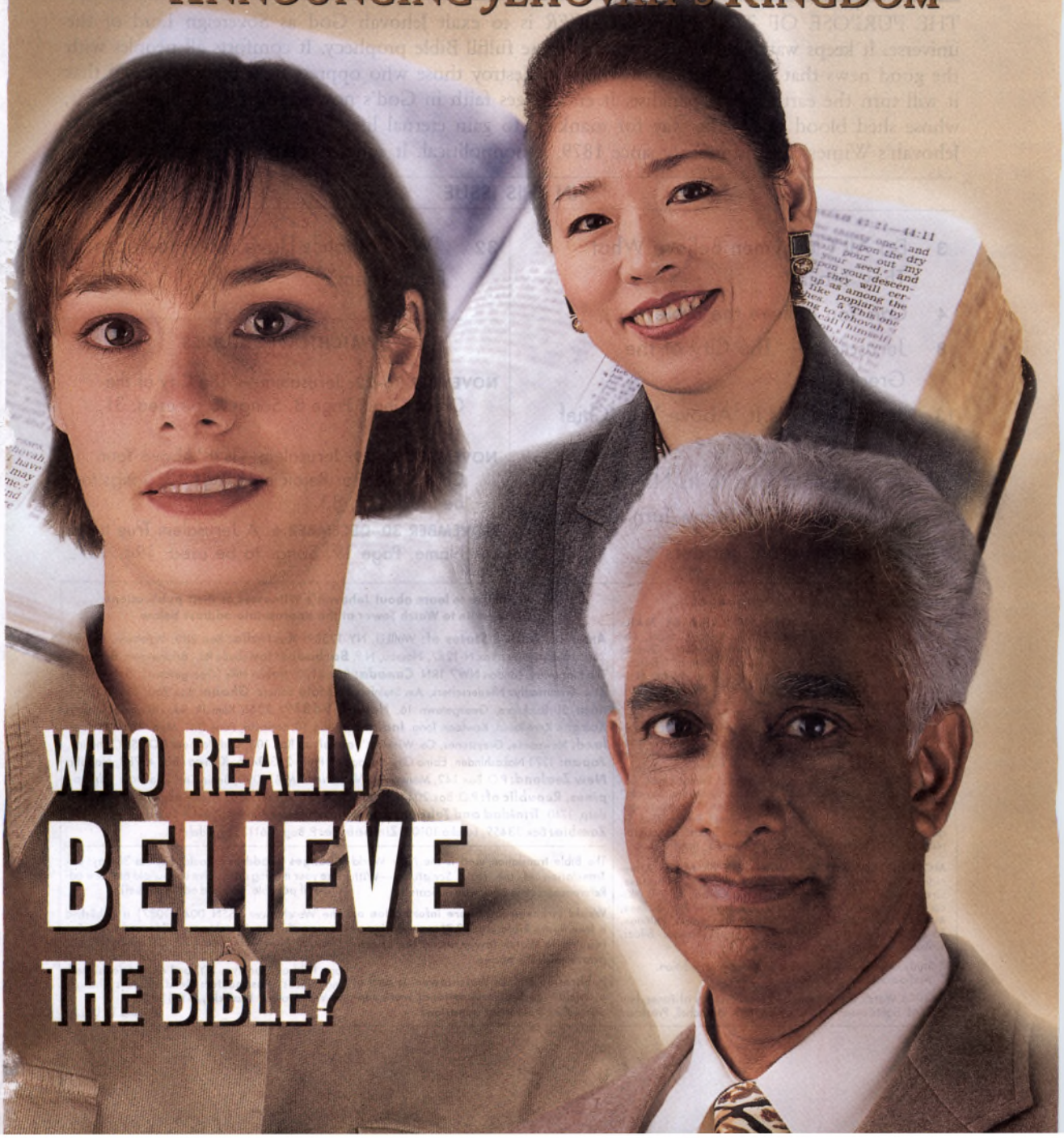
OCTOBER 15, 1998

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



WHO REALLY BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

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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DO ALL CLERGYMEN BELIEVE WHAT THEY TEACH?

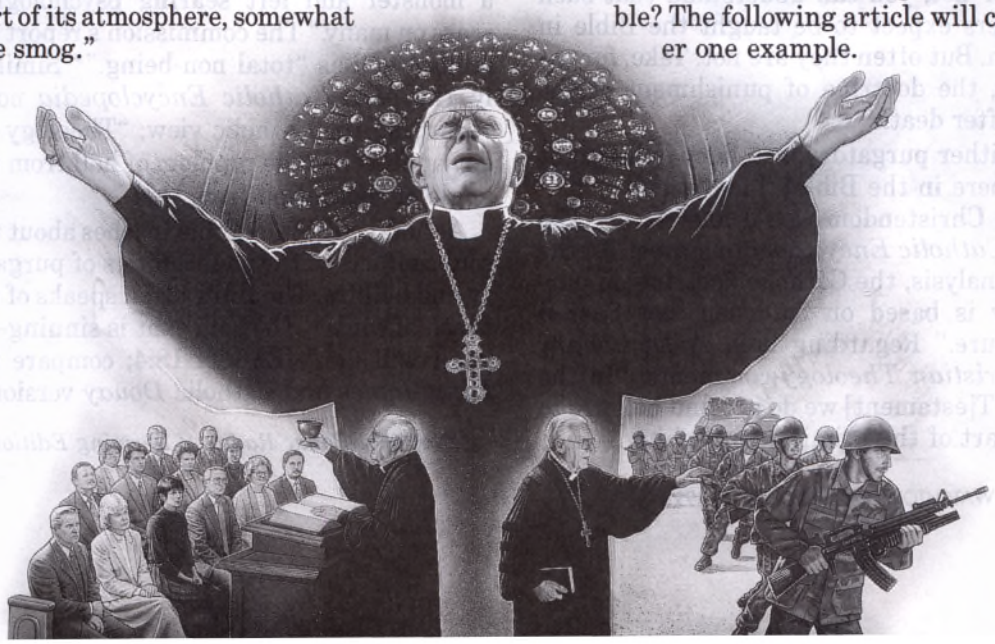
THE woman's husband has just died. Her priest explains that her husband was neither good enough to go directly to heaven nor bad enough to be consigned to the fires of hell. So, according to the priest, he is suffering punishment until he qualifies for heaven. She pays the priest to say prayers so that her husband may be released from purification sooner. The widow is content with this, feeling that the priest shares her sincere beliefs.

Do you think that the widow would be disillusioned if she found out that her priest did not really believe in punishment after death? Many are disturbed to learn that a large number of clergymen do not believe in much of what they themselves teach. The *National Catholic Reporter,* addressing what it called "a deeper clerical problem than sex," stated: "Among the clergy in general, there are enough who have ceased to believe in the existence of God or the doctrine of rewards and punishments or the resurrection . . . that the clerical culture carries this disbelief as part of its atmosphere, somewhat like smog."

Other churches face a similar dilemma. A survey of vicars of the Church of England revealed that many "do not believe in fundamental features of traditional Christian faith such as the virgin birth, Jesus's miracles and the second coming of the messiah," reports Australia's *Canberra Times.*

Religion writer George R. Plagenz asked regarding a minister how he could, in good conscience, recite a creed that he himself did not believe in. One minister said that he simply replaced the creed's opening words, "I believe." He said: "I begin the creed by saying, 'THEY believe in God the Father Almighty . . .'" Plagenz called such hypocrisy "the biggest con game in the country."

Sadly, such clerical disbelief and insincerity disillusion many people about religion in general. But it is not the only disturbing aspect of religion today. Most churchgoers have been taught that the Bible is the Word of God. Would they be surprised to learn that some long-accepted church doctrines are not taught in the Bible? The following article will consider one example.



CAN YOU BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

BELIEF in the Bible remains widespread, even in this modern world. For instance, in a recent Gallup survey of Americans, 80 percent expressed belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Whether the percentage is as high in your area or not, you can understand that such believers expect to be taught the Bible in church. But often they are not. Take, for example, the doctrine of punishment of the soul after death.

Is either purgatory or a fiery hell taught anywhere in the Bible? Today, many scholars in Christendom would answer no. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "In the final analysis, the Catholic doctrine on purgatory is based on tradition, not Sacred Scripture." Regarding hell, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* comments: "In the N[ew] T[estament] we do not find hell fire to be a part of the primitive preaching."

In fact, the doctrine commission of the Church of England recently made headlines when it recommended repudiating the teaching of hellfire altogether. Dr. Tom Wright, dean of Lichfield Cathedral, states that past imagery of hell "made God into a monster and left searing psychological scars on many." The commission's report describes hell as "total non-being."* Similarly, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* notes regarding the Catholic view: "Theology today approaches the problem of hell from the angle of separation from God."

Actually, what the Bible teaches about the soul conflicts with the teachings of purgatory and hellfire. The Bible often speaks of the death of souls. "The soul that is sinning—it itself will die." (Ezekiel 18:4; compare the *King James* and Catholic *Douay* versions.)

* *National Public Radio—"Morning Edition"*

According to the Bible, the dead are unconscious, unable to feel pain. "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all." (Ecclesiastes 9:5) The hope that the Bible holds out for the dead is that of a future resurrection. When Jesus' friend Lazarus died, Jesus compared death to sleep. Lazarus' sister Martha expressed the hope taught in the Bible when she declared: "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day." By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus confirmed that hope for mankind.—John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14, 24, 44.

