

THE **WATCHTOWER**
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

APRIL 1, 2000

Is There
Anything
Wrong With
Witchcraft?

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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WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT WITCHCRAFT?

WITCHCRAFT! What does that word bring to your mind?

To many, it is the stuff of superstition and fantasy, not to be taken seriously. To them, witchcraft lives only in the realm of the imagination—old hags dressed in hooded cloaks who add bats' wings to a bubbling caldron, turn people into frogs, and soar through the night sky on broomsticks as they cackle maliciously.

To others, witchcraft is no laughing matter. Some investigators say that more than half the world's population believe that witches are real and can influence the lives of others. Millions believe that witchcraft is evil, dangerous, and to be greatly feared. For example, a book about African religion states: "Belief in the function and dangers of bad magic, sorcery and witchcraft is deeply rooted in African life . . . Witches and sorcerers are the most hated people in their community. Even to this day there are places and occasions when they are beaten to death by the rest of the people."

In Western lands, however, witchcraft has donned a new mask of respectability. Books, television, and movies have done much to reduce the fear of witchcraft. Observes



entertainment analyst David Davis: "Suddenly, witches are younger and cuter, definitely cuter. Hollywood is good at picking up on trends. . . . By making the witches cuter and more huggable, they can appeal to a larger audience,

including women and younger kids." Hollywood knows how to turn any trend into a paying proposition.

Some say that witchcraft has become one of the fastest growing spiritual movements in the United States. Throughout the developed world, an increasing number of people, inspired by feminist movements and disenchanted with mainstream religions, seek spiritual fulfillment in various forms of witchcraft. In fact, so numerous are the forms of witchcraft that people disagree even on the meaning of the word "witch." However, professed witches often identify with Wicca—defined in one dictionary as "a pagan nature religion having its roots in pre-Christian western Europe and undergoing a 20th-century revival."* Consequently, many also refer to themselves as pagans or neopagans.

* The English word "witchcraft" comes from the Old English "wicce" and "wicca," referring to female and male practitioners respectively.

Throughout history, witches have been hated, persecuted, tortured, even slain. Little wonder that modern practitioners of witchcraft are eager to improve their image. In one survey, dozens of witches were asked what message they most wanted to express to the public. Their answer, summarized by researcher Margot Adler, was: "We are not evil. We do not worship the Devil. We don't harm or seduce people. We are not dangerous. We are or-

dinary people like you. We have families, jobs, hopes, and dreams. We are not a cult. We are not weird. . . . You don't have to be afraid of us. . . . We are much more similar to you than you think."

Increasingly, that message has been accepted. But does this mean that there is no reason to be concerned about the practice of witchcraft? Let us consider that question in the following article.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WITCHCRAFT

MODERN-DAY witchcraft is hard to define. This is because those who practice it vary so greatly. They recognize no central authority or doctrine or holy book to unify belief. They also differ in tradition, organization, ritual, and opinion as to what gods to honor. Remarks one writer: "The occult world offers to the individual a 'free marketplace' of ideas." Says another: "Most Neo-Pagans disagree on almost everything."

For many, the contradictions are not a problem. One guidebook for aspiring witches states: "When you're challenged with seemingly contradictory information, examine this information and make a decision as to which to follow. Listen to your intuition. In other words, feel free to pick and choose among the published rituals and ritual textbooks to decide what *feels* right."

For those who recognize the nature of truth, such contradictions are a problem. Truth is fact, that which is real. Things are not true simply because a person feels or hopes or believes that they are true. For example, at one time doctors believed that they could cure pneumonia by cutting a live chicken in two

and laying the pieces on the patient's chest. Doubtless, many patients sincerely believed that this treatment would cure them. Their beliefs and hopes, however, were not in harmony with fact—such a procedure does not cure pneumonia. People do not create truth; they reach out to comprehend it.

The Bible claims to contain the truth about spiritual matters. Jesus Christ, when on earth, said to his Father in prayer: "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) The apostle Paul wrote: "All Scripture is inspired of God." (2 Timothy 3:16) Many who practice witchcraft do not agree. Instead, they look for inspiration and guidance in myth, ancient religions, and even science fiction. Is it not reasonable, though, at least to consider what the Bible says? After all, it is almost universally recognized as a holy book. It is also one of the oldest religious texts that has survived. The Bible was written over a period of 1,600 years, yet it is consistent throughout in its teachings. Let us compare the Bible's teachings with some common beliefs currently expressed by those who promote witchcraft.



Who Dwell in the Spirit Realm?

A basic question in the quest for spiritual understanding is this, Who inhabit the spirit realm? While most modern witches are followers of a nature-oriented, polytheistic faith, some worship a great mother-goddess, viewed in a triple role of maiden, mother, and crone, representing the basic stages of life. Her lover is a god with horns. Other witches worship a god and goddess together. One writer says: "The Goddess and God are seen as a manifestation of the feminine and masculine forces of nature. Each [having] unique characteristics that when combined result in the harmonious creation of life." Another authority writes: "One of the most pivotal choices in Witchcraft is your choice of the deities (Gods/Goddesses) you will work with. . . . The Craft gives you the freedom to pick and subsequently honor your own forms of the Divine."

The Bible supports none of these ideas. Jesus Christ devoted his entire ministry to teaching others about Jehovah, "the only true God." (John 17:3) The Bible states: "Jehovah is great and very much to be praised, and he is to be feared more than all other gods. For all the gods of the peoples are valueless gods." —1 Chronicles 16:25, 26.

Many today view witchcraft as a harmless nature religion

What about the Devil? *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines witchcraft as "communication with the devil." It would be hard to find a witch today who would agree with this definition, for many do not accept even the existence of Satan the Devil. One young woman, described in *The Irish Times* as a "high-ranking witch and leader of one of Ireland's most significant covens," reasons this way: "Belief in the Devil implies acceptance of Christianity . . . [The Devil] cannot inhabit a universe where there is no God."

The Bible confirms the existence of the Devil and charges him with much of the suffering and turmoil on earth. (Revelation 12:12) Jesus not only taught that the Devil exists but also showed that it is possible unwittingly to do the will of the Devil. For example, self-righteous religious leaders of the first century asserted that they were, in a way, sons of God and believed that they were doing the will of God. Jesus, who could discern what was in their hearts, knew differently. He told them forthright: "You are from your father the Devil, and you wish to do the desires of your father." (John 8:44) Further, the Bible book of Revelation states that the Devil "is misleading the entire inhabited earth."—Revelation 12:9.

Is Some Magic Good?

Magic, of course, has always been associated with the occult.* Many people in both ancient and modern times believe that the magic practiced by witches is performed to bring harm to others. Witches are credited with the power to inflict severe pain and even death by means of magic. Traditionally, witches have been blamed for an almost limitless array

* In English, some use the spelling "magick" to distinguish the difference between the occult variety and stage illusions. See *Awake!*, September 8, 1993, page 26, "Is There Danger in Practicing Magic?"



Magic has always been associated with the occult

of misfortunes, including illness, death, and crop failure.

Witches today strongly deny such charges. While acknowledging the existence of the occasional rogue witch who pursues evil, most maintain that their magic is used to bring benefits, not harm. Wiccans teach that the effects of magic will return threefold to the person practicing it and say that this is a major deterrent to the pronouncing of curses. Examples of this so-called benevolent magic include spells to protect yourself, to purify your home from negative energy left behind by former tenants, to make a person fall in love with you, to promote healing and health, to prevent the loss of your job, and to acquire money. With such sweeping powers being attributed to witchcraft, it is not surprising that it has become so popular.

The Bible, however, makes no distinction between magic that is good and magic that is evil. In the Law given to Moses, God made his position quite clear. He said: "You must not practice magic." (Leviticus 19:26) We also read: "There should not be found in you . . . a practitioner of magic or anyone who looks for omens or a sorcerer, or one who binds others

with a spell or anyone who consults a spirit medium."—Deuteronomy 18:10, 11.

Why did God say that? It is not because he intends to deny us what is beneficial. Jehovah gave these laws to his people because he loved them and did not want them to become enslaved by fear and superstition. Instead, he invites his servants to approach him for the things they need. He is the Giver of "every good gift and every perfect present." (James 1:17) The apostle John assured fellow believers: "Whatever we ask we receive from [God], because we are observing his commandments and are doing the things that are pleasing in his eyes."—1 John 3:22.

What About Evil Spirits?

Many witches agree with the Bible on this point: Evil spirits do exist. In one essay a promoter of witchcraft warns: "The Shadows are out there: They exist, in the invisible world that parallels our own, living creatures. . . . The terms 'Imp', 'Evil Spirit' and 'Demon' are fairly accurate. They are very strong. . . . The most intelligent variety . . . are capable (if someone is helpful enough to open a doorway for them) of entering our world. . . . They can enter your body . . . , even asserting a de-

Are practitioners of witchcraft unknowingly doing the will of the Devil?





The Bible
reveals the way of truth

gree of control over you. Yes, this is exactly like the old stories of Demon possession."

In Bible times, demon possession afflicted people in various ways. Some of those affected were unable to speak, some were blind, some acted insane, and some possessed superhuman strength. (Matthew 9:32; 12:22; 17:15, 18; Mark 5:2-5; Luke 8:29; 9:42; 11:14; Acts 19:16) At times the agony was compounded when many demons gained possession of a person simultaneously. (Luke 8:2, 30) Surely, then, there is good reason why Jehovah warns people to stay away from witchcraft and other occult practices.

