APRIL 15, 2000

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

You Can Find *Comfort*

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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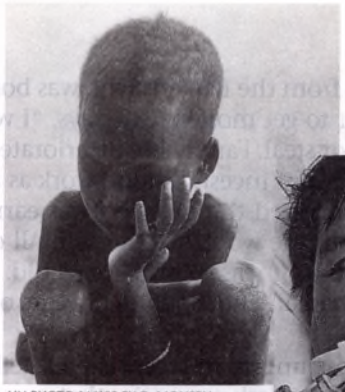

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So Much Need for Comfort!

"Look! the tears of those being oppressed, but they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power, so that they had no comforter."—ECCLESIASTES 4:1.

ARE you looking for comfort? Are you yearning for a ray of consolation to break through the dark clouds of despair? Are you craving a crumb of solace to sweeten a life marred by bitter suffering and unsavory experiences?

At one time or another, we all sorely need comfort and encouragement. This is because there are so many things in life that bring sadness. We all need to be sheltered, warmed, embraced. Some of us have grown old and are not happy about that. Others are deeply disappointed that life has not turned out as was hoped. Still others have been shaken by a report that has come back from a pathology lab.

Moreover, few would contest that events in our time have created a vast need for comfort and hope. During the past century alone, more than a hundred million people have died in war.* Almost all of them left behind a grieving family—mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, widows and orphans—in desperate need of solace. Today, over a billion people live in extreme poverty. Half the world's population lack regular access to medical treatment and essential drugs. On the streets of polluted megacities wander millions of abandoned children, many of whom use drugs and practice prostitution. Millions of refugees languish in horrible camps.

However, numbers—as compelling as they may be—do not bespeak the individual pain and affliction that some are experiencing in their personal life. Consider, for instance, Svetlana, a

* The actual number of military personnel and civilians who have died is not known. For example, the 1998 book *Facts About the American Wars* notes about World War II alone: "Most sources give the total number of those who died because of World War II (military and civilian) as 50 million but many who have studied the subject closely believe that the truer figure is higher—up to twice that number."

young woman from the Balkans who was born into abject poverty.* "In order to get money," she says, "I was sent out by my parents to beg or steal. Family life deteriorated to the point that I became a victim of incest. I found work as a waitress, and my mother, who received the money I was earning, said that if I ever lost my job, she would kill herself. All of this led me to a life of prostitution. I was only 13 years old. In time, I became pregnant and had an abortion. At 15 years of age, I looked like a 30-year-old."

Laimonis, a young man from Latvia, tells of the need for comfort and of the dark memories that caused him to be grim. At the age of 29, he had a car accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. He felt completely hopeless and turned to alcohol. Five years later he was a wreck—a paralyzed alcoholic with no future. From where could he draw comfort?

Or think of Angie. Her husband underwent three brain surgeries that had at first left him partially paralyzed. Then, five years after the last surgery, he was in a very serious accident, one that could have killed him. As his wife entered the emergency room and saw her husband lying there in a coma after having sustained a very serious head injury, she knew that a tragedy was impending. The road ahead for her and her family was going to be rough. How could she find support and encouragement?

For Pat, a winter day some years ago seemed to start off normally. The next three days, however, have been erased from her memory. Her husband later told her that after having severe chest pains, she went into full cardiac arrest. Her heart started beating very rapidly and erratically, and then it stopped beating altogether. Her breathing stopped. "I was actually clinically dead," says Pat. But she somehow survived. Of her long stay in the hospital, she says: "I was frightened by many of the tests, especially when they tried to make my heart fibrillate and stop, as it had done originally." What could provide her with the needed solace and relief during this critical time?

Joe and Rebecca lost their 19-year-old son in an automobile accident. "We have never had to deal with anything so devastating," they say. "Although we, in the past, have mourned with others over their losses, we did not truly feel the great pain of heart that we do now." What could possibly soothe such a "great pain of heart"—the extreme grief over losing someone whom you dearly love?