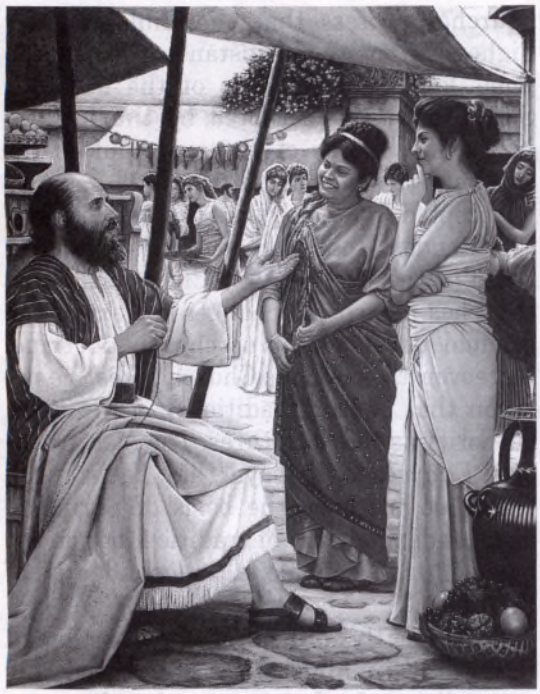
Historians point out that the teaching that man possesses a separate, immortal soul did not originate with the Bible but with Greek philosophy. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* observes that the ancient Hebrews did not think of man as being composed of a material body and an immaterial soul. It states about the Hebrews' belief: "When the breath of life entered the first man whom God formed out of the ground, he became a 'living being' (G[enesis] 2.7). Death was not regarded as a separation of two distinct elements in man, as in Greek philosophy; the breath of life departs and man is left a 'dead being' (L[eviticus] 21.11; N[umbers] 6.6; 19.13). In each case the word 'being' would be the Hebrew [*ne'phesh*], often translated 'soul' but, in fact, virtually equated with the person."

That same encyclopedia notes that Catholic scholars recently "have maintained that the N[ew] T[estament] does not teach the immortality of the soul in the Hellenistic [Greek] sense." It concludes: "The ultimate solution to the problem is to be found not so much in philosophical speculation as in the supernatural gift of the Resurrection."

The Bible or Tradition?

How, though, did non-Biblical ideas make their way into church teaching? Many churches profess that the Bible is their highest authority. For instance, not long ago Pope John Paul II spoke of the need for Scripture to be "accepted by the faithful in the full depths of its truth and as the supreme rule of our faith." It is generally accepted, however, that the teachings of Christendom today are not identical with those of the first-century Christians. Most churches regard the changes as part of the gradual development of church doctrine. Moreover, the Catholic Church takes the position that church tradition has the same authority as the Scriptures. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says that the church "holds no truth on the basis of Scripture alone, independently of tradition, nor on the basis of tradition alone, independently of Scripture."

Historically, churches have replaced Scriptural teachings with those based only on tradition. In fact, many churches now hold that the Bible's teachings are wrong. For example, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states that it is "obvious that many Biblical statements are simply not true when judged according to modern knowledge of science and history." Speaking of the Biblical teaching that the dead are unconscious, it adds: "Even in religious matters, the O[ld] T[estament] testifies to an imperfect knowledge of . . . life after death." The encyclopedia cites Psalm 6:5 (verse 6 in some Bibles) as an example of this: "In death there is no mention of you; in Sheol [or, Hades] who will laud you?" Some Protestant seminaries and colleges no longer teach that the Bible is inerrant. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, believes that it possesses the magisterium, or teaching authority, by which it interprets what is taught in the Bible. You might wonder, though, 'What if such interpretations seem to be at odds with the Scriptures?'



The apostle Paul and others preached in the marketplace

The Importance of the Scriptures

Jesus repeatedly cited the Scriptures as authoritative, often prefacing his points by saying: "It is written." (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 19:46) Indeed, when Jesus spoke about man's marital situation, he drew, not upon Greek philosophical conjecture, but upon the Genesis account of creation. (Genesis 1: 27; 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9) Clearly, Jesus considered the Scriptures to be inspired by God and factual. In prayer to God, he said: "Your word is truth."—John 17:17.*

The Bible records Jesus' censure of the religious leaders of his day: "Adroitly you set aside the commandment of God in order to retain your tradition. . . . Thus you make the word of God invalid by your tradition." (Mark 7:6-13) Similarly, the apostle Paul resisted the pressure to assimilate either Greek philosophy or erroneous traditions into his teaching. "Look out," he cautioned. "Perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey through the philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men." (Colossians 2:8; 1 Corinthians 1:22, 23; 2:1-13) There were some traditions, or teachings, that Paul urged Christians to maintain, but these were based on the Scriptures and were totally in harmony with them. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-15) "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial," Paul wrote, "that the man of God may be *fully* competent, completely equipped for every good work."—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

Paul foresaw a drift away from the Scriptures. He warned Timothy: "There will be a period of time when they will not put up with the healthful teaching, . . . and they will turn their ears away from the truth." He urged Timothy: "You, though, keep your senses in all things." (2 Timothy 4:3-5) But how? One way is to be "noble-minded." A Greek lexicon defines this Bible word as "a willingness to learn and evaluate something fairly." Luke used this expression to describe Paul's listeners in first-century Beroea. Paul's teachings were new to them, and they did not want to be misled. Commending them, Luke wrote: "The [Beroeans] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so." Being noble-minded did not make the Beroeans skeptical, disinclined to believe in anything. Rather, the result of their honest inquiry was that "many of them became believers." —Acts 17:11, 12.

* For further information on the reliability of the Bible, see the brochure *A Book for All People*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

Jehovah's Witnesses "regard the Bible as their only source of belief and rule of conduct"

Benefits of Living by the Bible

The early Christians were noted both for their adherence to the Bible and for their self-sacrificing love. Today, however, many people have "a form of godly devotion but [are] proving false to its power." (2 Timothy 3:5) Any form of Christianity today that is not faithful to the original cannot have genuine power for good in people's lives. Could this help to explain why, in the greater part of Christendom, we see increasing violence, immorality, family breakdown, and materialism? In some "Christian" lands, vicious ethnic wars are carried on even between members of the same religion.

Has the noble-minded spirit of the Beroeans died out? Is there any group of people today who believe in and live by the Bible?

The *Encyclopedia Canadiana* observes: "The work of Jehovah's Witnesses is the revival and re-establishment of the primitive Christianity practised by Jesus and his disciples during the first and second centuries of our era." Referring to the Witnesses, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* notes: "They regard the Bible as their only source of belief and rule of conduct."

No doubt this is a major reason why Jehovah's Witnesses around the world are known for their spiritual prosperity, peace, and happiness. We therefore encourage our readers to learn more about the Bible's spiritually healthful teachings. Greater knowledge can lead to even greater trust in the Bible and stronger faith in God. The eternal benefits of such faith are well worth the effort.

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JERUSALEM—"THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING"

"Do not swear . . . by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King."
—MATTHEW 5:34, 35.

JERUSALEM—its very name evokes strong feelings in people of different religions. In fact, none of us can ignore this age-old city, since it is often mentioned in the news. Sadly, though, many reports reveal that Jerusalem is not always a place of peace.

[2] This may present some Bible readers with a puzzling thought. In the past the shortened name of Jerusalem was Salem, which means "peace." (Genesis 14:18; Psalm 76:2; Hebrews 7:1, 2) You may therefore wonder, 'Why in recent decades has a city with this name had such a lack of peace?'

[3] To answer that question, we need to go far back in history and learn about the Jerusalem of ancient times. But some may think, 'We do not have time to study ancient history.' Nevertheless, accurate knowledge of Jerusalem's early history has value for all of us. The Bible indicates why in these words: "All the things that were written aforetime were written for our instruction, that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4) Bible knowledge about Jerusalem can give us comfort—yes, and hope of peace, not only in that city but throughout the earth.

1, 2. What might puzzle some regarding Jerusalem?
3. Where can we find reliable information about Jerusalem?

The Place of "Jehovah's Throne"

[4] In the 11th century B.C.E., Jerusalem became world famous as the capital of a secure and peaceful nation. Jehovah God had the young man David anointed as king

4, 5. How was David involved in helping Jerusalem play a key role in the outworking of God's purpose?

over that ancient nation—Israel. With the seat of government in Jerusalem, David and his royal descendants came to occupy "the throne of the kingship of Jehovah," or "Jehovah's throne."—1 Chronicles 28:5; 29:23.

5 The God-fearing man David—an Israelite of the tribe of Judah—captured Jerusalem from the idolatrous Jebusites. The city then occupied only a hill called Zion, but that name became synonymous with Jerusalem itself. In time, David had the ark of God's covenant with Israel moved to Jerusalem, where it was housed in a tent. Years earlier God had spoken to his prophet Moses from a cloud above that sacred Ark. (Exodus 25:1, 21, 22; Leviticus 16:2; 1 Chronicles 15:1-3) The Ark symbolized God's presence, for Jehovah was the real King of Israel. In a twofold sense, therefore, it could be said that Jehovah God ruled from the city of Jerusalem.

6 Jehovah promised David that the kingdom of his royal house, represented by Zion, or Jerusalem, would not end. This meant that a descendant of David would inherit the right to rule forever as God's Anointed One —the Messiah, or Christ.* (Psalm 132:11-14; Luke 1:31-33) The Bible also reveals that this permanent heir to "Jehovah's throne" would rule over all the nations, not just Jerusalem.—Psalm 2:6-8; Daniel 7:13, 14.

7 Attempts to unseat God's anointed one, King David, proved futile. Instead, enemy nations were subdued, and the borders of the Promised Land were extended to their God-designated extremity. David utilized this situation to promote pure worship. And many of David's psalms laud Jehovah as the real King in Zion.—2 Samuel 8:1-15; Psalm 9:1, 11; 24:1, 3, 7-10; 65:1, 2; 68:1, 24, 29; 110:1, 2; 122:1-4.

8 During the reign of David's son Solomon, the worship of Jehovah reached new heights. Solomon extended Jerusalem northward to include the hill Moriah (the area of the present-day Dome of the Rock). On this higher elevation, he was privileged to build a magnificent temple to Jehovah's praise. The ark of the covenant was placed in the Most Holy of that temple.—1 Kings 6:1-38.

9 The nation of Israel enjoyed peace as they gave their wholehearted support to Jehovah's worship, centered in Jerusalem. Beautifully describing this situation, the Scriptures state: "Judah and Israel were many, like the grains of sand that are by the sea for multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. . . . And peace itself became [Solomon's] in every region of his, all around. And Judah and Israel continued to dwell in security, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree."—1 Kings 4:20, 24, 25.

10 Archaeological findings lend support to this account of Solomon's prosperous reign. In his book *The Archaeology of the Land of Israel,* Professor Yohanan Aharoni states: "The wealth that flowed into the royal court from all directions, and the flourishing commerce . . . brought about a rapid and noticeable revolution in every aspect of material culture. . . . The change in material culture . . . is discernible not only in luxury items but also especially in ceramics. . . . The quality of the pottery and its firing improved beyond all recognition."

* The titles "Messiah" (adapted from a Hebrew word) and "Christ" (from Greek) both mean "Anointed One."