Religion Based on Truth

Many are drawn to witchcraft today because it seems to be a harmless, benign, nature religion. In some communities it has become accepted. It is not feared. Rather, it has often become trivialized. In a climate where religious tolerance leads many to embrace even the bizarre, witchcraft has gained considerable respectability.

Indeed, the world of religions has become



a marketplace from which people are free to choose one that fits their needs, much as one would buy a pair of shoes. In contrast, Jesus spoke of only two choices. He said: "Go in through the narrow gate; because broad and spacious is the road leading off into destruction, and many are the ones going in through it; whereas narrow is the gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are the ones finding it." (Matthew 7:13, 14) Naturally, we are free to choose which path to take. But since our eternal welfare is at stake, that choice is vitally important. To achieve spiritual enlightenment, we must pursue the way of truth—the way that is found only in God's Word, the Bible.

How Does God's Spirit Operate Today?

HE WAS lame from his mother's womb. Daily, he sat at the temple gate called Beautiful in order to ask gifts of mercy from those entering into the temple. On one occasion, however, this disabled beggar received a gift that was worth far more than a few small coins. He was healed!—Acts 3:2-8.

Although the apostles Peter and John were the ones who “raised him up” so that “the soles of his feet . . . were made firm,” they did not take credit for the healing. Why not? Peter himself explained: “Men of Israel, why are you wondering over this, or why are you gazing at us as though by personal power or godly devotion we have made him walk?” Indeed, both Peter and John realized that it was, not by their might, but by God’s holy spirit that such a thing could be done.—Acts 3:7-16; 4:29-31.

At that time, such “powerful works” were provided to show that the fledgling Christian congregation had God’s backing. (Hebrews 2:4) But after having served their purpose, they would be “done away with,” said the apostle Paul.* (1 Corinthians 13:8) Thus, we do not now observe in the true Christian congregation any God-ordained healings, prophetic messages, or the exorcising of demons.

Does this mean, though, that God’s holy spirit is no longer operative? Far from it! Let us consider some other ways in which God’s spirit was active in the first century and is active in our day.

“The Spirit of the Truth”

One operation of God’s holy spirit is to in-

* See the article “Why Have the Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit Ceased?” in *The Watchtower* of August 15, 1971, pages 501-5.

form, to illuminate, to reveal truths. Shortly before his death, Jesus told his disciples: “I have many things yet to say to you, but you are not able to bear them at present. However, when that one arrives, the spirit of the truth, he will guide you into all the truth.”—John 16:12, 13.

“The spirit of the truth” was poured out at Pentecost 33 C.E. when about 120 disciples who gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem were baptized with holy spirit. (Acts 2:1-4) The apostle Peter was among those present for that annual festival. Filled with holy spirit, Peter “stood up” and amplified, or clarified, certain truths about Jesus. He recounted, for example, how “Jesus the Nazarene” was “exalted to the right hand of God.” (Acts 2:14, 22, 33) God’s spirit also moved Peter to declare boldly to his Jewish listeners: “Let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled.” (Acts 2:36) As a result of Peter’s spirit-inspired message, about three thousand persons “embraced his word heartily” and got baptized. In this way, God’s holy spirit helped to guide them into the truth.—Acts 2:37-41.

God’s holy spirit also served as a teacher and remembrancer. Jesus said: “The helper, the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name, that one will teach you all things and bring back to your minds all the things I told you.”—John 14:26.

How did holy spirit operate as a teacher? God’s spirit opened the disciples’ minds to things that they had previously heard from Jesus but had not fully understood. For example, the apostles knew that during his trial, Jesus told the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pi-



God's holy spirit enlightens us spiritually,



... promotes fine Christian qualities,

late: "My kingdom is no part of this world." Yet, at the time of Jesus' ascension to heaven over 40 days later, the apostles still had the mistaken view that the Kingdom would be established here on the earth. (John 18:36; Acts 1:6) Apparently, the apostles were not able to grasp fully the meaning of Jesus' words until after the outpouring of God's holy spirit at Pentecost 33 C.E.

God's spirit also served as a remembrancer by bringing back to mind the various teachings of Jesus. Prophecies regarding Christ's death and resurrection, for instance, took on new meaning with the aid of holy spirit. (Matthew 16:21; John 12:16) Recalling Jesus' teachings enabled the apostles boldly to defend their position before kings, magistrates, and religious leaders.—Mark 13:9-11; Acts 4:5-20.

Additionally, God's holy spirit helped to direct early Christians to fruitful territory in the ministry. (Acts 16:6-10) God's spirit also moved early Christians to share in writing God's Word, the Bible, for the benefit of all humankind. (2 Timothy 3:16) Clearly, then, holy spirit was active in a variety of ways in the



... and supports us in the worldwide preaching work

first century. It was not provided solely to perform miracles.

Holy Spirit in Our Day

Holy spirit has likewise been working in behalf of true Christians in our day. This became

What Others Say About Jehovah's Witnesses

"While other churches hire consultants to lure people into the pews or grapple with modern-day issues such as homosexuality and abortion, the Witnesses make no concessions to a changing world. They still systematically canvass the Earth."—*The Orange County Register* of Orange County, California, U.S.A.

"When it comes to spreading the faith, few denominations are as enthusiastic . . . as the Jehovah's Witnesses."—*The Republic* of Columbus, Indiana, U.S.A.

"They are the only ones to go from door to door with 'the good news,' applying the Bible's principles."—*Życie Literackie*, Poland.

"In the greatest preaching campaign ever known, Jehovah's Witnesses have taken Jehovah's message throughout the world."—*News-Observer*, Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

evident to a small group of Bible students in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., in the latter half of the 19th century. These earnest students of the Bible yearned to know "the truth."—John 8:32; 16:13.

One member of this group, Charles Taze Russell, said regarding his quest for Scriptural truth: "I prayed . . . that I might be enabled to rid my heart and mind of any prejudice that might stand in the way and be led of his spirit into the proper understanding." God blessed this humble prayer.

As Russell and his associates diligently searched the Scriptures, a number of things became clear. "We found that for centuries," explained Russell, "various sects and parties had split up the Bible doctrines amongst them, blending them with more or less of

human speculation and error." This resulted in what he called "the misplacement of the truth." Indeed, Scriptural truths were buried under a collection of pagan teachings that had infiltrated Christendom over the centuries. But Russell was determined to know and declare the truth.

Through the pages of *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, Russell and his associates courageously denounced false religious doctrines that misrepresented God. They discerned that—contrary to popular religious opinion—the soul is mortal, that at death we go to the grave, and that Jehovah is the only true God and therefore not part of a Trinity.

As you can imagine, though, such exposing of false teachings angered the clergy of Christendom. Eager to hold on to their influential positions, many Catholic and Protestant clergymen organized campaigns aimed at discrediting Russell. But he and his associates did not give up. Confidently, they looked to God's spirit for guidance. "Our Lord's assurance," said Russell, "is that . . . the holy spirit of the Father, sent on account of and at the instance of Jesus our Redeemer, Mediator and Head, will be our instructor." And instruct it did! These sincere Bible Students continued to take in the pure waters of truth from the Bible and proclaim them worldwide.—Revelation 22:17.

The modern-day organization of Jehovah's Witnesses has remained sensitive to the leadings of God's holy spirit for well over a century now. As Jehovah's spirit progressively enlightens their spiritual vision, the Witnesses willingly make the needed adjustments to conform to updated understanding.—Proverbs 4:18.

"You Will Be Witnesses of Me"

Jesus identified yet another manifestation of God's holy spirit when he told his disciples: "You will receive power when the holy spirit arrives upon you, and you will be witnesses of

me . . . to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Jesus' promise to infuse his disciples with "power" and "holy spirit" in order to carry out their God-assigned work still applies today.

As a group, Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for their preaching activities. (See box.) Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses speak the message of truth in over 230 lands and island groups. Under every imaginable condition, including risking their lives in war-torn areas, they courageously raise their voices in support of God's Kingdom. Their zeal for the Christian ministry gives powerful evidence that holy spirit is in operation today. And it is obvious that Jehovah God is blessing their efforts.

Last year, for example, well over one billion hours were devoted to preaching the good news of God's Kingdom. With what result? Some 323,439 people symbolized their dedication to God by submitting themselves to water baptism. In addition, 4,433,884 weekly home Bible studies were conducted with newly interested ones. All told, 24,607,741 books, 631,162,309 magazines, and 63,495,728 brochures and booklets were placed. What a powerful testimony to God's spirit in action!

God's Spirit and You

When an individual responds favorably to the good news, conforms his life to God's standards, and expresses faith in the ransom provision, the way is opened for a clean standing with God. To such ones the apostle Paul said: "God . . . puts his holy spirit in you." —1 Thessalonians 4:7, 8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Having God's spirit results in many fine blessings. What kind of blessings? For one thing, God's inspired Word says: "The fruitage of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, [and] self-control." (Galatians 5:22, 23) Therefore, God's holy spirit is a powerful force for good, enabling one to display godly qualities.

Additionally, if you read the Bible and ap-

ply what you learn, God's spirit can help you to grow in wisdom, knowledge, insight, judgment, and thinking ability. King Solomon received "wisdom and understanding in very great measure and a broadness of heart" because he sought to please God rather than men. (1 Kings 4:29) Since Jehovah gave holy spirit to Solomon, surely he will not withhold his holy spirit from those seeking to please him today.

