.

[18] Besides being students, Jehovah's Witnesses are soldiers of Jesus Christ, instructed to "fight the fine fight of the faith." (1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 2:3) Naturally, persistent conduct unbecoming a Christian soldier may incur divine disapproval. As an individual endowed with freedom of choice, a Christian soldier can decide as he wishes, but he must bear the consequences of his decision. Paul reasons:

17, 18. How might the propriety of disfellowshipping be illustrated?

*Around the world, Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy the freedom for which Christ set them free*

"No man serving as a soldier involves himself in the commercial businesses of life, in order that he may gain the approval of the one who enrolled him as a soldier. Moreover, if anyone contends even in the games, he is not crowned unless he has contended according to the rules." (2 Timothy 2:4, 5) Mature Christians, including those of the Governing Body, remain wholly at the disposal of their Leader, Jesus Christ, keeping "the rules" so that they can win the prize of life everlasting.—John 17:3; Revelation 2:10.

19 Do not the facts make clear that Jehovah's Witnesses are servants of God, not slaves of men? As dedicated Christians enjoying the freedom for which Christ set them free, they let God's spirit and his Word govern their lives as they serve unitedly with their brothers in the congregation of God. (Psalm 133:1) The evidences of this should also erase any uncertainty about the source of their strength. With the psalmist, they can sing: "Jehovah is my strength and my shield. In him my heart has trusted, and I have been helped, so that my heart exults, and with my song I shall laud him."—Psalm 28:7.

19. Having examined the facts about Christian dedication, of what can we be sure?

# They Did Not Make a Celebrated Name for Themselves

THE Bible does not name the builders of the infamous tower of Babel. The account states: "*They* now said: 'Come on! Let us build ourselves a city and also a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a celebrated name for ourselves, for fear we may be scattered over all the surface of the earth.'"—Genesis 11:4.

Who were "they"? This event took place some 200 years after the Flood. By then Noah, about 800 years old, lived among thousands of his descendants. They all spoke the same language and lived together in the general area where he and his sons settled after the Flood. (Genesis 11:1) At some point in time, a portion of this enlarged population moved eastward and "discovered a valley plain in the land of Shinar." —Genesis 11:2.

### An Utter Failure

It was in this valley that the group decided to rebel against God. How so? Well, Jehovah God had expressed his purpose when he commanded the first human couple to "be fruitful and become many and fill the earth." (Genesis 1:28) This was repeated to Noah and his sons after the Flood. God instructed them: "As for you men, be fruitful and become many, make the earth swarm with you and become many in it." (Genesis 9:7) In opposition to Jehovah's direction, the people built a city so that they would not "be scattered over all the surface of the earth."

These people also began to build a tower with the purpose of making "a celebrated name" for themselves. But contrary to their expectations, they did not complete construction of the tower. The Bible record shows that Jehovah confused their language so that they could not understand one another. "Accordingly," says the inspired account, "Jehovah scattered them from there over all the surface of the earth, and they gradually left off building the city."—Genesis 11:7, 8.

The complete failure of this venture is highlighted by the fact that the names of the builders never became "celebrated," or well-known. Actually, their names are unknown and have been erased from human history. But what about Nimrod, Noah's great-grandson? Was he not the leader of this rebellion against God? Is not his name well-known?

### Nimrod—An Insolent Rebel

Doubtless, Nimrod was the ringleader. Genesis chapter 10 introduces him as "a mighty hunter in opposition to Jehovah." (Genesis 10:9) The Scriptures also say that "he made the start in becoming a mighty one in the earth." (Genesis 10:8) Nimrod was a warrior, a man of violence. He became the first human ruler after the Flood, appointing himself as king. Nimrod was also a builder. The Bible credits him with being the founder of eight cities, including Babel. —Genesis 10:10-12.

Hence, Nimrod—an opposer of God, a king of Babel, and a constructor of cities—undoubtedly shared in building the tower of Babel. Did he not make a celebrated name for himself? Concerning the name Nimrod, Orientalist E. F. C. Rosenmüller wrote: "The name was given to Nimrod from [*ma·radh'*], 'he rebelled,' 'he defected,' according to the Hebrew meaning." Then Rosenmüller explains that "Orientals are accustomed not rarely to call their noblemen by names given after death, from which comes the, at times, amazing agreement between names and things done."