6. What promise did Jehovah make concerning David and Jerusalem?
7. How did King David promote pure worship?
8, 9. How did true worship in Jerusalem expand under the reign of King Solomon?
10, 11. How does archaeology bear out what the Bible says about Jerusalem when Solomon reigned?

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The City of David was on a southern ridge, but Solomon expanded the city northward and built the temple

[11] Similarly, Jerry M. Landay wrote: "Under Solomon, Israelite material culture advanced more in three decades than it had during the preceding two hundred years. We find in Solomonic strata the remains of monumental constructions, great cities with massive walls, the mushrooming of residential quarters with well-built clusters of the dwellings of the well-to-do, a quantum jump in the technical proficiency of the potter and his manufacturing processes. We find, too, the remains of artefacts representing goods made in far-off places, signs of vigorous international commerce and trade."—*The House of David.*

From Peace to Desolation

[12] The peace and prosperity of Jerusalem, the city where Jehovah's sanctuary was situated, were an appropriate subject for prayer. David wrote: "Ask, O you people, for the peace of Jerusalem. Those loving you, O city, will be free from care. May peace continue within your rampart, freedom from care within your dwelling towers. For the sake of my brothers and my companions I will now speak: 'May there be peace within you.'" (Psalm 122:6-8) Though Solomon was privileged to build the magnificent temple in that peaceful city, he eventually married many pagan wives. In his old age, they seduced him into promoting the worship of false gods of that day. This apostasy had a corrupting effect on the whole nation, robbing it and its inhabitants of genuine peace.—1 Kings 11:1-8; 14:21-24.

[13] Early in the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam, ten tribes rebelled and formed the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of their idol worship, God allowed that kingdom to be overthrown by Assyria. (1 Kings 12:16-30) The southern two-tribe kingdom of Judah continued to be centered in Jerusalem. But in time they too turned from pure worship, so God allowed the wayward city to be destroyed by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E. For 70 years Jewish exiles languished as captives in Babylon. Then, by God's mercy, they were allowed to return to Jerusalem and restore true worship. —2 Chronicles 36:15-21.

12, 13. How was it that true worship did not continue to be promoted in Jerusalem?

[14] After 70 years of desolation, the ruined buildings must have been overgrown with weeds. Jerusalem's wall was broken down, with large gaps where gates and supporting towers once stood. Yet, the returning Jews took heart. They built an altar on the site of the former temple and began to offer daily sacrifices to Jehovah.

[15] This was a promising start, but that restored Jerusalem would never again be the capital of a kingdom with a descendant of King David on the throne. Instead, the Jews were ruled by a governor appointed by Babylon's conquerers and had to pay taxes to their Persian masters. (Nehemiah 9:34-37) Though in a "trampled" condition, Jerusalem was still the one city in all the earth specially favored by Jehovah God. (Luke 21: 24) As the center of pure worship, it also represented God's right to exercise his sovereignty over the earth through a descendant of King David.

Opposed by False Religious Neighbors

[16] Soon the Jews who had returned from exile to Jerusalem laid the foundation of a new temple. But neighboring practicers of false religion sent a slanderous letter to Persian King Artaxerxes, claiming that the Jews would rebel. In turn, Artaxerxes banned further building in Jerusalem. You can imagine that if you had lived in the city back then, you would have wondered what the future would hold for it. As it turned out, the Jews discontinued temple construction and became engrossed in their own material pursuits.—Ezra 4:11-24; Haggai 1:2-6.

[17] Some 17 years after their return, God raised up the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to correct the thinking of his people. Moved to repentance, the Jews took up rebuilding the temple. Meanwhile, Darius had become the king of Persia. He verified King Cyrus' order that Jerusalem's temple be rebuilt. Darius sent a letter to the Jews' neighbors, warning them to 'keep their distance from Jerusalem' and to provide financial support from the king's tax so that the building work might be completed.—Ezra 6:1-13.

[18] The Jews completed the temple in the 22nd year of their return. You can appreciate that this milestone would be something to celebrate with great rejoicing. Yet, to a considerable extent, Jerusalem and its walls still lay in ruins. The city received needed attention "in the days of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest, the copyist." (Nehemiah 12:26, 27) Evidently, by the end of the fifth century B.C.E., Jerusalem was completely rebuilt as a major city of the ancient world.

The Messiah Appears!

[19] Let us, though, leap forward some centuries to an event of universal importance, the birth of Jesus Christ. Jehovah God's angel had told Jesus' virgin mother: "Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, . . . and there will be no end of his kingdom." (Luke 1:32, 33) Years later, Jesus gave his famous Sermon on the Mount. In it, he offered encouragement and counsel on many subjects. For instance, he urged his listeners to fulfill their vows to God but to be careful not to indulge in frivolous oath taking. Said Jesus: "You heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You must not swear without

14, 15. How did Jerusalem regain a key role after the Babylonian exile, but with what change?
16. Why did the Jews who returned from Babylon leave off their restoring of Jerusalem?
17, 18. By what means did Jehovah see to it that Jerusalem was rebuilt?

19. How did the Messiah acknowledge the unique status of Jerusalem?

performing, but you must pay your vows to Jehovah.' However, I say to you: Do not swear at all, neither by heaven, because it is God's throne; nor by earth, because it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the great King." (Matthew 5:33-35) It is noteworthy that Jesus acknowledged Jerusalem's unique status—one that it had enjoyed for centuries. Yes, it was "the city of the great King," Jehovah God.

[20] Near the end of his earthly life, Jesus presented himself to Jerusalem's residents as their duly anointed King. In response to that thrilling event, many joyfully cried out: "Blessed is he that comes in Jehovah's name! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"—Mark 11:1-10; John 12:12-15.

[21] In less than a week, however, the crowds allowed Jerusalem's religious leaders to turn them against Jesus. He warned that the city of Jerusalem and the entire nation would lose their favored status before God. (Matthew 21:23, 33-45; 22:1-7) For instance, Jesus declared: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the killer of the prophets and stoner of those sent forth to her,—how often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks together under her wings! But you people did not want it. Look! Your house is abandoned to you." (Matthew 23:37, 38) At the time of the Passover in 33 C.E., Jesus' opposers had him unjustly executed outside Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jehovah resurrected his Anointed One and glorified him with immortal spirit life in heavenly Zion, an accomplishment all of us can benefit from. —Acts 2:32-36.

20, 21. What dramatic change occurred in the attitude of many living in Jerusalem?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ How did Jerusalem come to be the place of "Jehovah's throne"?
- ☐ What significant role did Solomon have in advancing true worship?
- ☐ How do we know that Jerusalem ceased to be the center of Jehovah's worship?
- ☐ Why are we interested in learning more about Jerusalem?

[22] From that time on, most unfulfilled prophecies about Zion, or Jerusalem, can be understood as applying to heavenly arrangements or to Jesus' anointed followers. (Psalm 2:6-8; 110:1-4; Isaiah 2:2-4; 65:17, 18; Zechariah 12:3; 14:12, 16, 17) A number of references to "Jerusalem" or "Zion" written after Jesus' death clearly have a figurative sense and do not apply to the literal city or location. (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 3:12; 14:1; 21:2, 10) Final proof that Jerusalem was no longer "the city of the great King" came in 70 C.E. when Roman armies desolated it, as prophesied by Daniel and Jesus Christ. (Daniel 9:26; Luke 19:41-44) Neither Bible writers nor Jesus himself foretold a later restoration of earthly Jerusalem to the special favor of Jehovah God that it had once enjoyed.—Galatians 4:25; Hebrews 13:14.

Foregleams of Lasting Peace

[23] Having reviewed earthly Jerusalem's early history, one cannot deny that the city lived up to the meaning of its name —"Possession [or, Foundation] of Twofold Peace"—during King Solomon's peaceful reign. Yet, that was but a foregleam of the

22. After Jesus' death, what application have many references to Jerusalem had?
23. Why should we still be interested in Jerusalem?

peace and prosperity soon to be enjoyed by lovers of God who will live on an earth transformed into a paradise.—Luke 23:43.

[24] The 72nd Psalm reflects the conditions that prevailed during King Solomon's reign. But that beautiful song is prophetic of blessings for mankind under the heavenly rule of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Of him, the psalmist sang: "In his days the righteous one will sprout, and the abundance of peace until the moon is no more. . . . He will deliver the poor one crying for help, also the afflicted one and whoever has no helper. He will feel sorry for the lowly one and the poor one, and the souls of the poor ones he will save. From oppression and from violence he will redeem their soul, and their blood will be precious in his eyes. There will come to be plenty of grain on the earth; on the top of the mountains there will be an overflow." —Psalm 72:7, 8, 12-14, 16.

24. What can we learn from conditions that prevailed when Solomon reigned?

[25] What comfort and hope those words provide for lovers of God in Jerusalem or anywhere else on earth! You can be among those who will enjoy earth-wide peace under the Messianic Kingdom of God. Knowledge of Jerusalem's past can help us to understand God's purpose for mankind. The following articles will focus on events that took place in the seventh and eighth decades after the Jews returned from Babylonian exile. This offers comfort to all desiring to render acceptable worship to Jehovah God, the Great King.

25. Why should we want to learn more about Jerusalem?

JERUSALEM—IS IT 'ABOVE YOUR CHIEF CAUSE FOR REJOICING'?

"Let my tongue stick to my palate . . . if I were not to make Jerusalem ascend above my chief cause for rejoicing."—PSALM 137:6.

NEARLY seven decades had passed since the first Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. God's temple had been rebuilt, but the city still lay in ruins. Meanwhile, a new generation had grown up in exile. No doubt many of them felt like the psalmist who sang: "If I should forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgetful." (Psalm 137:5) Some did more than simply remember Jerusalem; they proved by their actions that it had ascended "above [their] chief cause for rejoicing."—Psalm 137:6.

1. What attitude did many Jewish exiles have toward God's chosen city?

[2] For example, consider the priest Ezra. Even before he returned to his homeland,

2. Who was Ezra, and how was he blessed?

he had zealously worked for the interests of pure worship in Jerusalem. (Ezra 7:6, 10) Ezra was richly blessed for that. Jehovah God moved the heart of the Persian king to grant Ezra the privilege of leading a second company of returning exiles to Jerusalem. Furthermore, the king gave them a large contribution of gold and silver "to beautify the house of Jehovah."—Ezra 7:21-27.