God's holy spirit also helps Christians to combat Satan and the demons, this wicked system of things, and the sinful tendencies of their fallen flesh. How is that possible? The apostle Paul answers: "For all things I have the strength by virtue of him who imparts power to me." (Philippians 4:13) Holy spirit may not remove trials or temptations; it can, however, help you to endure them. By relying on God's spirit, we can receive "power beyond what is normal" to deal with any trouble or distress. —2 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

When you consider all the evidence, there is little doubt that God's holy spirit is operating today. Jehovah's spirit energizes his servants to bear witness about his grand purposes. It continues to reveal flashes of spiritual light, and it fortifies our faith, helping us to remain loyal to our Creator. How thankful we can be that God has remained true to his promise by supplying holy spirit to his faithful servants today!

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The New World—Will You Be There?

Fishing for Men in the Aegean Sea

Do You View Violent
Ones as God Does?

PAY ATTENTION TO GOD'S PROPHETIC WORD

"We have the prophetic word made more sure; and you are doing well in paying attention to it."—2 PETER 1:19.

FOR centuries, false messiahs have tried to predict the future. In the fifth century C.E., a man who called himself Moses convinced Jews on the island of Crete that he was the messiah and would deliver them from oppression. On the day set for their liberation, they followed him to a high point overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. He said that they had only to cast themselves into the sea, and it would part before them. A great many who plunged into the waters drowned, and that false messiah fled from the scene.

² In the 12th century, a "messiah" emerged in Yemen. The caliph, or ruler, asked him for a sign of his messiahship. This "messiah" proposed that the caliph have him beheaded. He prophesied a swift resurrection that would serve as the sign. The caliph agreed to the plan—and that was the end of that "messiah."

³ False messiahs and their prophecies are total failures, but paying attention to God's prophetic word never leads to disappointment. The true Messiah, Jesus Christ, was the living fulfillment of many Bible prophecies. Quoting Isaiah's prophecy, for instance, the Gospel writer Matthew wrote: "'O land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, along the road of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the nations! the people sitting in darkness saw a great light, and as for those sitting

in a region of deathly shadow, light rose upon them.' From that time on Jesus commenced preaching and saying: 'Repent, you people, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.'" (Matthew 4:15-17; Isaiah 9:1, 2) Jesus was that "great light," and his ministry proved that he was the Prophet foretold by Moses. Those refusing to listen to Jesus would be destroyed.—Deuteronomy 18:18, 19; Acts 3:22, 23.

⁴ Jesus also fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah 53:12: "He poured out his soul to the very death, and it was with the transgressors that he was counted in; and he himself carried the very sin of many people, and for the transgressors he proceeded to interpose." Aware that he would soon give his human life as a ransom, Jesus strengthened the faith of his disciples. (Mark 10:45) He did this in an outstanding way through the transfiguration.

The Transfiguration Builds Faith

⁵ The transfiguration was a prophetic event. Said Jesus: "The Son of man is destined to come in the glory of his Father with his angels . . . Truly I say to you that there are some of those standing here that will not taste death at all until first they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:27, 28) Did some of the apostles actually see Jesus coming in his Kingdom? Matthew 17:1-7 states: "Six days later Jesus took Peter and

- 1, 2. What example of a false messiah can you relate?
3. Who is the true Messiah, and what did his ministry prove?

4. How did Jesus fulfill Isaiah 53:12?
5. In your own words, how would you describe the transfiguration?

*Can you explain the
significance of the
transfiguration?*

James and John his brother along and brought them up into a lofty mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them." What a dramatic event! "His face shone as the sun, and his outer garments became brilliant as the light. And, look! there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, conversing with him." Also, "a bright cloud overshadowed them," and they heard God's own voice saying: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him." At hearing this the disciples fell upon their faces and became very much afraid. Then Jesus came near and, touching them, said: 'Get up and have no fear.' "

⁶ This awesome event likely took place on one of the ridges of Mount Hermon, where Jesus and the three apostles spent the night. The transfiguration evidently occurred at night, making it especially vivid. One reason Jesus called it a vision was that long-dead Moses and Elijah were not literally present. Only Christ was actually there. (Matthew 17:8, 9) Such a dazzling display gave Peter, James, and John a spectacular foregleam of Jesus' glorious presence in Kingdom power. Moses and Elijah find parallels in Jesus' anointed joint heirs, and the vision powerfully reinforced his testimony about the Kingdom and his future kingship.

6. (a) Why did Jesus call the transfiguration a vision? (b) Of what was the transfiguration a foregleam?



⁷ The transfiguration helped to strengthen the faith of the three apostles who were to play a leading role in the Christian congregation. Christ's shining face, his glistening garments, and God's own voice declaring that Jesus was His beloved Son to whom they should listen—all of this served its purpose most effectively. But the apostles were to relate the vision to no one until Jesus was resurrected. Some 32 years later, this vision was still vivid in Peter's mind. Pointing to it and its significance, he wrote: "No, it was not by following artfully contrived false stories that we acquainted you with the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ,"

7. How do we know that Peter had vivid recollections of the transfiguration?

but it was by having become eyewitnesses of his magnificence. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when words such as these were borne to him by the magnificent glory: 'This is my son, my beloved, whom I myself have approved.' Yes, these words we heard borne from heaven while we were with him in the holy mountain."—2 Peter 1:16-18.

⁸ Of utmost importance was God's proclamation: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him." This statement focuses attention on Jesus as God's enthroned King, to whom all creation must render obedience. The overshadowing cloud indicated that the fulfillment of this vision would be invisible. It would be discernible only with the eyes of understanding on the part of those who recognize "the sign" of Jesus' invisible presence in Kingdom power. (Matthew 24:3) In fact, Jesus' instruction not to tell the vision to anyone until he had risen from the dead shows that his exaltation and glorification would come after his resurrection.

⁹ After referring to the transfiguration, Peter stated: "Consequently we have the prophetic word made more sure; and you are doing well in paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and a daystar rises, in your hearts. For you know this first, that no prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation. For prophecy was at no time brought by man's will, but men spoke from God as they were borne along by holy spirit." (2 Peter 1:19-21) The transfiguration underscores the reliability of God's prophetic word. We must pay attention to that word and not to "artfully contrived false stories" that do not have divine backing or approval. Our faith in the prophetic word should be strengthened by the transfiguration because that visionary

foreview of Jesus' glory and Kingdom power has become a reality. Yes, we have undeniable evidence that Christ is present today as a powerful heavenly King.

How the Daystar Rises

¹⁰ Peter wrote: "You are doing well in paying attention to [the prophetic word] as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and a daystar rises." Who or what is the "daystar"? The word "daystar" occurs just once in the Bible, and it is similar in meaning to "morning star." Revelation 22:16 calls Jesus Christ "the bright morning star." At certain seasons of the year, such stars are the last ones to rise on the eastern horizon. They rise just before the sun appears, and they thus herald the dawn of a new day. Peter used the word "daystar" to refer to Jesus after He received Kingdom power. At that time, Jesus rose in all the universe, including our earth! As the Messianic Daystar, he heralds the dawning of a new day, or era, for obedient mankind.

¹¹ Many Bible translations foster the idea that the apostle Peter's words recorded at 2 Peter 1:19 refer to the physical human heart. An adult heart weighs but 9 to 11 ounces. How could Jesus Christ—now a glorious immortal spirit creature in heaven—rise in these small human organs? (1 Timothy 6:16) Of course, our figurative hearts are involved in this matter, for with them we pay attention to God's prophetic word. But look carefully at 2 Peter 1:19, and you will see that the *New World Translation* uses commas to set off the parenthetical phrase "until day dawns and a daystar rises" from earlier words in the verse and from the expression "in your hearts." This verse might be expressed in this way: 'We have the prophetic word made more sure; and you are do-

8. (a) God's pronouncement regarding his Son focused attention on what? (b) What was indicated by the cloud that appeared in the transfiguration?

9. Why should the transfiguration strengthen our faith?

10. Who or what is the "daystar" that Peter mentioned, and why do you so answer?

11. (a) Why does 2 Peter 1:19 not mean that "a daystar" arises in actual human hearts? (b) How would you explain 2 Peter 1:19?

The Daystar has already risen. Do you know how and when?

ing well in paying attention to it as to a lamp shining in a dark place, that is, in your hearts, until day dawns and a daystar rises.'

¹² What is the condition of the figurative hearts of sinful mankind in general? Why, their hearts are in spiritual darkness! If we are true Christians, however, it is as if we have a lamp shining in our hearts, which would otherwise be dark. As indicated by Peter's words, it would be by paying attention to God's illuminating prophetic word that genuine Christians would keep alert and enlightened to the dawn of a new day. They would be aware of the fact that the Daystar had risen, not in fleshly human hearts, but before all creation.

¹³ The Daystar has already risen! We can be sure of that by paying attention to Jesus' great prophecy regarding his presence. Today, we are experiencing its fulfillment in such events as unprecedented wars, famines, earthquakes, and the worldwide preaching of the good news. (Matthew 24:3-14) Though the difficult conditions that Jesus foretold also affect us as Christians, we are able to endure with peace and joy of heart. Why? Because we pay attention to God's prophetic word and have faith

12. What is the condition of human hearts in general, but what is true of genuine Christians?

13. (a) Why can we be sure that the Daystar has already risen? (b) Why can Christians endure the difficult conditions that Jesus foretold for our day?



in what he promises for the future. We know that we are on the threshold of the best of times because we are very deep into "the time of the end"! (Daniel 12:4) The world is in the desperate straits foretold at Isaiah 60:2: "Look! darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups." How can anyone find his way in this darkness? A person must humbly pay attention to God's prophetic word now, before it is too late. People of honest heart need to turn to Jehovah God, the Source of life and light. (Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:28) Only by doing this can anyone have true enlightenment and the hope of enjoying the marvelous future that God has purposed for obedient mankind.—Revelation 21:1-5.