All these individuals, and millions of others, have indeed found a surpassing source of comfort and solace. To see how you too can benefit from that source, please read on.

* The name has been changed.

TO ALL of those yearning for solace, the Bible has words of comfort. Little wonder, then, that *The World Book Encyclopedia* says that "countless people have turned to the Bible for comfort, hope, and guidance during times of trouble and uncertainty." Why?

Because the Bible is inspired by our loving Creator, "the God of all comfort," the One "who comforts us in all our tribulation." (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) He is 'the God who supplies comfort.' (Romans 15:5) Jehovah has set the example in providing a means of relief for all of us. He sent his only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, to the earth to give us hope and consolation. Jesus taught: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) The Bible describes Jehovah as the one "who daily carries the load for us, the true God of our salvation." (Psalm 68:19) God-fearing humans can confidently say: "I have placed Je-

Take Comfort in Jehovah's Strength

"When my disquieting thoughts became many inside of me, your own consolations began to fondle my soul."—PSALM 94:19.

hovah in front of me constantly. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be made to totter."—Psalm 16:8.

Such Bible passages show the deep love that Jehovah God has for us humans. It becomes clear that he has the heartfelt desire—as well as the ability—to provide abundant comfort and to ease our pain in times of distress. "He is giving to the tired one power; and to the one without dynamic energy he makes full might abound." (Isaiah 40:29) How, then, can we take comfort in Jehovah's strength?

The Soothing Effect of Jehovah's Care

The psalmist wrote: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself, and he himself will sustain you. Never will he allow the righteous one to totter." (Psalm 55:22) Yes, Jehovah God has an interest in the human family. The apostle Peter reassured first-century Christians: "He [God] cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Jesus Christ stressed the value that God places on humans by saying: "Five sparrows sell for two coins of small value, do they not? Yet not one of them goes forgotten before God. But even the hairs of your heads are all numbered. Have no fear; you are worth more than many sparrows." (Luke 12:6, 7) We are of such worth to God that he takes note of even the minutest detail about us. He knows things that we ourselves do not know because he is deeply interested in each of us.

Sensing this personal interest of Jehovah proved very comforting to Svetlana, the young prostitute mentioned in the preceding article. She was about to commit suicide when she came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses. Then she accepted a Bible study, which helped her to become acquainted with Jehovah as a real person who is interested in her welfare. This touched her heart, motivating her to change her way of life and to dedicate herself to God. It also gave Svetlana the necessary measure of self-worth that she needed to press on despite her problems and to get a positive outlook on life. "I am convinced," she now says, "that Jehovah will never leave me. I have found that what is written at 1 Peter 5:7 is true. It says: 'Throw all your anxiety upon [Jehovah], because he cares for you.'"

Bible-Based Hope Comforts

A particular way in which God provides comfort is through his written Word, which contains a marvelous hope for the future. The apostle Paul wrote: "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) Paul made clear the link between true hope and comfort when he wrote: "May . . . God our Father, who loved us and gave everlasting comfort and good hope by means of undeserved kindness, comfort your hearts and make you firm in every good deed and word." (2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17) This "good hope" includes the prospect of perfect, happy, and unending life on a paradise earth.—2 Peter 3:13.

Such a sure and bright hope inspirited Laimonis, the alcoholic paralytic mentioned in the preceding article. Reading Bible-based

literature of Jehovah's Witnesses, he rejoiced to learn about the new world under God's Kingdom, where his health could be completely restored. In the Bible, he read the following bright promise of miraculous healing: "At that time the eyes of the blind ones will be opened, and the very ears of the deaf ones will be unstopped. At that time the lame one will climb up just as a stag does, and the tongue of the speechless one will cry out in gladness." (Isaiah 35:5, 6) In order to qualify for life in that Paradise, Laimonis made great changes. He turned from liquor, and his transformation has not gone unnoticed by his neighbors and acquaintances. He now conducts several Bible studies, sharing with others the comfort that Bible-based hope gives.