3 Some 12 years later, there was another Jew who took decisive action—Nehemiah. He served in the Persian palace at Shushan. He had a prestigious position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, but that was not Nehemiah's "chief cause for rejoicing." Instead, he longed to go and rebuild Jerusalem. For months Nehemiah prayed about this, and Jehovah God blessed him for doing so. On learning of Nehemiah's concern, the Persian king provided him with a military force and with letters authorizing him to rebuild Jerusalem.—Nehemiah 1:1–2:9.

4 Without a doubt, Ezra, Nehemiah, and many Jews cooperating with them proved that Jehovah's worship, centered in Jerusalem, was more important than anything else—that it was 'above their chief cause for rejoicing,' that is, above any other thing over which they might rejoice. What an encouragement such individuals are for all today who view Jehovah, his worship, and his spirit-directed organization in the same way! Is that true of you? Do you show by your endurance in godly works that your greatest cause for rejoicing is the privilege of worshiping Jehovah with his dedicated people? (2 Peter 3:11) As a further encouragement to that end, let us consider the fine results of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem.

3. How did Nehemiah prove that Jerusalem was his chief concern?

4. How can we show that the worship of Jehovah is above any other cause for rejoicing that we may have?

Blessings and Responsibilities

5 The group of about 6,000 exiles returning with Ezra brought contributions of gold and silver for Jehovah's temple. These amounted to some 35 million dollars at current rates. This was about seven times more gold and silver than the first exiles had managed to bring. How thankful to Jehovah the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah must have been to receive all this human and material support! But rich blessings from God also bring responsibility.—Luke 12:48.

6 Ezra soon discovered that many Jews, including some priests and elders, had overstepped God's Law by marrying pagan wives. (Deuteronomy 7:3, 4) Rightly, he was very distressed over this violation of God's Law covenant. "As soon as I heard of this thing I ripped apart my garment and my sleeveless coat, . . . and I kept sitting stunned." (Ezra 9:3) Then, with anxious Israelites present, Ezra poured out his heart in prayer to Jehovah. In the hearing of all, Ezra reviewed Israel's past disobedience and God's warning of what would happen if they married the pagan inhabitants of the land. He concluded: "O Jehovah the God of Israel, you are righteous, because we have been left over as an escaped people as at this day. Here we are before you in our guiltiness, for it is impossible to stand before you on account of this."—Ezra 9:14, 15.

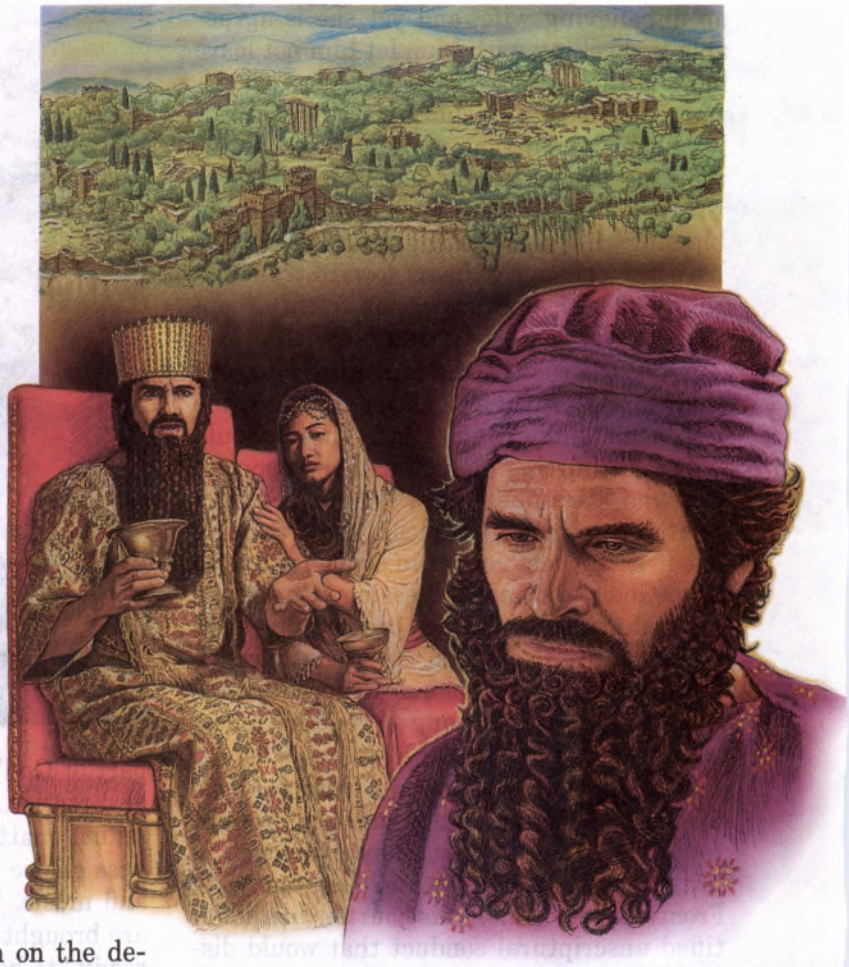
7 Ezra used the expression "we." Yes, he included himself, though he was not personally guilty. Ezra's deep distress along with his humble prayer touched the hearts of the people and motivated them to works befit-

5. What rich blessings came to the inhabitants of Judah in the days of Ezra?

6. What did Ezra discover in his homeland, and how did he react?

7. (a) What fine example did Ezra set in dealing with wrongdoing? (b) How did guilty ones react in Ezra's day?

Jerusalem, not his prestigious job at Shushan, was of chief concern to Nehemiah



ting repentance. They volunteered a painful remedy—all who had violated God's Law would send the foreign wives back to their homelands, along with children born to them. Ezra agreed to this measure and encouraged the guilty ones to comply. With the authority invested in him by the Persian king, Ezra had the right to execute all lawbreakers or to banish them from Jerusalem and Judah. (Ezra 7:12, 26) But it appears that he did not have to take such action. "All the congregation" said: "Exactly according to your word it devolves upon us to do." Furthermore, they confessed: "We have rebelled to a great extent in this matter." (Ezra 10:11-13) Ezra chapter 10 lists the names of 111 men who followed through on the decision by sending away their foreign wives and the children born to them.

[8] This action was in the interests not only of Israel but also of all mankind. If nothing had been done to correct matters, the Israelites could have been assimilated into the surrounding nations. In that case, the line of descent to the Promised Seed for blessing all mankind would have been contaminated. (Genesis 3:15; 22:18) It would have been difficult to establish the identity of the Promised Seed as a descendant of King David of the tribe of Judah. Some 12 years later, this vital matter was again given attention when "the seed of Israel proceeded to separate themselves from all the foreigners."—Nehemiah 9:1, 2; 10:29, 30.

[9] What can Jehovah's present-day servants learn from this account? Well, Christians are not under the Law covenant. (2 Corinthians 3:14) Instead, they obey "the law of the Christ." (Galatians 6:2) Thus, a Christian married to an unbeliever complies with Paul's counsel: "If any brother has

8. Why was the drastic action of sending away foreign wives in the interests of all mankind?

9. What good counsel does the Bible give to Christians who are married to unbelievers?

an unbelieving wife, and yet she is agreeable to dwelling with him, let him not leave her." (1 Corinthians 7:12) Moreover, Christians married to unbelievers are Scripturally obliged to work at making a success of their marriage. (1 Peter 3:1, 2) Obedience to this fine counsel has often resulted in the blessing that unbelieving marriage mates have had a change of heart toward true worship. Some have even become faithful baptized Christians.—1 Corinthians 7:16.

[10] Yet, the case of the Israelites who sent their foreign wives away does provide a fine lesson for single Christians. These should not start courting members of the opposite sex who are unbelievers. Avoiding such a relationship may be difficult, even painful, but it is the best course in order for one to have God's continued blessing. Christians are commanded: "Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers." (2 Corinthians 6:14) Any single Christian desiring marriage should plan on marrying a genuine fellow believer.—1 Corinthians 7:39.

[11] In many other ways too, Christians have made adjustments when it has been brought to their attention that they are heading in an unscriptural direction. (Galatians 6:1) From time to time, this journal has identified unscriptural conduct that would disqualify a person from remaining a part of God's organization. In 1973, for example, Jehovah's people came to understand fully that drug abuse and the use of tobacco are serious sins. To pursue a godly course, we must "cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit." (2 Corinthians 7:1) Quite a number took such Bible counsel to heart; they were willing to suffer initial withdrawal symptoms in order to remain

10. What lesson can Christians learn from the 111 Israelite men who sent their foreign wives away?

11. Like the Israelite men, how may we be tested as to our cause for rejoicing?

part of God's clean people. Clear Scriptural direction has also been given regarding sexual matters, dress, grooming, and the wise choice of employment, entertainment, and music. Whatever Scriptural principles are brought to our attention, may we prove ready "to be readjusted," like the 111 Israelite men. (2 Corinthians 13:11) This will show that the privilege of worshiping Jehovah in association with his holy people 'ascends above our chief cause for rejoicing.'

[12] After reporting the episode involving the foreign wives, the Bible does not tell us what happened in Jerusalem for the next 12 years. No doubt, Israel's neighbors became more hostile because of the cancellation of many marriage alliances. In 455 B.C.E., Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem with a military escort. He had been appointed gover-

12. What happened in 455 B.C.E.?

Like Nehemiah, we need to pray for Jehovah's guidance and for strength to continue in our all-important preaching assignment

nor of Judah and had brought letters from the Persian king authorizing him to rebuild the city.—Nehemiah 2:9, 10; 5:14.

Opposition From Envious Neighbors

13 False religious neighbors opposed the purpose for Nehemiah's coming. Their leaders threatened him by asking: "Is it against the king that you are rebelling?" Showing faith in Jehovah, Nehemiah replied: "The God of the heavens is the One that will grant us success, and we ourselves, his servants, shall get up, and we must build; but you yourselves have no share, nor just claim, nor memorial in Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 2:19, 20) When repairs to the wall began, the same enemies mocked: 'What are the feeble Jews doing? Will they bring the stones to life out of the heaps of dusty rubbish?