"The Light Has Come Into the World"

¹⁴ The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus Christ is now ruling as King. Because of his coming to power in 1914, wonderful prophecies will yet be fulfilled. To experience their fulfillment, we must prove to be meek ones who exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repenting of sinful works and of sins committed in ignorance. Of course, those who love darkness will not receive everlasting life. Jesus said: "This is the basis for judgment, that the light has come into the world but men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were wicked. For he that practices vile things hates the light and does not come to the light, in order that his works may not be reproved. But he that does what is true comes to the light, in order that his works may be made manifest as having been worked in harmony with God."—John 3:19-21.

¹⁵ Spiritual light has come into the world by means of Jesus, and listening to him is vital. Paul wrote: "God, who long ago spoke on many occasions and in many ways to our forefathers by means of the prophets, has at the end of these days spoken to us by means of a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things." (Hebrews 1:1, 2) What will happen if we

14. What must we do to experience the fulfillment of the Bible's wonderful prophecies?

15. What will happen if we neglect the salvation that God has made possible through his Son?

How Would You Answer?

- How would you describe Jesus' transfiguration?
- How does the transfiguration build faith?
- Who or what is Jehovah's Daystar, and when did it arise?
- Why should we pay attention to God's prophetic word?

spurn the salvation that God has made possible through his Son? Paul went on to say: "If the word spoken through angels proved to be firm, and every transgression and disobedient act received a retribution in harmony with justice; how shall we escape if we have neglected a salvation of such greatness in that it began to be spoken through our Lord and was verified for us by those who heard him, while God joined in bearing witness with signs as well as portents and various powerful works and with distributions of holy spirit according to his will?" (Hebrews 2:2-4) Yes, Jesus is central to the proclaiming of the prophetic word.—Revelation 19:10.

¹⁶ As noted, Peter said: "No prophecy of Scripture springs from any private interpretation." Humans alone cannot come up with true prophecy, but we can have full faith in all of God's prophecies. These originate with Jehovah God himself. By holy spirit he has enabled his servants to understand how Bible prophecies are being fulfilled. Indeed, we are grateful to Jehovah that we have seen the fulfillment of many such prophecies since the year 1914. And we are absolutely sure that the remaining prophecies about the end of this wicked system of things will all be fulfilled. It is vital that we keep on paying attention to divine predictions while we let our light shine. (Matthew 5:16) How thankful we are that Jehovah is causing 'light to flash up for us in the dense darkness' enveloping the earth today! —Isaiah 58:10.

¹⁷ Physical light enables us to see. It also makes possible the growth of crops that furnish us with food in great variety. We cannot get along without physical light. What about spiritual light? It gives us guidance and shows us the future as foretold in God's Word, the Bible. (Psalm 119:105) Jehovah God loving—

16. Why can we have full faith in all of Jehovah God's prophecies?

17. Why do we need spiritual light from God?

ly 'sends out his light and his truth.' (Psalm 43:3) Surely we should show deep appreciation for such provisions. Let us therefore do our utmost to absorb the light of "the glorious knowledge of God" so that it illuminates our figurative heart.—2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 1:18.

¹⁸ How blessed we are to know that in 1914, Jesus Christ, the Daystar, rose in all the universe and began to fulfill the transfiguration

18. What is Jehovah's Daystar now ready to do?

vision! Jehovah's Daystar is now on the scene, ready to carry out God's purpose in further fulfillment of the transfiguration—"the war of the great day of God the Almighty." (Revelation 16:14, 16) After this old system has been swept away, Jehovah will fulfill his promise of "new heavens and a new earth" in which we can praise him forever as the Sovereign Lord of the universe and the God of true prophecy. (2 Peter 3:13) Until that grand day, let us keep on walking in divine light by paying attention to God's prophetic word.

FIGHTERS AGAINST GOD WILL NOT PREVAIL!

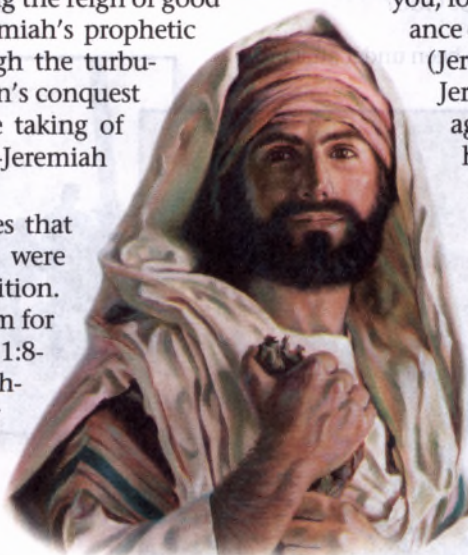
"They will be certain to fight against you, but they will not prevail against you."

—JEREMIAH 1:19.

JEHOVAH commissioned young Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5) This occurred during the reign of good King Josiah of Judah. Jeremiah's prophetic ministry continued through the turbulent period prior to Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem and into the taking of God's people into exile.—Jeremiah 1:1-3.

² The judgment messages that Jeremiah was to declare were bound to stir up opposition. Therefore, God fortified him for what lay ahead. (Jeremiah 1:8-10) For instance, the prophet's spirit was bolstered by

1. What commission did Jeremiah receive, and how long did his work continue?
2. How did Jehovah bolster Jeremiah, and fighting against that prophet meant what?



*Jeremiah was assured
that Jehovah would be with him*

the words: "They will be certain to fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for 'I am with you,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'to deliver you.'" (Jeremiah 1:19) Fighting against Jeremiah would mean fighting against God. Today, Jehovah has a prophetlike group of servants whose work is similar to that of Jeremiah. Like him, they boldly declare God's prophetic word. And this message affects all individuals and nations for good or for bad, depending on their reaction to it. As in Jeremiah's time, there are those who fight against God by opposing his servants and their divinely assigned activities.

Jehovah's Servants Under Attack

³ Jehovah's people have been under attack since early in the 20th century. In many lands, men of wicked intent have sought to hinder—yes, silence—the proclamation of the good news of God's Kingdom. They have been goaded on by our chief Adversary, the Devil, who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone.” (1 Peter 5:8) After “the appointed times of the nations” ended in 1914, God installed his Son as earth's new King, with the command: “Go subduing in the midst of your enemies.” (Luke 21:24; Psalm 110:2) Exercising his power, Christ ousted Satan from heaven and confined him to the vicinity of the earth. Knowing that his time is short, the Devil vents his wrath upon anointed Christians and their companions. (Revelation 12:9, 17) What have been the results of the repeated attacks by these fighters against God?

3. Why have Jehovah's servants been under attack?

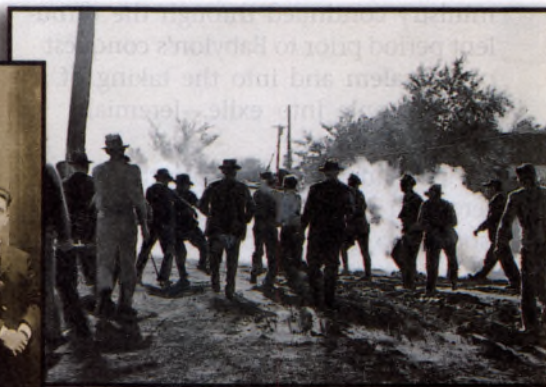


⁴ Anointed servants of Jehovah faced many tests of faith during World War I. They were ridiculed and slandered, chased by mobs, and subjected to beatings. As Jesus had foretold, they became “objects of hatred by all the na—

4. What trials did Jehovah's people experience during the World War I era, but what happened in 1919 and 1922?



Concentration camp survivors



Mob violence against Jehovah's Witnesses

J. F. Rutherford and associates

tions." (Matthew 24:9) Amid war hysteria, enemies of God's Kingdom made use of a tactic that had been used against Jesus Christ. They falsely branded Jehovah's people seditious, and they struck at the very heart of God's visible organization. In May 1918, federal warrants were issued for the arrest of the Watch Tower Society's president, J. F. Rutherford, and seven of his closest associates. These eight men were given heavy prison sentences and were sent to the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. Nine months later they were released. In May 1919 the circuit court of appeals ruled that the defendants had not had an impartial trial, and the judgment was therefore reversed. The case was remanded for a new trial, but later the government withdrew the prosecution, with Brother Rutherford and his associates being completely exonerated. They resumed their activities, and conventions held at Cedar Point, Ohio, in 1919 and in 1922 gave the Kingdom-preaching work renewed impetus.

⁵ Dictatorships emerged in the 1930's, and Germany, Italy, and Japan united to form the Axis powers. Early in that decade, barbaric persecution was unleashed against God's people, notably in Nazi Germany. Bans were imposed. Homes were searched, and their occupants were arrested. Thousands were thrown into concentration camps because they refused to renounce their faith. The fight against God and his people was aimed at wiping out Jehovah's Witnesses in that totalitarian domain.* When the Witnesses went to the courts in Germany to fight for their rights, the Reich's Ministry of Justice prepared a lengthy opinion to ensure that they would not succeed. It said: "The courts must not fail on account of merely apparent legal formalism."