Several scholars share the opinion that the name Nimrod was not a name given at birth. Rather, they consider it to be a name given later to suit his rebellious character after it became manifest. For example, C. F. Keil states: "The name itself, *Nimrod* from [*ma·radh'*], 'we will revolt,' points to some violent resistance to God. It is so characteristic that it can only have been given by his contemporaries, and thus have become a proper name." In a footnote, Keil quotes historian Jacob Perizonius as writing: "I would believe that this man [Nimrod], as a ferocious hunter and surrounded by a band of comrades, in order to incite the rest to rebellion, always had in his mouth and geminated that word 'nimrod, nimrod,' that is, 'Let us rebel! Let us rebel!' Hence, in later times, he was designated by others, even Moses himself, by that word as a proper name."

Clearly, Nimrod did not make a celebrated name for himself. The name given to him at birth apparently is unknown. It has been erased from history, as have the names of those who followed his lead. He did not even leave any offspring to carry his name. Instead of receiving glory and fame, he has been vested with infamy. The name Nimrod has forever labeled him an insolent rebel who foolishly challenged Jehovah God.

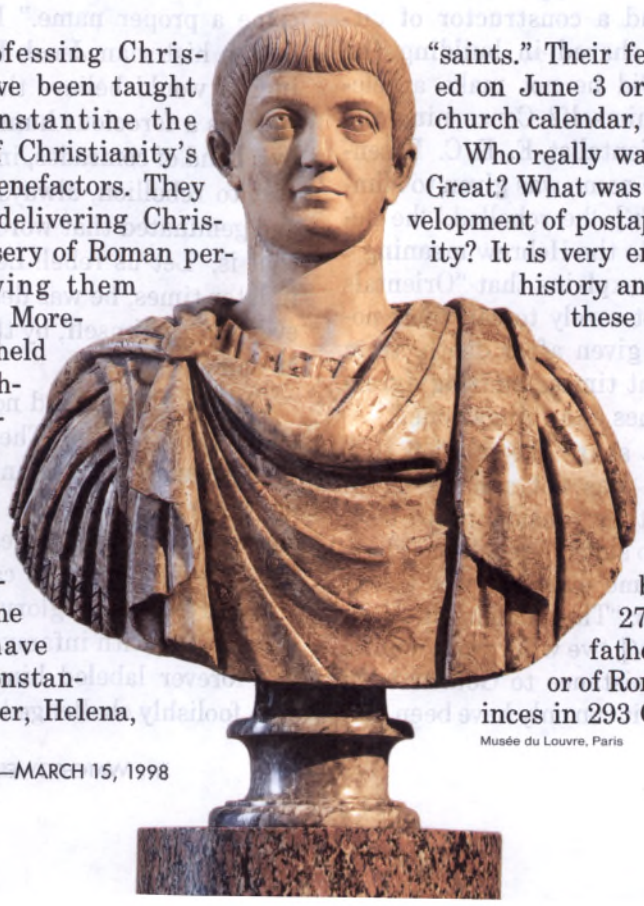
# CONSTANTINE THE GREAT

## *A Champion of Christianity?*

*Roman Emperor Constantine is among the few men whose name history has embellished with the term "Great." Christendom has added the expressions "saint," "thirteenth apostle," "holy equal of the apostles," and 'chosen by God's Providence to accomplish the greatest turnabout in the whole world.' At the other end of the spectrum, some describe Constantine as "bloodstained, stigmatized by countless enormities and full of deceit, . . . a hideous tyrant, guilty of horrid crimes."*

MANY professing Christians have been taught that Constantine the Great was one of Christianity's most prominent benefactors. They credit him with delivering Christians from the misery of Roman persecution and giving them religious freedom. Moreover, it is widely held that he was a faithful footstep follower of Jesus Christ with a strong desire to advance the Christian cause. The Eastern Orthodox Church and the Coptic Church have declared both Constantine and his mother, Helena, "saints." Their festival is celebrated on June 3 or according to the church calendar, on May 21.

Who really was Constantine the Great? What was his role in the development of postapostolic Christianity? It is very enlightening to let history and scholars answer these questions.



Musée du Louvre, Paris

### The Historical Constantine

Constantine, the son of Constantius Chlorus, was born in Naissus in Serbia about the year 275 C.E. When his father became emperor of Rome's western provinces in 293 C.E., he was fight-

ing on the Danube under orders from Emperor Galerius. Constantine returned to his dying father's side in Britain in the year 306 C.E. Soon after his father's death, Constantine was raised to the status of an emperor by the army.

At that time, five other individuals claimed that they were Augusti. The period between 306 and 324 C.E., after which Constantine became sole imperator, was a time of unremitting civil war. Victory in two sets of campaigns guaranteed Constantine a place in Roman history and made him the sole ruler of the Roman Empire.