The Role of Prayer

When our heart is in pain for some reason, we can find comfort by praying to Jehovah. That can take the load off us. During our supplications, we may be comforted by recalling things said in God's Word. The longest psalm in the Bible is like a beautiful prayer. Its composer sang: "I have remembered your judicial decisions from time indefinite, O Jehovah, and I find comfort for myself." (Psalm 119:52) In extremely difficult situations, especially ones that involve a health crisis, there often is no single, all-encompassing answer. In our own strength, we may not know exactly where to turn. Many have found that when all that is humanly possible was done, turning to God in prayer resulted in great comfort and, at times, in unforeseen solutions. —1 Corinthians 10:13.

Pat, who was rushed to a hospital emergency room, experienced this comforting effect of prayer. After she recuperated, she said: "I prayed to Jehovah and really learned that I had to leave my life in his hands, trusting him to do whatever was his will. During all this time, I felt calm; I was experiencing the peace of God mentioned at Philippians 4:6, 7." How comforting these verses can be to all of us! There Paul admonishes us: "Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus."

The Holy Spirit as Comforter

On the night before his death, Jesus made it clear to his apostles that he would soon be leaving them. This troubled and grieved them. (John 13:33, 36; 14:27-31) Recognizing their need for continued comfort, Jesus promised: "I will request the Father and he will give you another helper [or, comforter] to be with you forever." (John 14:16; footnote) Jesus here was referring to God's holy spirit. Among other things, God's spirit comforted the apostles during their trials and strengthened them to continue doing God's will.—Acts 4:31.

Angie, whose husband came close to death after a serious accident, was able to cope successfully with all the distress and pain of her situation. What helped her? She says: "Without the support of Jehovah's holy spirit, we could not have gone through what we have experienced and remained strong. Jehovah's strength has indeed been made manifest through our weaknesses, and he has proved to be a fortress in our time of distress."

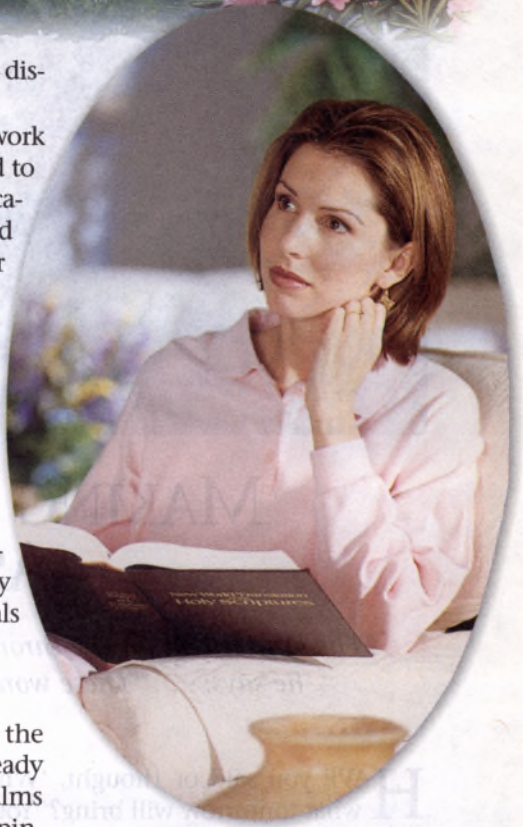
A Comforting Brotherhood

Whatever an individual's situation in life may be, no matter what painful circumstances may develop, he should be able to find comfort in the brotherhood existing within Jehovah's congregation. This brotherhood provides spiritual support and assistance for those associated with it. Therein, one can find a group of loving, concerned, and comforting friends, who are

ready and willing to help and console others in times of distress.—2 Corinthians 7:5-7.

Members of the Christian congregation are taught to "work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to [them] in the faith." (Galatians 6:10) The Bible-based education they receive moves them to manifest brotherly love and tender affection for one another. (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 3:8) Spiritual brothers and sisters in the congregation are moved to be kind, comforting, and tenderly compassionate.—Ephesians 4:32.