13. What attitude did the Jews' false religious neighbors display, and how did Nehemiah react?

If a fox went up against it, he would certainly break down their wall of stones.' Instead of replying to these remarks, Nehemiah prayed: "Hear, O our God, for we have become an object of contempt; and make their reproach return upon their own head." (Nehemiah 4:2-4) Continuously, Nehemiah set this fine example of reliance on Jehovah! —Nehemiah 6:14; 13:14.

14 To fulfill their important preaching assignment, Jehovah's Witnesses today also rely on God. Opposers try to hinder this work by mocking. Sometimes, individuals interested in the Kingdom message give up because they cannot endure the ridicule. If ridicule fails, opposers may get angry and resort to threats of violence. This is what the builders of Jerusalem's walls experienced. But Nehemiah refused to be intimidated. Instead, he armed the builders against enemy attack and strengthened their faith by saying: "Do not be afraid on their account. Jehovah the great and the fear-inspiring One keep in your mind; and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." —Nehemiah 4:13, 14.

15 As in the days of Nehemiah, Jehovah's Witnesses have been well equipped to continue their spiritual building work in spite of fierce opposition. "The faithful and discreet slave" has provided faith-strengthening spiritual food, which enables God's people to be productive even where the work is banned. (Matthew 24:45) As a result, Jehovah has continued to bless his

14, 15. (a) How did Nehemiah handle the threat of enemy violence? (b) How have Jehovah's Witnesses been able to continue with their spiritual building work despite fierce opposition?

people with increase throughout the earth. —Isaiah 60:22.

Internal Problems

16 As the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall progressed and the wall got higher, the work became more difficult. That was when a problem came to light that threatened the spirit of the struggling builders. Because of food shortages, some Jews were finding it hard to provide food for their families and to pay their taxes to the Persian government. Wealthier Jews lent them food and money. Contrary to God's Law, however, the poorer Israelites had to pledge their lands and children as security that they would pay back the money with interest. (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37; Nehemiah 4:6, 10; 5:1-5) Now the creditors were threatening to take over their lands and force them to sell their children as slaves. Nehemiah was incensed at this unloving, materialistic attitude. He acted quickly to ensure Jehovah's continued blessing on the work of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall.

17 "A great assembly" was arranged, and Nehemiah clearly showed the wealthier Israelites that what they had done displeased Jehovah. Then he appealed to the guilty ones, including some of the priests, to return all the interest they had taken and to return the lands they had illegally taken from those who could not afford to pay interest. Commendably, the guilty ones said: "We shall make restoration, and from them we shall ask nothing back. We shall do precisely as you are saying." These were not idle words, for the Bible reports that "the people proceeded to do according to [Nehemiah's] word." And all the congregation praised Jehovah.—Nehemiah 5:7-13.

18 What about our day? Rather than be exploitative, Jehovah's Witnesses are widely known for their generous attitude toward fellow believers and others who have been struck by adversity. As in Nehemiah's day, this has resulted in many grateful expressions of praise to Jehovah. At the same time, however, "the faithful and discreet slave" has found it necessary to give Scriptural counsel on business matters and on the need to avoid the greedy exploitation of others. In certain countries it is common to ask for an exorbitant bride-price, but the Bible plainly warns that greedy persons and extortioners will not inherit God's Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) The good response of most Christians to such counsel is reminiscent of how those Jews saw the sinfulness of exploiting their poorer brothers.

Jerusalem's Wall Completed

19 Despite all the opposition, Jerusalem's wall was completed in 52 days. What effect did this have on the opposers? Nehemiah said: "As soon as all our enemies heard of it and all the nations that were around us got

16. What internal problems threatened the spirit of the builders of Jerusalem's wall?
17. What did Nehemiah do to ensure Jehovah's continued blessing on the building work, and with what outcome?

18. For what attitude have Jehovah's Witnesses become known?
19, 20. (a) What effect did the completion of Jerusalem's wall have on religious opposers? (b) What victory have Jehovah's Witnesses experienced in many lands?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ How did Ezra and others rejoice over Jerusalem?
- ☐ What errors did Ezra and Nehemiah help many Jews correct?
- ☐ What lessons can you take from the accounts involving Ezra and Nehemiah?

to see it, they at once fell very much in their own eyes, and they got to know that it was from our God that this work had been done." —Nehemiah 6:16.

[20] Today, enemy opposition to God's work continues in various ways and places. However, millions of people have seen the futility of opposing Jehovah's Witnesses. For instance, consider past attempts to bring an end to the preaching work in Nazi Germany, Eastern Europe, and many countries of Africa. All such attempts have failed, and many people now acknowledge that 'it is from God that our work is being done.' What a reward this has been to faithful old-timers who made Jehovah's worship 'ascend above their chief cause for rejoicing' in such lands!

[21] In the next article, we will review important events that led up to the joyful inauguration of Jerusalem's rebuilt wall. We will also consider how the completion of a far grander city for the benefit of all mankind draws near.

21. What significant events will be considered in the next article?

A JERUSALEM TRUE TO ITS NAME

"Be joyful forever in what I am creating. For here I am creating Jerusalem a cause for joyfulness."—ISAIAH 65:18.

AS A keen student of God's Word, the Jewish priest Ezra cherished the connection that Jerusalem once had with Jehovah's pure worship. (Deuteronomy 12:5; Ezra 7:27) His love for God's city is revealed in the portion of the Bible that he was inspired to write—First and Second Chronicles and Ezra. In these historical records, the name Jerusalem is found nearly a quarter of the over 800 times it appears in the entire Bible.

[2] In Biblical Hebrew, "Jerusalem" can be understood as being in a form of the Hebrew language called the dual. The dual is most often used for objects that come in pairs, such as eyes, ears, hands, and feet. In this dual form, the name Jerusalem can be viewed as prophetic of a peace that God's people would experience in a twofold sense —spiritually and physically. The Scriptures do not reveal whether Ezra fully understood this. As a priest, though, he did his best to help the Jews to enjoy peace with God. And he certainly worked hard so that Jerusalem would live up to the meaning of its name, that is, "Possession [or, Foundation] of Twofold Peace."—Ezra 7:6.

[3] The Bible does not state where Ezra

1. How did Ezra feel about God's chosen city?
2. What prophetic meaning can we see in the significance of the name Jerusalem?

3. How many years pass before we are again introduced to the activities of Ezra, and in what circumstances do we find him?

was during the 12 years that intervened between his visit to Jerusalem and Nehemiah's arrival in the city. The poor spiritual condition of the nation during that time suggests that Ezra was absent. Yet, we find Ezra serving again as a faithful priest in Jerusalem just after the city's wall had been rebuilt.

A Wonderful Assembly Day

[4] The wall of Jerusalem was finished just in time for the important festival month of Tishri, the seventh month on Israel's religious calendar. The first day of Tishri was a special new moon feast called Festival of Trumpet Blast. On that day, priests blew on trumpets while sacrifices were offered to Jehovah. (Numbers 10:10; 29:1) This day prepared the Israelites for the annual Day of Atonement on the 10th of Tishri and the joyful Festival of Ingathering from the 15th to the 21st of the same month.

[5] On "the first day of the seventh month," "all the people" gathered, likely being encouraged to do so by Nehemiah and Ezra. Men, women, and "all intelligent enough to listen" were included. Thus, young children were present and were attentive while Ezra stood on a podium and read the Law "from daybreak till midday." (Nehemiah 8:1-4) At regular intervals, the Levites helped the people to understand what was being read. This moved the Israelites to tears as they realized how far short they and their forefathers had fallen from obedience to God's Law.—Nehemiah 8:5-9.

[6] But this was not the time for mournful weeping. It was a festival, and the people had just completed the work of rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. Nehemiah therefore helped them to get into the right frame of mind by saying: "Go, eat the fatty things and drink the sweet things, and send portions to the one for whom nothing has been prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord, and do not feel hurt, for the joy of Jehovah is your stronghold." Obediently, "all the people went away to eat and drink and to send out portions and to carry on a great rejoicing, for they had understood the words that had been made known to them."—Nehemiah 8:10-12.

[7] God's people today can learn much from this account. Those privileged to have parts at meetings and assemblies should keep the foregoing in mind. In addition to providing corrective counsel that is sometimes necessary, such occasions highlight the benefits and blessings that come from meeting God's requirements. Commendation is given for fine works performed and encouragement to endure is provided. God's people should go away from such gatherings with joy of heart because of the upbuilding instruction they have received from God's Word.—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

Another Joyful Gathering

[8] On the second day of that special month,

4. What was significant about the first day of Israel's seventh month?
5. (a) How did Ezra and Nehemiah make good use of "the first day of the seventh month"? (b) Why did the Israelites weep?

6, 7. What can Christians learn from what Nehemiah did to stop the Jews from weeping?
8, 9. What special meeting took place on the second day of the seventh month, resulting in what for God's people?

In Our Next Issue

How to Solve Problems Peacefully

Will Your Work Withstand the Fire?

"God Loves a Cheerful Giver"

"the heads of the fathers of all the people, the priests and the Levites, gathered themselves together to Ezra the copyist, even to gain insight into the words of the law." (Nehemiah 8:13) Ezra was well qualified to conduct this meeting, since he "had prepared his heart to consult the law of Jehovah and to do it and to teach in Israel regulation and justice." (Ezra 7:10) No doubt, this meeting highlighted areas where God's people needed to conform more closely to the Law covenant. Of immediate concern was the need to make proper preparations to celebrate the upcoming Festival of Booths.

9 This week-long festival was held in the correct way, with all the people dwelling in temporary shelters made from the branches and leaves of various trees. The people erected these booths on their flat roofs, in their courtyards, in the temple courtyards, and in the public squares of Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 8:15, 16) What a fine opportunity this was to congregate the people and read to them from God's Law! (Compare Deuteronomy 31:10-13.) This was done each day, "from the first day until the last day" of the festival, resulting in "very great rejoicing" on the part of God's people.—Nehemiah 8:17, 18.

We Should Not Neglect God's House

10 There is a proper time and place to correct serious deficiencies among God's people. Apparently realizing that this was such a time, Ezra and Nehemiah arranged for a day of fasting on the 24th of the month of Tishri. Again God's Law was read, and the people made confession of their sins. Then the Levites reviewed God's merciful dealings with his wayward people, made beautiful expressions of praise to Jehovah, and contracted "a trustworthy arrangement" attested by the seal of their princes, Levites, and priests.—Nehemiah 9:1-38.