* See the article "Faithful and Fearless in the Face of Nazi Oppression," pages 24-8.

5. How did Jehovah's Witnesses fare in Nazi Germany?

ties; but must seek and find ways in spite of the formal difficulties, to fulfill their high duties." This meant that justice could not be had. The Nazis maintained that the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses were inimical, or hostile, and 'disturbed the National Socialistic construction.'

⁶ During World War II, bans and restrictions were imposed on God's people in Australia, Canada, and other lands identified with the British Commonwealth—in Africa, Asia, and islands of the Caribbean and of the Pacific. In the United States, influential enemies and misinformed people brought 'trouble framed by decree.' (Psalm 94:20) But flag-salute issues and community ordinances forbidding house-to-house preaching were fought in the courts, and favorable decisions in the United States built up a bulwark of support for freedom of worship. Thanks to Jehovah, enemy efforts did not prevail. When the war came to a close in Europe, the bans were removed. The thousands of Witnesses held captive in concentration camps were freed, but the fight was not over. Immediately after World War II, the Cold War set in. Eastern European nations brought further pressure on Jehovah's people. Official action was taken to interfere with and stop our witnessing activities, halt the flow of Bible literature, stamp out our public assemblies. Many were imprisoned or sent to labor camps.

On With the Preaching Work!

⁷ As the decades passed, the Kingdom-preaching work opened up. Poland, though still under Communist rule, allowed the holding of one-day conventions in 1982. International conventions were held there in 1985. Huge international conventions followed in

6. What efforts were made to stop our work during World War II and thereafter?

7. What have Jehovah's Witnesses experienced in Poland, Russia, and other lands in recent years?

1989, with thousands from Russia and Ukraine attending. That year Hungary and Poland granted Jehovah's Witnesses legal recognition. In the autumn of 1989, the Berlin Wall came down. A few months later, we received legal recognition in East Germany, and shortly thereafter an international convention was held in Berlin. And at the start of the final decade of the 20th century, efforts were under way to make personal contact with the brothers in Russia. Some of the officials in Moscow were approached, and in 1991, Jehovah's Witnesses were granted legal registration. Since then the work has grown tremendously in Russia and in the republics that were part of the former Soviet Union.

⁸ While persecution let up in some areas, it increased in others. In the 45 years following the close of the second world war, many lands refused to grant legal recognition to Jehovah's Witnesses. Additionally, bans were imposed on us or on our activities in 23 lands in Africa, 9 in Asia, 8 in Europe, 3 in Latin America, and 4 in certain island nations.

⁹ Jehovah's Witnesses in Malawi experienced savage persecution beginning in 1967. Because of their neutral stand as true Christians, our fellow believers there would not purchase political party cards. (John 17:16) Following a meeting of the Malawi Congress Party in 1972, there was a renewal of brutality. The brothers were driven from their homes and denied employment. Thousands fled the country to avoid being killed. But did the fighters against God and his people prevail? Not at all! After a reversal of circumstances, a peak of 43,767 Kingdom publishers reported in Malawi in 1999, and over 120,000 attended district conventions there. A new branch office has been built in the capital city.

8. What happened to Jehovah's people in the 45 years following the close of World War II?

9. What have Jehovah's servants undergone in Malawi?

They Look for a Pretext

¹⁰ Apostates, clergymen, and others cannot put up with our message from God's Word. Under pressure from religious quarters of Christendom, opposers look for a so-called legal way to justify their fight against us. What tactics are sometimes used? Well, what did conspirators do in attacking the prophet Daniel? At Daniel 6:4, 5, we read: "The high officials and the satraps themselves were constantly seeking to find some pretext against Daniel respecting the kingdom; but there was no pretext or corrupt thing at all that they were able to find, forasmuch as he was trustworthy and no negligence or corrupt thing at all was found in him. Consequently these able-bodied men were saying: 'We shall find in this Daniel no pretext at all, except we have to find it against him in the law of his God.'" Today, opposers likewise look for a pretext. They clamor about "dangerous cults" and try to pin this label on Jehovah's Witnesses. By misrepresentation, innuendo, and falsehood, they attack our worship and our adherence to godly principles.

¹¹ In some lands, religious and political elements refuse to acknowledge that we practice "the form of worship that is clean and undefiled from the standpoint of our God." (James 1:27) Though our Christian activities are carried on in 234 lands, opposers claim that we are not a "known religion." Shortly before an international convention in 1998, an Athens newspaper quoted the Greek Orthodox clergy as claiming that "[Jehovah's Witnesses] are not a 'known religion,'" despite the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights to the contrary. A few days later, another newspaper in the same city quoted a church spokesman as saying: "[Jehovah's Witnesses] cannot be 'a Christian congrega-

10. As in Daniel's case, what have present-day opposers of God's people done?

11. What false claims have been made by some opposers of Jehovah's Witnesses?

tion,' since they have nothing in common with the Christian faith in the person of Jesus Christ." This is amazing, for no other religious group puts more emphasis on imitating Jesus than do Jehovah's Witnesses!

¹² We seek to defend and establish the good news by legal means. (Philippians 1:7) Moreover, we will not compromise or water down our firm adherence to God's standards of righteousness. (Titus 2:10, 12) Like Jeremiah, we 'gird up our hips and speak everything that Jehovah commands us,' not allowing fighters against God to strike us with any terror. (Jeremiah 1:17, 18) Jehovah's Holy Word has clearly marked out the right course for us to take. Never do we want to lean on the frail "arm of flesh" or seek "refuge in the shadow of Egypt," that is, this world. (2 Chronicles 32:8; Isaiah 30:3; 31:1-3) In waging spiritual warfare, we must continue to trust in Jehovah with all our heart, let him direct our steps, and not lean on our own understand-

12. In waging our spiritual warfare, what must we do?

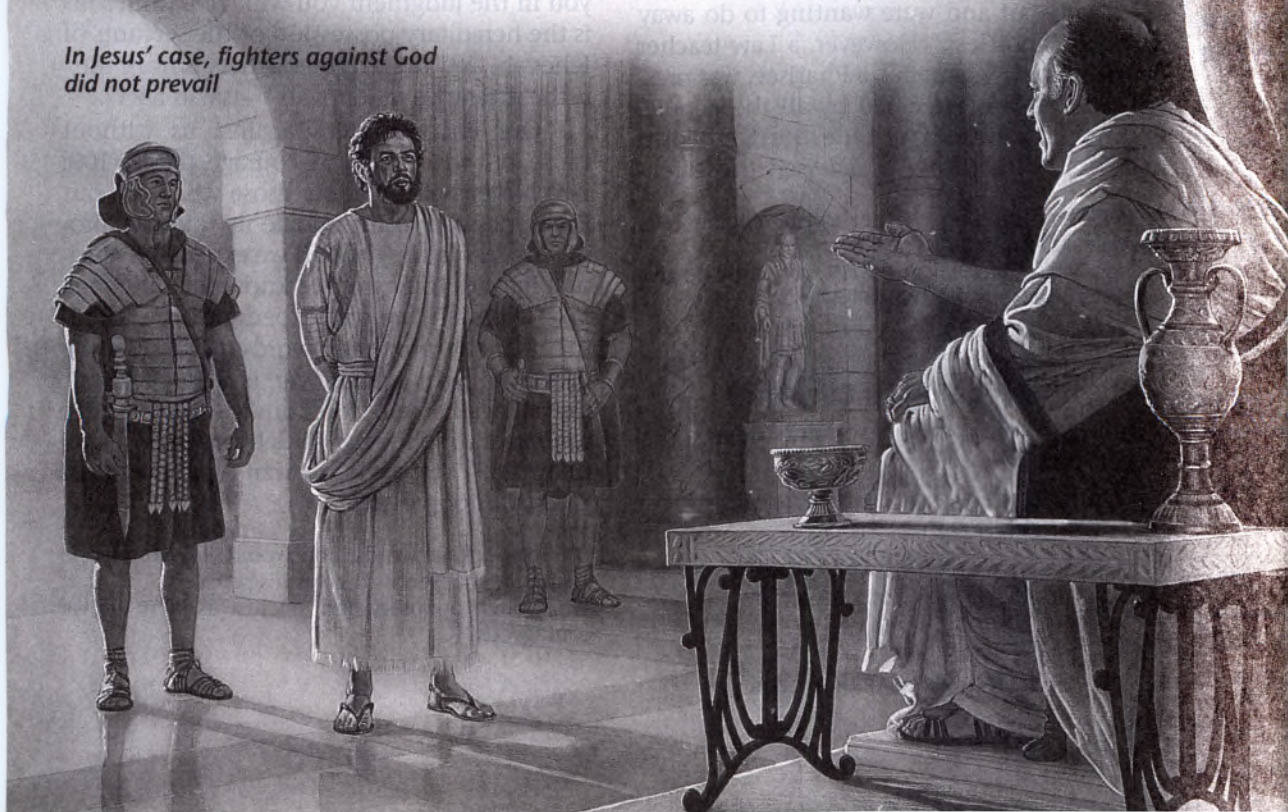
In Jesus' case, fighters against God did not prevail

ing. (Proverbs 3:5-7) Unless we have Jehovah's support and he himself is guarding us, all our work will be "to no avail."—Psalm 127:1.