Joe and Rebecca, who tragically lost their son in death, experienced such comforting support from members of the Christian congregation. They say: "Jehovah and his loving congregation have helped us through our difficult time. Hundreds of cards, letters, and telephone calls were received. This makes us appreciate how precious our brotherhood is. While we were in a daze from the tragedy, many local congregations came to our assistance, providing meals and cleaning the house."



The Bible-based hope for the future can provide comfort

Take Comfort!

When the gusting winds of adversity begin to howl, and the merciless rain and hail of distress keep pounding, God is ready to provide consoling protection. This is how one of the psalms describes him as providing comforting shelter: "With his pinions he will block approach to you, and under his wings you will take refuge." (Psalm 91:4) The image here may be that of an eagle. It is a picture of a bird that senses danger and then protectively spreads its wings over its young. In an even greater sense, Jehovah becomes a true Protector for all who find refuge in him.—Psalm 7:1.

If you wish to learn more about God, his personality, his purposes, and his ability to provide comfort, you are invited to study his Word. Jehovah's Witnesses will be happy to help you in that endeavor. Yes, you too can take comfort in Jehovah's strength!

MAKING ALL THINGS NEW —AS FORETOLD

"The One seated on the throne said: 'Look! I am making all things new.' Also, he says: . . . 'These words are faithful and true.'"—REVELATION 21:5.

HAVE you said or thought, 'Who knows what tomorrow will bring?' You can understand why people hesitate to guess what the future will bring or to trust in those who might brashly claim to foretell what lies ahead. Humans simply do not have the ability to predict accurately what will occur in the months or years to come.

[2] The magazine *Forbes ASAP* devoted an issue to time. In it, TV documentary host Robert Cringely wrote: "Time eventually humiliates us all, but no one suffers at the hands of time more than prognosticators. Trying to guess the future is a game we nearly always lose. . . . Still, the so-called experts continue to make predictions."

[3] You may have observed that with so much attention being paid to the new millennium, it may seem that more people are thinking about the future. At the beginning of last year, *Maclean's* magazine said: "The year 2000

1, 2. Why are many people rightly hesitant to consider what the future holds?

3, 4. (a) Some have what optimism about the new millennium? (b) What realistic expectation do others have about the future?

may be just another year on the calendar for most Canadians, but it could happen to coincide with a truly new beginning." Professor Chris Dewdney of York University gave this reason for optimism: "The millennium means that we can wash our hands of a really terrible century."

4 Does that sound like mere wishful thinking? In Canada only 22 percent of those who responded to one poll "believe that 2000 will usher in a new beginning for the world." In fact, almost half "expect another world conflict"—world war—within 50 years. Clearly, most sense that a new millennium cannot banish our problems, making all things new. Sir Michael Atiyah, former president of Britain's Royal Society, wrote: "The rapid pace of change . . . means that the twenty-first century will bring crucial challenges to our whole civilization. The problems of population growth, resource limitation, environmental pollution, and widespread poverty are already upon us and have to be grappled with as a matter of urgency."

5 You may wonder, 'Since men cannot foretell what our future holds, should we not just ignore the future?' The answer is no! Granted, men cannot accurately foretell what lies ahead, but we should not think that no one can. Well, who can, and why should we be optimistic about the future? You can find satisfying answers in four specific predictions. They are recorded in the most widely owned and read book, which is also widely misunderstood and ignored—the Bible. Whatever you think of the Bible, and no matter how well acquainted with it you may be, you owe it to yourself to consider these four fundamental texts. They actually foretell a future that is very bright. Moreover, these four key prophecies outline what your future and that of your loved ones can be.