11 The people in general took an oath to carry out the written "trustworthy arrangement." They would "walk in the law of the true God." And they agreed not to enter into marriage alliances with "the peoples of the land." (Nehemiah 10:28-30) Moreover, the Jews bound themselves to observe the Sabbath, to make an annual financial contribution in support of true worship, to supply wood for the altar of sacrifice, to give the firstborn of their flocks and herds for sacrifices, and to bring the firstfruits of their land to the dining halls of the temple. Clearly, they were determined 'not to neglect the house of their God.'—Nehemiah 10:32-39.

12 Today, Jehovah's people must be careful not to neglect their privilege of 'rendering sacred service' in the courtyards of Jehovah's great spiritual temple. (Revelation 7:15) This involves regular heartfelt prayers for the advancement of Jehovah's worship. Living in harmony with such prayers requires preparation for Christian meetings and participation in them, sharing in arrangements to preach the good news, and helping interested ones by returning and, if possible, conducting Bible studies with them. Many who do not want to neglect God's house make financial contributions toward the preaching work and the maintenance of places of true worship. We may also be able to give our support to the building of urgently needed meeting places as well as to keep them clean and tidy. An

10. Why was a special gathering arranged on the 24th day of the seventh month?

11. To what "trustworthy arrangement" did the Jews bind themselves?

12. What is involved in not neglecting God's house today?

important way to show love for God's spiritual house is to work for the peace of fellow believers and to assist any who are in need of material or spiritual help.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; Hebrews 13:15, 16.

A Joyful Inauguration

13 The "trustworthy arrangement" sealed in Nehemiah's day prepared God's ancient people for the day of the inauguration of Jerusalem's wall. But another urgent matter still needed attention. Now enclosed by a large wall with 12 gates, Jerusalem needed a larger population. Though some Israelites lived there, "the city was wide and great, and there were few people inside it." (Nehemiah 7:4) To solve this problem, the people "cast lots to bring in one out of every ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city." The willing response to this arrangement moved the people to bless "all the men who volunteered to dwell in Jerusalem." (Nehemiah 11:1, 2) What a fine example for true worshipers today whose circumstances allow them to move to where there is a greater need for mature Christian help!

14 Important preparations soon began for the great day of the inauguration of Jerusalem's wall. Musicians and singers were gathered from the surrounding cities of Judah. These were formed into two large thanksgiving choirs, each to be followed by a procession. (Nehemiah 12:27-31, 36, 38) The choirs and processions started from a point on the wall farthest from the temple, probably from the Valley Gate, and marched in opposite directions until they met at God's house. "They proceeded to sacrifice on that day great sacrifices and to rejoice, for the true God himself caused them to rejoice with great joy. And also the women and the children themselves rejoiced, so that the rejoicing of Jerusalem could be heard far away."—Nehemiah 12:43.

15 The Bible does not give the date of this joyful celebration. Undoubtedly, it was a highlight, if not the climax, of Jerusalem's restoration. Of course, much building work needed to be done inside the city. In time, Jerusalem's citizens lost their fine spiritual standing. For example, when Nehemiah visited the city for a second time, he found that God's house was again being neglected and that the Israelites were again marrying pagan women. (Nehemiah 13:6-11, 15, 23) These same bad conditions are confirmed in the writings of the prophet Malachi. (Malachi 1:6-8; 2:11; 3:8) So the dedication of Jerusalem's wall was not a cause for permanent joy.

A Cause for Everlasting Joy

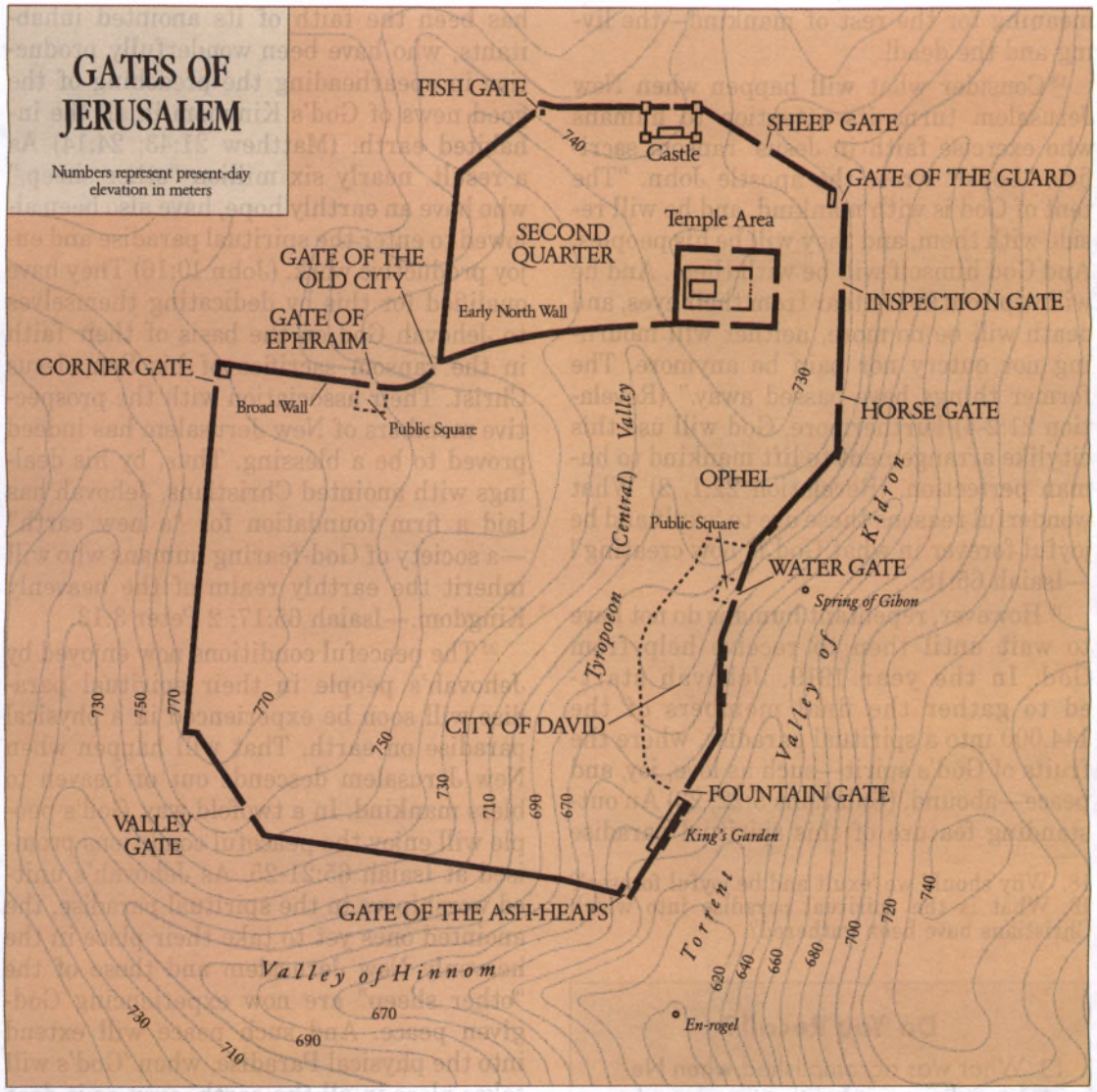
16 Today, Jehovah's people long for the time when God will triumph over all his enemies. This will start with the destruction of "Babylon the Great"—a figurative city that embraces all forms of false religion. (Revelation 18:2, 8) The destruction of false religion will mark the first phase of the coming great tribulation. (Matthew 24:21, 22) Ahead of us too is a truly momentous event—the heavenly marriage of the Lord Jesus Christ to his bride of 144,000 citizens of "New Jerusalem." (Revelation 19:7; 21:2) We cannot say exactly when that climactic union will be completed, but it certainly will be a joyous event.—See *The Watchtower,* August 15, 1990, pages 30-1.

13. What urgent matter required attention before Jerusalem's wall could be inaugurated, and what fine example did many set?

14. What happened on the day of the inauguration of Jerusalem's wall?

15. Why was the dedication of Jerusalem's wall not a cause for permanent joy?

16. What climactic events are God's people looking forward to?



Likely extent of Jerusalem's wall at the time of the city's destruction and when Nehemiah took the lead in the rebuilding of the wall

17 We do know that the completion of New Jerusalem is very near. (Matthew 24:3, 7-14; Revelation 12:12) Unlike the earthly city of Jerusalem, it will never be a cause for disappointment. This is because all its citizens are spirit-anointed, tested, and refined followers of Jesus Christ. Upon their faithfulness to death, each one will have proved to be everlastingly loyal to the Universal Sovereign, Jehovah God. That has significant

17. What do we know about the completion of New Jerusalem?

meaning for the rest of mankind—the living and the dead!

[18] Consider what will happen when New Jerusalem turns its attention to humans who exercise faith in Jesus' ransom sacrifice. "Look!" wrote the apostle John. "The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:2-4) Furthermore, God will use this citylike arrangement to lift mankind to human perfection. (Revelation 22:1, 2) What wonderful reasons these are to 'exult and be joyful forever in what God is now creating'! —Isaiah 65:18.

[19] However, repentant humans do not have to wait until then to receive help from God. In the year 1919, Jehovah started to gather the final members of the 144,000 into a spiritual paradise, where the fruits of God's spirit—such as love, joy, and peace—abound. (Galatians 5:22, 23) An outstanding feature of this spiritual paradise has been the faith of its anointed inhabitants, who have been wonderfully productive in spearheading the preaching of the good news of God's Kingdom in all the inhabited earth. (Matthew 21:43; 24:14) As a result, nearly six million "other sheep," who have an earthly hope, have also been allowed to enter the spiritual paradise and enjoy productive work. (John 10:16) They have qualified for this by dedicating themselves to Jehovah God on the basis of their faith in the ransom sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. Their association with the prospective members of New Jerusalem has indeed proved to be a blessing. Thus, by his dealings with anointed Christians, Jehovah has laid a firm foundation for "a new earth" —a society of God-fearing humans who will inherit the earthly realm of the heavenly Kingdom.—Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13.