In 312 C.E., Constantine defeated his opponent Maxentius in the battle of the Milvian Bridge outside Rome. Christian apologists claimed that during that campaign, there appeared under the sun a flaming cross bearing the Latin words *In hoc signo vinces,* meaning "In this sign conquer." It is also held that in a dream, Constantine was told to paint the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek on the shields of his troops. However, this story suffers from many anachronisms. The book *A History of Christianity* states: "There is a conflict of evidence about the exact time, place and details of this vision." Welcoming Constantine in Rome, a pagan Senate declared him chief Augustus and Pontifex Maximus, that is, high priest of the pagan religion of the empire.

In 313 C.E., Constantine arranged a partnership with Emperor Licinius, ruler of the eastern provinces. By means of the Edict of Milan, together they granted freedom of worship and equal rights to all religious groups. Many historians, however, downplay the significance of this document, saying that it was just a routine official letter and not a major imperial document signaling a change of policy toward Christianity.

Within the next ten years, Constantine defeated his last remaining rival, Licinius, and became the undisputed ruler of the Roman world. In 325 C.E., as yet unbaptized, he presided over the first great ecumenical council of the "Christian" church, which condemned Arianism and drew up a statement of essential beliefs called the Nicene Creed.

Constantine fell terminally ill in the year 337 C.E. At that late hour of his life, he was baptized, and then he died. After his death the Senate placed him among the Roman gods.

**Religion in Constantine's Strategy**

With reference to the general attitude that Roman emperors of the third and fourth centuries had toward religion, the book *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous* (History of the Greek Nation) says: "Even when those who occupied the imperial throne did not have such profoundly religious dispositions, surrendering to the mood of the era, they found it necessary to give religion precedence within the framework of their political schemes, to lend at least a religious flavor to their actions."

Certainly, Constantine was a man of his era. At the beginning of his career, he needed some "divine" patronage, and this could not be provided by the fading Roman gods. The empire, including its religion and other institutions, was in decline, and something new and invigorating was needed to reconsolidate it. The encyclopedia *Hidria* says: "Constantine was especially interested in Christianity because it backed up not only his victory but also the reorganization of his empire. The Christian churches that existed everywhere became his political support. . . . He surrounded himself with the great prelates of the times

## CONSTANTINE AND THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA

What role did the unbaptized Emperor Constantine play at the Council of Nicaea? The *Encyclopædia Britannica* states: "Constantine himself presided, actively guiding the discussions . . . Overawed by the emperor, the bishops, with two exceptions only, signed the creed, many of them much against their inclination."

After two months of furious religious debate, this pagan politician intervened and decided in favor of those who said that Jesus was God. But why? "Constantine had basically no understanding whatsoever of the questions that were being asked in Greek theology," says *A Short History of Christian Doctrine*. What he did understand was that religious division was a threat to his empire, and he was determined to solidify his empire.

Regarding the final document that was drafted in Nicaea under Constantine's auspices, *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous* (History of the Greek Nation) observes: "It shows [Constantine's] indifference to doctrinal matters, . . . his stubborn insistence in trying to restore unity within the church at any cost, and finally his conviction that as 'bishop of those outside the church' he had the final say about any religious matter." Could God's spirit possibly have been behind the decisions made at that council?—Compare Acts 15:28, 29.

. . . , and he requested that they keep their unity intact."

Constantine sensed that the "Christian" religion—albeit apostate and deeply corrupted by then—could be effectively utilized as a revitalizing and uniting force to serve his grand scheme for imperial domination. Adopting the foundations of apostate Christianity to gain support in furthering his own political ends, he decided to unify the people under one "catholic," or universal, religion. Pagan customs and celebrations were given "Christian" names. And "Christian" clergymen were given the status, salary, and influential clout of pagan priests.

Seeking religious harmony for political reasons, Constantine quickly crushed any dissenting voices, not on the grounds of doctrinal truth, but on the basis of majority acceptance. The profound dogmatic differences within the badly divided "Christian" church gave him the opportunity to intervene as a "God-sent" mediator. Through his dealings with the Donatists in North Africa and the followers of Arius in the eastern portion of the empire, he quickly discovered that persuasion was not enough to forge a solid, unified faith.* It was in an attempt to resolve the Arian controversy that he convened the first ecumenical council in the history of the church.—See box "Constantine and the Council of Nicaea."

Concerning Constantine, historian Paul Johnson states: "One of his main reasons for tolerating Christianity may have been that it gave himself and the State the opportunity to control the Church's policy on orthodoxy and the treatment of heterodoxy."