5. Where can we find reliable information about what lies ahead?

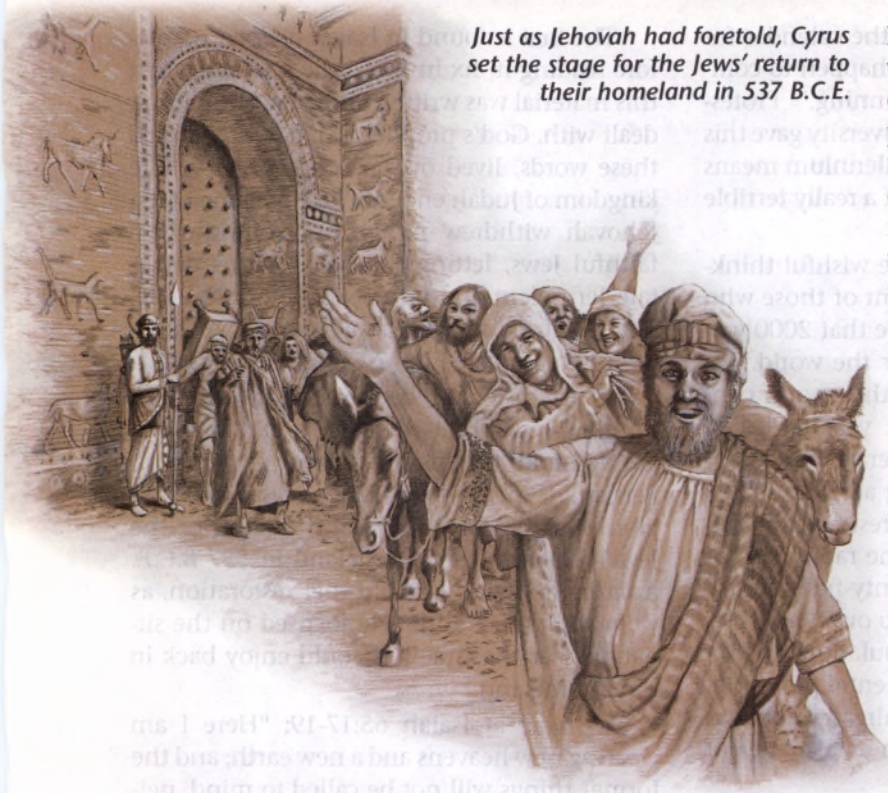
6 The first is found in Isaiah chapter 65. Before reading it, fix in mind the setting—when this material was written and what situation it dealt with. God's prophet Isaiah, who penned these words, lived over a century before the kingdom of Judah ended. The end came when Jehovah withdrew protection from the unfaithful Jews, letting the Babylonians devastate Jerusalem and take its people into exile. That occurred more than a hundred years after Isaiah predicted it.—2 Chronicles 36:15-21.

7 As to historical background of the fulfillment, recall that with God's guidance Isaiah foretold the name of the yet unborn Persian, Cyrus, who finally overthrew Babylon. (Isaiah 45:1) Cyrus set the stage for the Jews' return to their homeland in 537 B.C.E. Amazingly, Isaiah foretold that restoration, as we read in chapter 65. He focused on the situation that the Israelites could enjoy back in their homeland.

8 We read at Isaiah 65:17-19: "Here I am creating new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be called to mind, neither will they come up into the heart. But exult, you people, and be joyful forever in what I am creating. For here I am creating Jerusalem a cause for joyfulness and her people a cause for exultation. And I will be joyful in Jerusalem and exult in my people; and no more will there be heard in her the sound of weeping or the sound of a plaintive cry." Certainly, Isaiah described conditions that were far better than those the Jews had lived under in Babylon. He foretold joyfulness and rejoicing. Now look at the expression "new heavens and a new earth." This is the first of four occurrences of that phrase in the Bible, and these four passages can have a direct bearing on our future, even foretelling it.

6, 7. When did Isaiah prophesy, and how did his predictions have an amazing fulfillment?

8. Isaiah foretold what happy future, and what expression is of particular interest?



Just as Jehovah had foretold, Cyrus set the stage for the Jews' return to their homeland in 537 B.C.E.

[9] The initial fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17-19 involved the ancient Jews who, as Isaiah accurately predicted, did return to their homeland, where they reestablished pure worship. (Ezra 1:1-4; 3:1-4) You realize, of course, that they returned to a homeland on the same planet, not somewhere else in the universe. That realization can help us to see what Isaiah meant by new heavens and a *new earth.* We do not have to speculate, as some do, about vague prophecies of Nostradamus or other human prognosticators. The Bible itself clarifies what Isaiah meant.