[20] The peaceful conditions now enjoyed by Jehovah's people in their spiritual paradise will soon be experienced in a physical paradise on earth. That will happen when New Jerusalem descends out of heaven to bless mankind. In a twofold way, God's people will enjoy the peaceful conditions promised at Isaiah 65:21-25. As Jehovah's united worshipers in the spiritual paradise, the anointed ones yet to take their place in the heavenly New Jerusalem and those of the "other sheep" are now experiencing God-given peace. And such peace will extend into the physical Paradise, when 'God's will takes place in all the earth, even as it does in heaven.' (Matthew 6:10) Yes, God's glorious heavenly city will prove true to the name Jerusalem as the solid 'Foundation of Twofold Peace.' For all eternity, it will stand as a praiseworthy credit to its Grand Creator, Jehovah God, and to its Bridegroom King, Jesus Christ.

18. Why should we 'exult and be joyful forever'?
19. What is the spiritual paradise into which Christians have been gathered?

20. How will New Jerusalem live up to the meaning of its name?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What was accomplished when Nehemiah assembled the people in Jerusalem?
- ☐ What did ancient Jews have to do so as not to neglect the house of God, and what are we called upon to do?
- ☐ How is "Jerusalem" involved in bringing about lasting joy and peace?

When Hearts of Stone Turn Responsive

IN 1989, JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN POLAND were granted legal recognition as a religious organization. Witnesses who had been incarcerated for their Christian neutrality were gradually released, leaving behind in prison many inmates who longed to learn more about the Bible from them. Here is an account of how at one such prison, Jehovah's Witnesses endeavor to help those who once had hearts of stone to respond to the power of God's Word.

IN WOŁÓW, a town of 12,000 in southwestern Poland, is a 200-year-old penitentiary where some of Poland's worst criminals are kept. Since the official recognition of their work, Jehovah's Witnesses have endeavored to bring the Kingdom good news to the inmates there, and they do so with great enthusiasm.

What paved the way was a letter issued by the Ministry of Justice in February 1990 to all prison directors in Poland. The letter advised that they should "cause no difficulties" for any inmates who wanted to receive Watch Tower publications or to meet with Jehovah's Witnesses. The Witnesses, some having spent long years in Wołów prison, knew well the many hardened convicts there. However, they looked to Jehovah to bless their efforts to let Bible truth soften the stony hearts of other inmates.

Getting the Work Started

"It was difficult to get the program started," says Brother Czesław from the city of Wrocław, about 25 miles away, who has been authorized to visit the prison in Wołów. "It took many long discussions with prison officials for them to be convinced that our 'religious services' are beneficial for the prisoners."

To complicate matters, recalls Czesław's partner Paweł, "a high-ranking officer insisted that the convicts were merely using the religious services as a pretext for material gains." But when three once dangerous criminals presented themselves for baptism in 1991, the prison authorities changed their attitude, and cooperation improved.

"We started by witnessing to the convicts, to their families who came to visit them in prison, as well as to the penitentiary personnel," explains Czesław. "Then we were allowed to preach the good news from ward to ward, a most unusual exception. Finally, when we found the first interested ones, we were given access to a small hall in which to conduct Bible studies and hold Christian

meetings." Yes, Jehovah opened the way to the stony hearts of prisoners.

Effective Educational Program

That little hall soon proved to be too small. Since both the baptized prisoners and the brothers coming from outside shared in the preaching work, as many as 50 convicts started to attend the meetings. "For over three years, we held all the meetings there, and the prisoners attended the weekly meetings regularly," explains one of the local elders. So in May 1995 they were given the use of a larger hall.

How do the responsible brothers determine who can come to the meetings held in the prison? "We have a list of prisoners showing sincere interest in the truth," explain Brothers Czesław and Zdzisław. "If a convict does not make progress or misses meetings without good reason, thus indicating a lack of appreciation for such provisions, we scratch his name from the list and inform the prison director."

During their Bible studies, the brothers also teach the prisoners how to prepare well for the meetings and how to use our literature effectively. Thus, when inmates come to the meetings, they are well prepared and they participate freely. They give upbuilding comments, use their Bibles skillfully, and apply the counsel to themselves, often including in their comments observations like, 'I see I must do this or that.'

"In all, 20 Bible studies are conducted in Wołów prison. Eight of them are conducted by three prisoner publishers," says the secretary of the congregation. They have had good results also while preaching from ward to ward and during their walks in the prison compound. For example, in ten months, from September 1993 to June 1994, they distributed 235 books, almost 300 brochures, and 1,700 magazines. Recently, two of the prison officials asked for Bible studies.

Special Assemblies Bring Joy

In time, another element was added to the educational program in that prison, namely, special assemblies. Traveling overseers and other qualified brothers would present in the prison gym the principal parts of circuit assembly and one-day special assembly programs. The first special assembly was held in October 1993. Fifty inmates attended, and "entire families, including women and little children, have come from Wrocław," reported the newspaper *Słowo Polskie,* for a total attendance of 139. The intermission in the assembly program afforded opportunity for a meal prepared by the sisters, as well as time for fine Christian association.

Seven other special assemblies have been held since then, and the benefits have reached not only those in the prison but also those on the outside. When a Witness sister called on a former Wołów prisoner now

"BIG CHILD" PROBLEM

"After being in prison for some time, an inmate often loses sense of what it means to live in freedom, or on one's own," the Witnesses working in Wołów penitentiary observe. "What we have is essentially a 'big child' problem, a person who on being released from prison does not know how to care for himself. That is why the role of the congregation goes beyond just teaching him Bible truth. We have to prepare him to become a part of the community, warning him of new dangers and temptations that he might face. Though being careful not to be overly protective, we must help him to make a new start in life."

living in town, he was rather negative at first. But when he was told that a certain prisoner had become a Witness, the man burst out in disbelief: "That murderer is now a Witness?" As a result, the man accepted a Bible study.

Marvelous Transformation Effected

Has this large-scale educational program really softened the stony hearts of prisoners? Let them tell their stories.

"I have never known my parents because they abandoned me when I was small, and I came to miss most painfully the feeling of being loved," confesses Zdzisław, a man reflective by nature. "Early in my life, I got involved in crime, eventually committing a murder. The feeling of guilt pushed me to consider committing suicide, and I was desperately looking for a real hope. Then, in 1987, I came across the *Watchtower* magazine. From it I learned of the hope of the resurrection and of everlasting life. Realizing that not everything had been lost, I put away the idea of suicide and began to study the Bible. Now I have learned the meaning of love from Jehovah and from the brothers." Since 1993, this former murderer has been a ministerial servant and an auxiliary pioneer, and last year he became a regular pioneer.

Tomasz, on the other hand, readily accepted a Bible study. "That, however, was not a sincere step," he confesses. "I was studying only because I liked to show off when explaining the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses to others. But I was not doing much about Bible truth. One day, I made up my mind and went to a Christian meeting. The baptized prisoners gave me a warm welcome. I realized that instead of trying to show off with knowledge, I had to soften my stony heart and transform my mind." Tomasz began to put on the new Christian personality. (Ephesians 4:22-24) Today, he is a dedicated, baptized Witness and finds delight in preaching from ward to ward.

Pressures From Former Friends

Those who learned Bible truth in prison came under heavy pressures from former friends in the ward and from prison officials. One of them recalls: "I was constantly being derided and scoffed at. But I kept in mind the encouraging words of the brothers. 'Keep praying to Jehovah,' they told me. 'Read your Bible and you will feel the inner peace.' That really helped."

"My fellow prisoners were unsparing in the bitter remarks that they directed against me," says Ryszard, a robust baptized brother. "'You can go to your meetings, but do not try to stand out and pretend you are better, OK?' they would warn me. When I made changes in my life because of applying Bible principles, I had to suffer for it. They overturned my bed, threw my Bible literature around, and made a mess in my part of the ward. I prayed to Jehovah for strength

to control myself and then went about straightening things up quietly. After a while, the attacks stopped."

"When fellow prisoners see that we have made a firm decision to serve Jehovah," relate some other baptized prisoners, "the pressure takes on another form. They are likely to say, 'Remember, you are not supposed to drink, smoke, or lie anymore.' That kind of pressure helps one control one's body, quickly getting rid of any vices or addictions. It also helps one to cultivate the fruits of the spirit."—Galatians 5:22, 23.

Becoming Dedicated Servants of God

With the prison authorities' permission, the first baptism took place in the gym in the spring of 1991. Zdzisław was the happy candidate. Twelve inmates attended, and 21 brothers and sisters from outside came for the occasion. The meeting had an encouraging effect on the prisoners. A number of them made such remarkable progress that two other convicts were immersed later that year. Two years later, in 1993, baptisms were held twice, and seven more convicts symbolized their dedication to Jehovah!

Reporting on the baptism held in December, the local daily, *Wieczór Wrocławia,* observed: "People keep streaming into the gym hall, greeting all and shaking hands with them. Nobody is a stranger here. They form one big family, united in thinking, in their way of life, and in serving one God, Jehovah." That "one big family" then consisted of 135 persons, including 50 convicts. Let us meet some of them.

Jerzy, baptized in June, relates: "Though I had some contact with Bible truth years ago, what was in me was truly a heart of stone. Fraud, divorce from my first wife, illicit relations with Krystyna, a child out of wedlock, and frequently returning to prison—that is what my life was like." Seeing how other hardened criminals became Witnesses while in prison, he began asking himself, 'Could I not become a better man too?' He requested a Bible study and started coming to meetings. However, the real turning point came when he learned from the public prosecutor that Krystyna had become one of Jehovah's Witnesses three years earlier. "I was completely surprised!" says Jerzy. "I thought, 'What about me? What am I doing?' I realized that to be approved by Jehovah, I had to get my life in order." As a result, a happy reunion took place in the prison—with Krystyna and their 11-year-old daughter, Marzena. Before long, they legalized their marriage. Though still in pris-

on and having his ups and downs, Jerzy recently taught himself sign language and is able to help prisoners who are deaf.

Mirosław was already involved in criminal activities when he was in primary school. He greatly admired what his friends were doing, and soon he started doing the same. Many were the ones that he robbed or beat up. Then he landed in prison. "When I found myself in prison, I turned to the priest for help," Mirosław confesses. "But I was bitterly disappointed. So I decided that I would kill myself by taking poison." On the very day that he planned to take his life, he was transferred to another ward. There he found a copy of *The Watchtower* that talked about the purpose of life. "The simple and clear information proved to be just what I needed," he adds. "Now I wanted to live! So I prayed to Jehovah and asked the Witnesses for a Bible study." He made rapid progress in his Bible study and was baptized in 1991. Now he serves as an auxiliary pioneer in prison, having the privilege to preach from ward to ward.