Persecuted but Uncompromising

¹³ The foremost example in uncompromising devotion to Jehovah is Jesus, who was falsely accused of sedition and of disturbing the established order. After examining the case of Jesus, Pilate was willing to release him. But the crowd, goaded on by the religious leaders, cried for Jesus to be impaled, although he was innocent. In place of him, they called for the release of Barabbas—a man imprisoned for sedition and murder! Pilate again tried to dissuade the unreasonable opposers, but he finally gave way to the public clamor. (Luke 23:2, 5, 14, 18-25) Though Jesus died on

13. Why can it be said that the satanic attack on Jesus failed?



a stake, the heinous satanic attack on the innocent Son of God failed completely, for Jehovah resurrected Jesus and exalted him to His own right hand. And on the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., through the glorified Jesus, holy spirit was poured out, establishing the Christian congregation—"a new creation."—2 Corinthians 5:17; Acts 2:1-4.

¹⁴ Shortly thereafter the religious element threatened the apostles, but those followers of Christ did not stop speaking about the things that they had seen and heard. Jesus' disciples prayed: "Jehovah, give attention to their threats, and grant your slaves to keep speaking your word with all boldness." (Acts 4:29) Jehovah answered their supplication by filling them with holy spirit and strengthening them to continue their fearless proclamation. Soon the apostles were again ordered to stop preaching, but Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men." (Acts 5:29) Threats, arrests, and floggings could not deter them from expanding their Kingdom activity.

¹⁵ How did the religious rulers react? "They felt deeply cut and were wanting to do away with [the apostles]." However, a Law teacher by the name of Gamaliel, a Pharisee, was present, and he was esteemed by all the people. Putting the apostles outside the Sanhedrin hall for a short time, he advised those reli-

14. What resulted when the Jewish religious element acted against Jesus' followers?

15. Who was Gamaliel, and what advice did he give religious opposers of Jesus' followers?

How Would You Respond?

- Why have Jehovah's servants been under attack?
- In what ways have opposers fought against Jehovah's people?
- Why can we be sure that fighters against God will not prevail?

gious opposers: "Men of Israel, pay attention to yourselves as to what you intend to do respecting these men. . . . I say to you, Do not meddle with these men, but let them alone; (because, if this scheme or this work is from men, it will be overthrown; but if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them;) otherwise, you may perhaps be found fighters actually against God."—Acts 5:33-39.

No Weapon Formed Against Us Will Succeed

¹⁶ Gamaliel's advice was sound, and we appreciate it when some speak out in our behalf. We also acknowledge that freedom of worship has been upheld through court decisions by fair-minded judges. Of course, our adherence to God's Word displeases Christendom's clergy and other leaders of Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. (Revelation 18:1-3) Though they and those influenced by them fight against us, we have this assurance: "'Any weapon whatever that will be formed against you will have no success, and any tongue at all that will rise up against you in the judgment you will condemn. This is the hereditary possession of the servants of Jehovah, and their righteousness is from me,' is the utterance of Jehovah."—Isaiah 54:17.

¹⁷ Our enemies fight against us without cause, but we do not lose courage. (Psalm 109:1-3) Never will we allow those who hate our Bible message to intimidate us into compromising our faith. Though we expect our spiritual fight to intensify, we know the outcome. Like Jeremiah, we will experience the fulfillment of the prophetic words: "They will be certain to fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for 'I am with you,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'to deliver you.'" (Jeremiah 1:19) Yes, we know that fighters against God will not prevail!

16. In your own words, how would you express the assurance that Jehovah gives his people?

17. Though opposers fight against us, why are we courageous?

"You Know So Much About the Bible"

WHEN 12-year-old Jesus courageously spoke to the religious leaders in Jerusalem, "all those listening to him were in constant amazement at his understanding and his answers." (Luke 2:47) Similarly today, many young servants of Jehovah muster up courage to speak to their teachers and schoolmates about God and the Bible, and often they experience equally gratifying results.

Tiffany, age 14, was in a class where one discussion was directed to the Bible prophecy of the 70 weeks of years, found at Daniel 9:24-27. The teacher gave a few facts about the verses and quickly glossed over the subject.

At first, Tiffany was hesitant about raising her hand. "But for some reason," she says, "it really bothered me that the verses were not fully explained. And before I knew it, my hand was up." The teacher was amazed that someone actually had something to say on the subject, since most of the students were having a difficult time understanding it.

Given the opportunity to explain the prophecy, Tiffany stood up and spoke extemporaneously. As she finished, there was absolute silence in the classroom. Tiffany was a little nervous. Then the class broke out in a generous round of applause.

"That's very impressive, Tiffany, that is very

impressive," said the teacher over and over again. He admitted that he knew that there must be more to those verses, but Tiffany was the first person ever to explain them to him so clearly. At the end of the class, he asked Tiffany how she knew so much about the Bible.

"It's because I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses," she replied. "My parents had to explain that prophecy to me several times before I understood it."

The classmates too were amazed at her knowledge of the Bible. One student said to Tiffany: "Now I know why you Jehovah's Witnesses go from door to door; it's because you know so much about the Bible." Others promised that they would never again tease her about her beliefs.

When Tiffany told her parents about her experience, they suggested that she offer the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life* to her teacher. When she did so and showed the teacher the portion that explains Daniel's prophecy, he readily accepted the book and thanked her for it.

Truly, when Christian youths courageously speak about what their parents have taught them regarding God and the Bible, they bring praise and honor to Jehovah and blessings to themselves.—Matthew 21: 15, 16.



FAITHFUL AND FEARLESS in the Face of Nazi Oppression

On June 17, 1946, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands sent a message of condolence to a family of Jehovah's Witnesses in Amsterdam. Its purpose was to express her admiration for the family's son, Jacob van Bennekom, who had been executed by the Nazis during World War II. Some years ago, the city council of Doetinchem, a town in the eastern part of the Netherlands, decided to name a street for Bernard Polman, also one of Jehovah's Witnesses who had been executed during the war.

WHY did the Nazis turn against Jacob, Bernard, and others of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Netherlands during World War II? And what enabled these Witnesses to remain faithful under years of cruel persecution and ultimately gain the respect and admiration of their countrymen and the queen? To find out, let us review some events that led to a David-and-Goliath confrontation between a small band of Jehovah's Witnesses and the giant Nazi war machine.

Banned—But More Active Than Ever

On May 10, 1940, the Nazi army swooped down on the Netherlands. Since the literature distributed by Jehovah's Witnesses exposed the evil actions of Nazism and advocated the Kingdom of God, the Nazis lost no time in trying to stop the activities of the Witnesses. Less than three weeks after the Nazis invaded the Netherlands, they issued a secret edict banning Jehovah's Witnesses. On March 10, 1941, a press report made the ban public, accusing the Witnesses of waging a campaign "against all state and



Jacob van Bennekom

church institutions." As a result, the hunt for the Witnesses intensified.

Interestingly, though the infamous Gestapo, or secret police, kept all churches under surveillance, it persecuted only one Christian organization severely. "Persecution till the death," points out Dutch historian Dr. Louis de Jong, "struck just one religious group—the Jehovah's Witnesses." —*Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (The Kingdom of the Netherlands During the Second World War).

The Gestapo had the cooperation of the Dutch police in locating and arresting the Witnesses. In addition, a traveling overseer who had become fearful and had turned apostate provided the Nazis with information about his former fellow believers. By the end of April 1941, 113 Witnesses were under arrest. Did this onslaught bring the preaching activities to a halt?

The answer is found in *Meldungen aus den Niederlanden* (Reports From the Netherlands), a classified document that the German *Sicherheitspolizei* (Security Police) prepared in April 1941. The report says of Jehovah's Witnesses: "This forbidden sect carries on energetic activity in the entire land, holding illegal meetings and posting leaflets bearing such slogans as 'Persecuting God's Witnesses is a crime' and 'Jehovah will punish persecutors with eternal destruction.'" Two weeks later the same source reported that "in spite of the intensifying of strict measures taken by the Security Police against the activities of the Bible Students, their activities continue to increase." Yes, despite the danger of arrest, the Witnesses continued their work, placing more than 350,000 pieces of literature with the public in 1941 alone!

What enabled this small but growing band of a few hundred Witnesses to have the courage to stand up to their fear-some enemies? Like the faithful prophet Isaiah of old, the Witnesses feared God, not man. Why? Because they took to heart Jehovah's reassuring words to Isaiah: "I—I myself am the One that is comforting you people. Who are you that you should be afraid of a mortal man?"—Isaiah 51:12.

Fearlessness Demands Respect

By the end of 1941, the number of Witnesses who had been arrested had risen to 241. Few, however, gave in to fear of man. Willy Lages, a notorious member of the German secret police, is quoted as saying that "90 percent of



HET GOUDEN TIJDPERK



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Jehovah's Witnesses refused to divulge anything, while just a very small percentage of other groups had the strength to remain silent." An observation made by Dutch clergyman Johannes J. Buskes, who was imprisoned with some of the Witnesses, confirms Lages' statement. In 1951, Buskes wrote:

"Back then, I developed great respect for them because of their trust and the power of their faith. I will never forget the young man—he could not have been older than 19—who had distributed pamphlets that predicted the downfall of Hitler and the Third Reich. . . . He could have been released within half a year if he would promise to desist from such activity. This he very emphatically refused to do, and he was sentenced to indefinite forced la-

bor in Germany. We well knew what that meant. The next morning when he was taken away and we took leave of him, I told him we would think of him and pray for him. His only answer was: 'Do not worry about me. God's Kingdom will surely come.' A thing like that you do not forget, even if you have every possible objection against the teachings of these Jehovah's Witnesses."