[10] In the Bible, "earth" does not always refer to our globe. For instance, Psalm 96:1 says literally: 'Sing to Jehovah, all the earth.' We know that our planet—the terra firma and the vast oceans—cannot sing. People sing. Yes, Psalm 96:1 is referring to the people on the earth.* But Isaiah 65:17 also mentions "new heavens." If the "earth" represents a new society of people in the Jews' homeland, what are the "new heavens"?

[11] The *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature,* by M'Clintock and Strong, states: "Wherever the *scene* of a prophetic vision is laid, *heaven* signifies . . . the whole assembly of the ruling powers . . . being over and ruling the subjects, as the natural heaven stands over and rules the earth." As to the combination phrase "heaven and earth," the *Cyclopædia* explains that 'in prophetic language the phrase signifies the political condition of persons of different ranks. The heaven is the sovereignty; the earth is the peasantry, men who are ruled by superiors.'

[12] When the Jews returned to their homeland, they gained what might be called a new system of things. There was a new ruling body. Zerubbabel, a descendant of King David, was governor, and Joshua was high priest. (Haggai 1:1, 12; 2:21; Zechariah 6:11) These constituted "new heavens." Over what? The "new heavens" were over "a new earth," the cleansed so-

9. How were the ancient Jews involved in a fulfillment of Isaiah 65:17-19?
10. How are we to understand the new "earth" that Isaiah foretold?

* *The New English Bible* renders Psalm 96:1: "Sing to the LORD, all men on earth." *The Contemporary English Version* reads: "Everyone on this earth, sing praises to the LORD." This accords with the understanding that by "new earth" Isaiah was referring to God's people in their land.

11. To what did the phrase "new heavens" point?
12. How did the ancient Jews experience "new heavens and a new earth"?

ciety of people who were back in their land in order to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple for worshiping Jehovah. Hence, in this real sense, there were new heavens and a new earth in the fulfillment involving the Jews at that time.

13 Take care not to miss the point. This is neither an exercise in Biblical interpretation nor a mere glance at ancient history. You can see this by moving to another occurrence of the phrase "new heavens and a new earth." In 2 Peter chapter 3, you will find this occurrence and see that our future is involved.

14 The apostle Peter wrote his letter over 500 years after the Jews returned to their homeland. As one of Jesus' apostles, Peter was writing to the followers of Christ, "the Lord" mentioned at 2 Peter 3:2. In verse 4, Peter brings up Jesus' "promised presence," which makes the prophecy very pertinent today. Ample evidence shows that since World War I, Jesus has been present in the sense of having authority as Ruler in God's heavenly Kingdom. (Revelation 6:1-8; 11:15, 18) This takes on special meaning in view of something else that Peter foretold in this chapter.

15 We read at 2 Peter 3:13: "There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." You may already have learned that Jesus in heaven is the key Ruler in the "new heavens." (Luke 1:32, 33) Yet, other Bible texts indicate that he does not rule alone. Jesus promised that the apostles and some others like them would have a place in heaven. In the book of Hebrews, the apostle Paul described such ones as "partakers of the *heavenly* calling." And Jesus said that those of this group would sit on thrones in heaven with him. (Hebrews 3:1; Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; John 14:2, 3) The point is that others reign with Jesus as part of the new heavens. Then what did Peter mean by the term "new earth"?

13, 14. (a) What other instance of the phrase "new heavens and a new earth" should we consider? (b) Why is Peter's prophecy of particular interest at this time?

15. How is Peter's prophecy about the "new heavens" finding fulfillment?

16 As with the ancient fulfillment—the return of the Jews to their homeland—the current fulfillment of 2 Peter 3:13 involves people who submit to rulership by the new heavens. You can find millions today who are gladly submitting to such rulership. They are benefiting from its educational program and striving to follow its laws found in the Bible. (Isaiah 54:13) These make up the basis of "a new earth" in the sense that they form a global society of all nationalities, languages, and races, and they work together in submission to the reigning King, Jesus Christ. A significant fact is that you can be part of this! —Micah 4:1-4.