A total of 15 prisoners have been baptized thus far. Their combined sentences amount to almost 260 years. Some were released before completing their sentences. One prisoner had his 25-year sentence reduced by 10 years. And several who showed interest while in prison became baptized Witnesses after being released. Additionally, there are four more inmates in the prison who are preparing for baptism.

Acknowledgment by Prison Authorities

"The change in the convicts' attitude has been particularly noticeable," states a prison report. "Many give up smoking, and they keep their wards clean. Such changes in conduct are evident with many convicts."

The newspaper *Życie Warszawy* reports that the management of the penitentiary in Wołów acknowledged that "the converts are disciplined; they pose no problems to the prison guards." The article further notes that those released before completing their sentences are well integrated into the circle of Jehovah's Witnesses and do not return to the path of crime.

And what is the opinion of the prison's director? "The work of Jehovah's Witnesses in this penitentiary is most desirable and helpful," he says. The director acknowledges that "in the course of their Bible study [with the Witnesses], the convicts' values and standards change, giving them a new guiding force in their lives. Their conduct is very tactful and polite. They are diligent workers, causing almost no problems." Such favorable comments by the authorities are, of course, gratifying to the Witnesses who work with the inmates in Wołów prison.

The visiting Witnesses fully appreciate Jesus' words: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me. . . . They will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, one shepherd." (John 10:14, 16) Not even prison walls can prevent the Fine Shepherd, Jesus Christ, from gathering sheeplike ones. The Witnesses in Wołów are grateful that they have the privilege of sharing in this joyful service. And they look to Jehovah for his continued blessing in helping many more hearts of stone to respond to the Kingdom good news before the end comes.—Matthew 24:14.

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

Many of Jehovah's Witnesses observe wedding anniversaries. A birthday is an anniversary of when you were born. So why celebrate wedding anniversaries and not birthday anniversaries?

Frankly, there is no need for a Christian to celebrate either. Still, that does not mean that the two are equal in import or that Christians must view the former (wedding anniversaries) as they do birthday celebrations.

As noted, it can be said that both are anniversaries because an "anniversary" is 'the annual recurrence of a date marking some event.' It could be an anniversary of any event—the day you had an automobile accident, saw an eclipse of the moon, went swimming with your family, and so on. It is clear that Christians do not turn every "anniversary" into a special day or have a party to commemorate it. One should consider the aspects of an event and decide what is fitting.

For example, God specifically instructed the Israelites to celebrate annually the day when his angel passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and the resulting exodus of his people in 1513 B.C.E. (Exodus 12:14) When Jews, including Jesus, subsequently commemorated the anniversary of that event, it was in obedience to God's direction, and they did not do so with a party or with gift-giving. The Jews also treated as special the anniversary of the rededication of the temple. Though commemorating this historical event was not commanded in the Bible, John 10:22, 23 suggests that Jesus was not critical of its being done. Finally, Christians have a special meeting on the anniversary of Jesus' death. Of course, this is done out of obedience to a clear command found in God's Word.—Luke 22:19, 20.

What about wedding anniversaries? In some lands it is common for husband and wife to take note of the anniversary of their entering the marital state, an arrangement that God originated. (Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:4-6) Certainly, the Bible does not put marriage in a bad light. Jesus both attended a marriage celebration and contributed to the pleasure of the occasion.—John 2:1-11.

It thus would not be strange that a couple might on their wedding anniversary take time to reflect on the joyfulness of that event and on their resolve to work for success as a couple. Whether they focus on this happy occasion in private, just as a couple, or they have a few relatives or close friends with them would be for them to decide. The occasion should not become a mere excuse for a large social gathering. On this occasion Christians would want to be guided by the principles that apply every day of their lives. So whether one takes note of a wedding anniversary or not is a personal matter.—Romans 13:13, 14.

What, though, about taking special note of a birthday? Do we have any indications from the Bible about such an anniversary?

Well, early in this century, Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known, did take note of birthdays. Many of them kept small books called *Daily Heavenly Manna*. These contained a Bible text for each day, and many Christians put a tiny photograph on the pages corresponding to the birthdays of fellow Bible Students. Also, *The Watch Tower* of February 15, 1909, related that at a convention in Jacksonville, Florida, U.S.A., Brother Russell, then president of the Society, was ushered onto the platform. Why? He was given a surprise birthday present of some boxes of grapefruit, pineapples, and oranges. That gives us a glimpse of the past. To put matters in their context, recall that during that period, Bible Students also commemorated December 25 as the anniversary of Jesus' birth, or birthday. It was even customary to have Christmas dinner at the Brooklyn headquarters.

Of course, since then God's people have grown spiritually in many respects. In the 1920's increased light of truth enabled them to see the following:

Jesus was not born on December 25, a date linked to pagan religion. The Bible directs us to

commemorate the date of Jesus' death, not the anniversary of his or anyone else's birth. Doing so accords with Ecclesiastes 7:1 and the fact that how a faithful person's life turns out is more important than the day of his birth. The Bible has no record that any faithful servant celebrated his birthday. It records birthday celebrations of pagans, linking these occasions with cruel acts. Let us get the background of those birthday anniversaries.

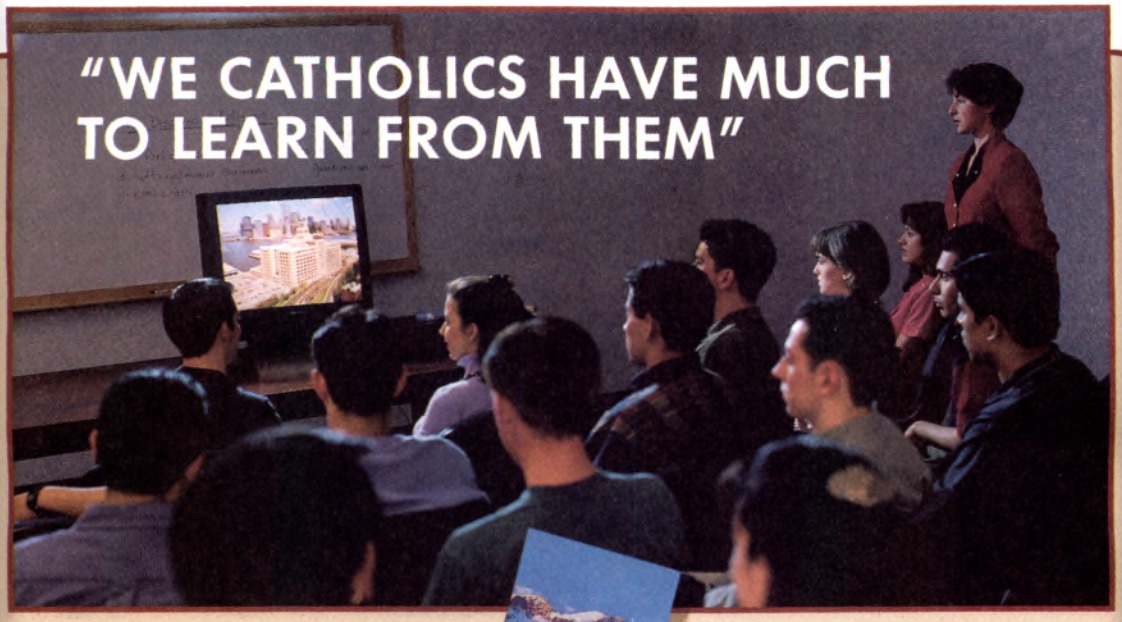
The first is the birthday of the Pharaoh in Joseph's day. (Genesis 40:20-23) In this regard, the article on birthdays in Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics* begins: "The custom of commemorating the day of birth is connected, in its form, with the reckoning of time, and, in its content, with certain primitive religious principles." Later, the encyclopedia quotes Egyptologist Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson, who wrote: "Every Egyptian attached much importance to the day, and even to the hour of his birth; and it is probable that, as in Persia, each individual kept his birthday with great rejoicings, welcoming his friends with all the amusements of society, and a more than usual profusion of the delicacies of the table."

Another birthday celebration mentioned in the Bible is Herod's, at which John the Baptist was beheaded. (Matthew 14:6-10) *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1979 edition) provides this insight: "The pre-Hellenistic Greeks celebrated the birthdays of gods and prominent men. G[ree]k *genéthlia* designated these celebrations, while *genésia* meant a celebration commemorative of the birthday of a deceased important individual. In 2 Macc[abees] 6:7 we find reference to a monthly *genéthlia* of Antiochus IV, during which the Jews were forced to 'partake of the sacrifices.' . . . When Herod celebrated his birthday he was acting in accord with a Hellenistic custom; there is no evidence for the celebration of birthdays in Israel in pre-Hellenistic times."

Admittedly, true Christians today are not preoccupied with the roots and possible ancient religious connections of every practice or custom, but neither are they inclined to ignore pointed indications that do exist in God's Word. This includes that the only birthday celebrations of Biblical record are of pagans and linked to instances of cruelty. Hence, the Scriptures clearly place birthday celebrations in a negative light, a fact that sincere Christians do not disregard.

Consequently, while it is entirely a private matter if Christians choose to take note of their wedding anniversary, there are good reasons why mature Christians abstain from celebrating birthdays.

"WE CATHOLICS HAVE MUCH TO LEARN FROM THEM"



THIS observation about Jehovah's Witnesses was made by a teacher in Bari, Italy, during her high-school class on the history of religion. The teacher had told the class that she would be using videocassettes as a teaching aid. Upon hearing this, one of the students, 18-year-old Roberto, suggested including his religion in the discussion. He offered her the video *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name*. She accepted Roberto's offer, and the entire class of about 30 students saw the video. "All were impressed by the unity, the organization, and the deep love that prevail among Jehovah's Witnesses," says Roberto. "They were even more amazed to learn that 40 million copies of *The Watchtower* and 36 million copies of *Awake!* are printed each month."

"I did not think you were so organized," commented several of Roberto's classmates after seeing the video. Regarding Jehovah's Witnesses, the teacher said to the class: "Observe how their faith moves them to be so united and organized. We Catholics have much to learn from them." The video and the class discussion that followed did much to promote a better understanding of Jehovah's Witnesses.