* Donatism was a "Christian" sect of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. Its adherents claimed that the validity of the sacraments depends on the moral character of the minister and that the church must exclude from its membership people guilty of serious sin. Arianism was a "Christian" movement of the fourth century that denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. Arius taught that God is unbegotten and without a beginning. The Son, because he is begotten, cannot be God in the same sense that the Father is. The Son did not exist from all eternity but was created and exists by the will of the Father.

## DYNASTIC MURDERS

Under this heading, the work *Istoria tou Ellinikou Ethnous* (History of the Greek Nation) describes what it calls "disgusting domestic crimes that Constantine committed." Soon after founding his dynasty, he forgot how to enjoy unexpected achievement and became aware of the dangers surrounding him. Being a suspicious person and perhaps egged on by sycophants, he first grew suspicious of his nephew Licinianus—the son of a co-Augustus he had already executed—as a possible rival. His murder was followed by the execution of Constantine's own firstborn son, Crispus, who was dealt with by his stepmother Fausta because he seemed to be an obstruction to her own offspring's total power.

This action of Fausta was finally the reason for her own dramatic death. It appears that Augusta Helena, who had influence over her son Constantine until the end, was involved in this murder. The illogical emotions that often controlled Constantine also contributed to the spate of executions of many of his friends and associates. The book *History of the Middle Ages* concludes: "The execution—not to say murder—of his own son and his wife indicates that he was untouched by any spiritual influence in Christianity."

### Did He Ever Become a Christian?

Johnson notes: "Constantine never abandoned sun-worship and kept the sun on his coins." The *Catholic Encyclopedia* observes: "Constantine showed equal favour to both religions. As pontifex maximus he watched over the heathen worship and protected its rights." "Constantine never became a Christian," states the encyclopedia *Hidria,* adding: "Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote his biography, says that he became a Christian in the last moments of his life. This doesn't hold water, as the day before, [Constantine] had made a sacrifice to Zeus because he also had the title Pontifex Maximus."

Down to the day of his death in 337 C.E., Constantine bore the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus, the supreme head of religious matters. Regarding his baptism, it is reasonable to ask, Was it preceded by genuine repentance and a turning around, as required in the Scriptures? (Acts 2:38, 40, 41) Was it a complete water immersion as a symbol of Constantine's dedication to Jehovah God?—Compare Acts 8:36-39.

### A "Saint"?

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* states: "Constantine was entitled to be called Great in virtue rather of what he did than what he was. Tested by character, indeed, he stands among the lowest of all those to whom the epithet [Great] has in ancient or modern times been applied." And the book *A History of Christianity* informs us: "There were early reports of his violent temper and his cruelty in anger. . . . He had no respect for human life . . . His private life became monstrous as he aged."

Evidently Constantine had serious personality problems. A history researcher states that "his temperamental character was often the reason for his committing crimes." (See the box "Dynastic Murders.") Constantine was not "a Christian character," contends historian H. Fisher in his *History of Europe.* The facts do not characterize him as a true Christian who had put on "the new personality" and in whom there could be found the fruitage of God's holy spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, and

*This arch in Rome has been used to glorify Constantine*

self-control.—Colossians 3:9, 10; Galatians 5:22, 23.

### The Consequences of His Efforts

As the pagan Pontifex Maximus—and therefore the religious head of the Roman Empire—Constantine tried to win over the bishops of the apostate church. He offered them positions of power, prominence, and wealth as officers of the Roman State religion. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* admits: "Some bishops, blinded by the splendour of the court, even went so far as to laud the emperor as an angel of God, as a sacred being, and to prophesy that he would, like the Son of God, reign in heaven."

As apostate Christianity came into favor with the political government, it became more and more a part of this world, of this secular system, and drifted away from the teachings of Jesus Christ. (John 15:19; 17:14, 16; Revelation 17:1, 2) As a result, there was a fusion of "Christianity" with false doctrines and practices—the Trinity, immortality of the soul, hellfire, purgatory, prayers for the dead, use of rosaries, icons, images, and the like.—Compare 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

From Constantine, the church also inherited the tendency to be authoritarian. Scholars Henderson and Buck say: "The simplicity of the Gospel was corrupted, pompous rites and ceremonies were introduced, worldly honours and emoluments were conferred on the teachers of Christianity, and the Kingdom of Christ in good measure converted into a kingdom of this world."

### Where Is True Christianity?

Historical facts reveal the truth behind the "greatness" of Constantine. Instead of being founded by Jesus Christ, the Head of the true Christian congregation, Christendom is partly the result of the political expediency and the crafty maneuvers of a pagan emperor. Very aptly, historian Paul Johnson asks: "Did the empire surrender to Christianity, or did Christianity prostitute itself to the empire?"