Despite cruel opposition, the number of Witnesses kept increasing. While there were some 300 shortly before the second world war, the number had risen to 1,379 in 1943. Sadly, by the end of that same year, 54 of the more than 350 Witnesses who had been arrested had died in different concentration camps. As of 1944, there were 141 Jehovah's Witnesses from the Netherlands who were still held in various concentration camps.

Ver. van Bijbelvorsers opgeheven

Hoofd der veiligheidspolitie achte haar gevaarlijk

Den Haag, — Zaterdag.

Men deelt ons van bevoegde zijde mede:

Op grond van een Verordening van den Rijkscommissaris van 29 Mei 1940 heeft het hoofd der veiligheidspolitie de Internationale Vereniging van Bijbelvorsers in Nederland opgeheven. Voorts heeft hij inbeslagneming en verbeurdverklaring van de bezittingen dier vereniging en van haar nevenorganisaties („Wachttorenen" en bijbeltractaatverenigingen) gelast.

De Internationale Vereniging van Bijbelvorsers in Nederland en haar nevenorganisaties voeren in woord en geschrift onder de dekmantel van zogenaamd wetenschappelijk bijbelonderzoek een onmiskenbare „hetze" tegen alle staats- en kerkelijke instellingen. Terwijl deze vereniging beide instanties als organen van den satan beschouwt, ondergraaft zij de grondslagen van het gemeenschapsleven van het volk en tegelijk ook de autoriteit van de staat in anarchistische zin. Het voortbestaan van deze vereniging zou de openbare veiligheid en orde ernstig in gevaar hebben gebracht.

The Final Year of Nazi Persecution

After D day, June 6, 1944, the persecution of the Witnesses entered its final year. Militarily, the Nazis and their collaborators had their backs to the wall. One would think that in this situation the Nazis would give up running down innocent Christians. Yet, during that year, another 48 Witnesses were arrested, and 68 more of the imprisoned Witnesses perished. One of them was Jacob van Bennekom, mentioned earlier.

Eighteen-year-old Jacob was among the 580 persons who were baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses in 1941. Soon after that he quit a good job because it required that he compromise his Christian neutrality. He took a job as a messenger and began serving as a full-time minister. While transporting Bible literature, he was caught and arrested. In Au-

*Newspaper clipping on edict banning
Jehovah's Witnesses*

gust 1944, 21-year-old Jacob wrote his family from a prison in the city of Rotterdam:

"I am in very good condition and full of joy. . . . I have by now been interrogated four times. The first two times were quite severe, and I was badly beaten, but by the strength and the undeserved kindness of the Lord, I have till now been able not to divulge anything. . . . I have already been able to give talks here, six in all, with a total of 102 listening. Some of these show good interest and have promised that as soon as they are set free, they will continue with this."

On September 14, 1944, Jacob was taken to a concentration camp in the Dutch city of Amersfoort. Even there he kept on preaching. How? A fellow prisoner recalled: "Prisoners salvaged cigarette butts that the guards had thrown away and used pages of a Bible as cigarette paper. Sometimes Jacob succeeded in reading a few words from a Bible page that was about to be used to roll a cigarette. Right away, he would use these words as a basis for preaching to us. Before long, we nicknamed Jacob 'the Bible Man.'"

In October 1944, Jacob was among a large group of prisoners ordered to dig tank traps. Jacob refused to do the work because his conscience would not allow him to support the war effort. Though constantly threatened by the guards, he did not give in. On October 13 an officer took him from solitary confinement back to the work site. Again, Jacob stood his ground. Finally, Jacob was ordered to dig his own grave and was shot to death.

The Hunt for Witnesses Continues

The courageous stand of Jacob and others enraged the Nazis and triggered another hunt for the Witnesses. One of their targets was 18-year-old Evert Kettelarij. At first, Evert was able to get away and go into hiding, but later he was apprehended and severely beaten to make him give information about other Witnesses. He refused and was sent to Germany to do forced labor.

That same month, October 1944, the police

*Right: Bernard Luimes;
below: Albertus Bos
(left) and Antonie
Rehmeijer; bottom:
Society's office in
Heemstede*



went after Evert's brother-in-law, Bernard Luimes. When they found him, he was in the company of two other Witnesses—Antonie Rehmeijer and Albertus Bos. Albertus had already spent 14 months in a concentration camp. Yet, upon his release, he zealously resumed the preaching work. First the three men were mercilessly beaten by the Nazis, and then they were shot to death. It was only after the end of the war that their bodies were located and buried anew. Shortly after the war, several local newspapers reported this execution. One of the newspapers wrote that the three Witnesses had consistently refused to perform any service for the Nazis that was contrary to God's law and added that "for this, they had to pay with their lives."

Meanwhile, on November 10, 1944, Bernard Polman, mentioned earlier, was arrested and sent off to work on a military project. He was the only Witness among the forced laborers and the only one who refused to do this work. The guards tried different tactics to get him to compromise. He was not given any food. He was also cruelly beaten with clubs, a spade, and the butt of a rifle. In addition, he was forced to wade through knee-deep cold water, and then he was shut up in a damp basement, where he had to spend the night in his wet clothes. Still, Bernard did not give in.

During that time, two of Bernard's sisters, who were not Jehovah's Witnesses, were allowed to visit him. They urged him to change his mind, but that did not sway him in any way. When they asked Bernard if they could do something for him, he suggested that they go home and study the Bible. His persecutors then allowed his pregnant wife to visit him, hoping that she would break his resistance. But her presence and courageous words only served to strengthen Bernard's resolve to remain faithful to God. On November 17, 1944, Bernard was shot by five of his tormentors while all other forced laborers looked on. Even after Bernard was dead, his body riddled

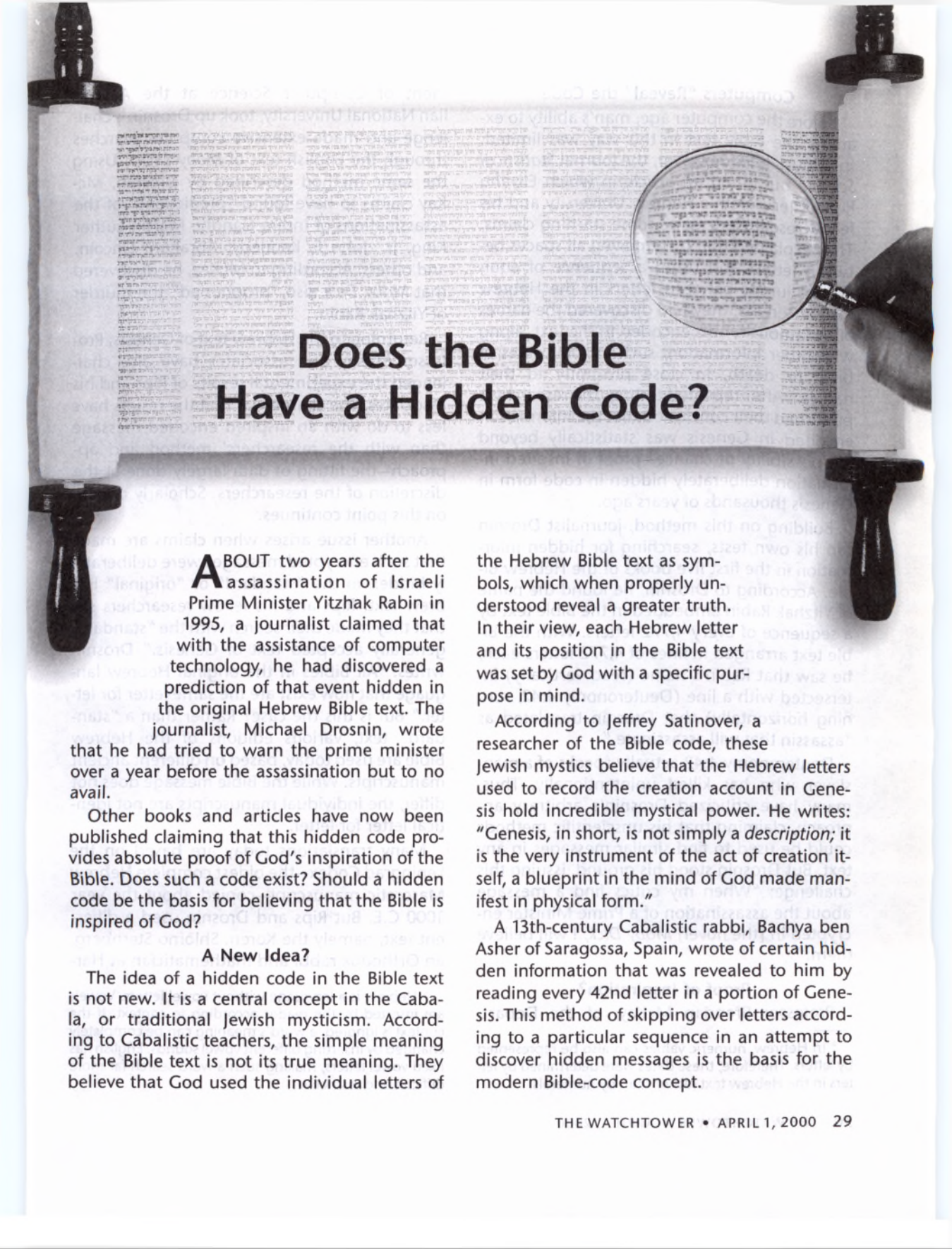
with bullets, the officer in charge became so enraged that he pulled out his revolver and shot Bernard through both his eyes.