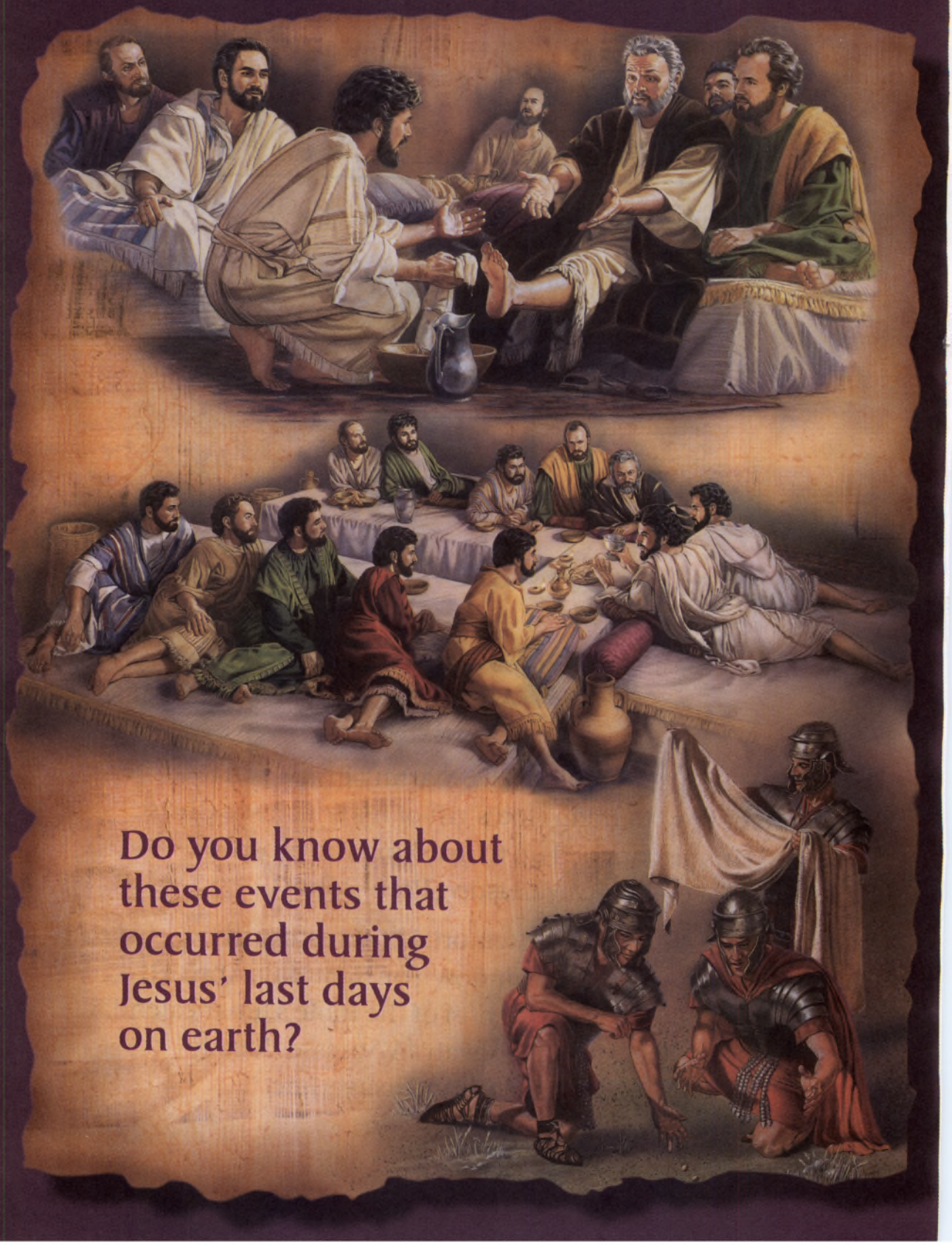
All those who really want to adhere to pure Christianity can be helped to recognize and associate with the true Christian congregation today. Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide are more than willing to help honesthearted people to identify true Christianity and to worship God in the way acceptable to him.—John 4:23, 24.

# PLEASE JOIN US FOR A SPECIAL EVENT

## SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 1998

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES warmly invite you to remember with them God's gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. This gift opened up to mankind the prospect of enjoying everlasting life.—John 3:16.

This year the Memorial of Jesus' death will be observed after sundown on Saturday, April 11. That date corresponds to Nisan 14 of the Bible's lunar calendar. Please check with Jehovah's Witnesses locally for meeting place and exact time.


Do you know about
these events that
occurred during
Jesus' last days
on earth?