Although this brutal treatment shocked the Witnesses who learned about the execution, they remained faithful and fearless and kept up their Christian activity. One small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, located near the area where Bernard was killed, reported shortly after the execution: "This month, in spite of much foul weather and the difficulties that Satan has put on our path, we have been able to gain much ground. The number of hours spent in the field went up from 429 to 765. . . . While preaching, one brother met a man to whom he was able to give a good witness. The man asked if this was the same faith as that of the man who had been shot. Upon hearing that it was, the man exclaimed: 'What a man, what a faith! That's what I call a hero in faith!'"

Remembered by Jehovah

In May 1945 the Nazis were defeated and driven from the Netherlands. Despite the relentless persecution during the war, the number of Jehovah's Witnesses had increased from a few hundred to over 2,000. Speaking about these wartime Witnesses, historian Dr. de Jong acknowledges: "The very great majority of them refused to deny their faith in spite of threats and torture."

It is with good reason, therefore, that some secular authorities have remembered Jehovah's Witnesses for the courageous stand they took in the face of Nazi rule. More important, however, the sterling record of these wartime Witnesses will be remembered by Jehovah and Jesus. (Hebrews 6:10) During the approaching Thousand Year Reign of Jesus Christ, these faithful and fearless Witnesses who gave their lives in God's service will be raised from the memorial tombs, with prospects of everlasting life in a paradise earth! —John 5:28, 29.



Does the Bible Have a Hidden Code?

ABOUT two years after the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, a journalist claimed that with the assistance of computer technology, he had discovered a prediction of that event hidden in the original Hebrew Bible text. The journalist, Michael Drosnin, wrote that he had tried to warn the prime minister over a year before the assassination but to no avail.

Other books and articles have now been published claiming that this hidden code provides absolute proof of God's inspiration of the Bible. Does such a code exist? Should a hidden code be the basis for believing that the Bible is inspired of God?

A New Idea?

The idea of a hidden code in the Bible text is not new. It is a central concept in the Cabala, or traditional Jewish mysticism. According to Cabalistic teachers, the simple meaning of the Bible text is not its true meaning. They believe that God used the individual letters of

the Hebrew Bible text as symbols, which when properly understood reveal a greater truth. In their view, each Hebrew letter and its position in the Bible text was set by God with a specific purpose in mind.

According to Jeffrey Satinover, a researcher of the Bible code, these Jewish mystics believe that the Hebrew letters used to record the creation account in Genesis hold incredible mystical power. He writes: "Genesis, in short, is not simply a *description*; it is the very instrument of the act of creation itself, a blueprint in the mind of God made manifest in physical form."

A 13th-century Cabalistic rabbi, Bachya ben Asher of Saragossa, Spain, wrote of certain hidden information that was revealed to him by reading every 42nd letter in a portion of Genesis. This method of skipping over letters according to a particular sequence in an attempt to discover hidden messages is the basis for the modern Bible-code concept.

Computers "Reveal" the Code

Before the computer age, man's ability to examine the Bible text in this way was limited. In August 1994, however, the journal *Statistical Science* published an article in which Eliyahu Rips of Jerusalem's Hebrew University and his fellow researchers made some startling claims. They explained that by removing all spaces between letters and using a sequence of equidistant jumps between letters in the Hebrew text of Genesis, they had discovered the names of 34 famous rabbis encoded in the text, along with other information, such as their dates of birth or death, in close proximity to their names.* After repeated testing, the researchers published their conclusion that the information encoded in Genesis was statistically beyond the possibility of chance—proof of inspired information deliberately hidden in code form in Genesis thousands of years ago.

Building on this method, journalist Drosnin ran his own tests, searching for hidden information in the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. According to Drosnin, he found the name of Yitzhak Rabin embedded in the Bible text by a sequence of every 4,772 letters. With the Bible text arranged in lines of 4,772 letters each, he saw that Rabin's name (read vertically) intersected with a line (Deuteronomy 4:42, running horizontally) that Drosnin translated as "assassin that will assassinate."

Deuteronomy 4:42 actually speaks of a man-slayer who has killed unintentionally. Thus, many have criticized Drosnin's arbitrary approach, claiming that his unscientific methods could be used to find similar messages in any text. But Drosnin stood his ground, issuing this challenge: "When my critics find a message about the assassination of a Prime Minister encrypted in [the novel] *Moby Dick*, I will believe them."

Proof of Inspiration?

Professor Brendan McKay, of the Depart-

* In Hebrew, numeric values can also be represented by letters. Therefore, these dates were determined by letters in the Hebrew text rather than by numerals.

ment of Computer Science at the Australian National University, took up Drosnin's challenge and made extensive computer searches through the English text of *Moby Dick*.^{*} Using the same method described by Drosnin, McKay claims to have found "predictions" of the assassinations of Indira Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., John F. Kennedy, Abraham Lincoln, and others. According to McKay, he discovered that *Moby Dick* also "prophesied" the murder of Yitzhak Rabin.

Returning to the Hebrew text of Genesis, Professor McKay and associates have also challenged the experimental results of Rips and his associates. The charge was that the results have less to do with an inspired encoded message than with the researchers' method and approach—the fitting of data largely done at the discretion of the researchers. Scholarly debate on this point continues.

Another issue arises when claims are made that such encrypted messages were deliberately hidden in the "standard" or "original" Hebrew text. Rips and his fellow researchers say that they made their search with the "standard, generally accepted text of Genesis." Drosnin writes: "All Bibles in the original Hebrew language that now exist are the same letter for letter." But is this the case? Rather than a "standard" text, various editions of the Hebrew Bible are used today, based on different ancient manuscripts. While the Bible message does not differ, the individual manuscripts are not identical letter for letter.

Many translations today are based on the Leningrad Codex—the oldest complete Hebrew Masoretic manuscript—copied about the year 1000 C.E. But Rips and Drosnin used a different text, namely the Koren. Shlomo Sternberg, an Orthodox rabbi and mathematician at Har-

* Hebrew is a language without vowel letters. Vowels are inserted by the reader according to context. If the context is ignored, a word's meaning can be completely changed by inserting different vowel sounds. English has fixed vowel letters, making such a word search far more difficult and restrictive.

vard University, explains that the Leningrad Codex “differs from the Koren edition used by Drosnin by 41 letters in Deuteronomy alone.” The Dead Sea Scrolls include portions of the Bible text copied over 2,000 years ago. The spelling in these scrolls often differs considerably from later Masoretic texts. In some scrolls, certain letters were freely added to indicate vowel sounds, since vowel points had not yet been invented. In other scrolls, fewer letters were used. A comparison between all extant Biblical manuscripts shows that the meaning of the Bible text remains intact. Yet, it also clearly indicates that the spelling and number of letters vary from text to text.

The search for a supposed hidden message depends upon an absolutely unchanging text. One letter altered would completely distort the sequence—and the message if there was one. God has preserved his message through the Bible. But he has not preserved each letter intact, as if he were obsessed with such trivial matters as spelling changes over the course of centuries. Does this not indicate that he has not buried a hidden message in the Bible?—Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:24, 25.

Do We Need a Hidden Bible Code?

The apostle Paul very clearly wrote that “all Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) The clear and straightforward message in the Bible is not too difficult to understand or apply, but many people choose to ignore it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14) The prophecies that are openly presented in the Bible give a solid basis for be-

lieving its inspiration.* Unlike a hidden code, Bible prophecies are not arbitrary, and they do not ‘spring from any private interpretation.’ —2 Peter 1:19-21.

The apostle Peter wrote that “it was not by following artfully contrived false stories that we acquainted you with the power and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 1:16) The concept of a Bible code has its roots in Jewish mysticism, utilizing “artfully contrived” methods that obscure and distort the plain meaning of the Bible’s inspired text. The Hebrew Scriptures themselves unequivocally condemned such a mystical approach.—Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:9-13.

How happy we are to have the Bible’s clear message and instruction, which can help us to know God! This is far better than trying to learn about our Creator by searching for hidden messages that are the products of private interpretation and computer-assisted imagination.—Matthew 7:24, 25.

* For more information on the Bible’s inspiration and its prophecies, see the brochure *A Book for All People*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



A Special Occasion

Will You Be There?



ON A memorable day over 3,500 years ago, Jehovah God had each household of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt kill a lamb or a goat and sprinkle its blood on the doorposts and lintels of their houses. That very night, God's angel *passed over* the houses marked in this way but killed the firstborn sons in the homes of all the Egyptians. The Israelites were then freed. On the anniversary of that event, Jews have celebrated the Passover.

Immediately after Jesus Christ finished celebrating his last Passover with his apostles, he instituted a meal that would memorialize his sacrificial death. He handed his apostles unleavened bread and said: "Take, eat. This means my body." Then he gave them a cup of wine and said: "Drink out of it, all of you; for this means my 'blood of the covenant,' which is to be poured out in behalf of many for forgiveness of sins." Jesus also said: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me." (Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19, 20) So Jesus commanded his followers to hold this observance of his death.

This year the anniversary of Jesus' death falls on Wednesday, April 19, after sunset. Jehovah's Witnesses around the world will gather on this special night to observe this Memorial in the manner Jesus requested. You are most warmly invited to join us as observers. Please check with Jehovah's Witnesses locally for the exact time and place of the meeting.