17 Do not feel that this is the end of matters, that we do not have any detailed insight into the future. In fact, as you examine the context of 2 Peter chapter 3, you will find indications of a great change ahead. In verses 5 and 6, Peter writes about the Flood of Noah's day, the Deluge that ended the wicked world back then. In verse 7, Peter mentions that "the heavens and the earth that are now," both the rulerships and the masses of people, are reserved for "the day of judgment and of destruction of *the ungodly men.*" This confirms that the phrase "the heavens and the earth that are now" refers, not to the material universe, but to humans and their rulerships.

18 Peter explains thereafter that the coming day of Jehovah will bring about a great cleansing, making way for the new heavens and new earth mentioned in verse 13. Note the end of that verse—"in these righteousness is to dwell." Does that not suggest that some major changes for the better must occur? Does it not raise the prospect of really new

16. What "new earth" already exists?

17, 18. Why do the words at 2 Peter 3:13 give us reason to look to the future?

things, a time when humans will find greater enjoyment in living than they do today? If you can see that, then you have gained insight into what the Bible foretells, insight that relatively few have.

19 But let us go further. We have looked at the occurrence of the phrase "new heavens and a new earth" in Isaiah chapter 65 and another instance in 2 Peter chapter 3. Now turn to Revelation chapter 21, which contains one other occurrence of this expression in the Bible. Again, understanding the setting will help. Two chapters before, in Revelation chapter 19, we find described in vivid symbolism a war—but not a war between hostile nations. On one side is "The Word of God." You likely recognize that as a title of Jesus Christ. (John 1:1, 14) He is in heaven, and this vision depicts him with his heavenly armies. Battling against whom? The chapter mentions "kings," "military commanders," and people of various ranks, both "small ones and great." This battle involves the coming day of Jehovah, the destruction of wickedness. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10) Moving on, Revelation chapter 20 opens by describing the removal of "the original serpent, who is the Devil and Satan." This sets the stage for considering Revelation chapter 21.

19. In what setting does the book of Revelation point to "new heavens and a new earth" yet to come?

What Do You Recall?

- What are three instances where the Bible foretells "new heavens and a new earth"?
- How were the ancient Jews involved in a fulfillment of "new heavens and a new earth"?
- What fulfillments are understood for "new heavens and a new earth" as mentioned by Peter?
- How does Revelation chapter 21 point us toward a bright future?

20 The apostle John begins with the thrilling words: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea is no more." Based on what we have seen in Isaiah chapter 65 and 2 Peter chapter 3, we can be sure that this does not mean replacing the literal heavens and our planet, with its watery deep. As the preceding chapters showed, wicked people and their rulerships, including the invisible ruler Satan, will be removed. Yes, the promise here is of a new system of things involving people on earth.

21 We are assured of this as we move into this wonderful prophecy. The end of verse 3 speaks of the time when God will be with mankind, turning his beneficent attention toward people doing his will. (Ezekiel 43:7) John continues in verses 4, 5: "He [Jehovah] 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. And the One seated on the throne said: 'Look! I am making all things new.' Also, he says: 'Write, because these words are faithful and true.' " What an uplifting prophecy!

22 Pause to savor what the Bible is foretelling. 'God will wipe out every tear from their eyes.' That cannot refer to normal tears that wash our sensitive eyes, nor can it refer to tears of joy. No, the tears that God will wipe out are tears caused by suffering, grief, disappointment, hurt, and agony. How can we be sure? Well, this remarkable promise of God links wiping out tears with 'death, mourning, outcry, and pain being no more.' —John 11:35.

20. Revelation 21:1 indicates that what significant change lies ahead?

21, 22. Of what blessings does John assure us, and what does the wiping out of tears mean?

[23] Does this not prove that cancer, strokes, heart attacks, and even death will have been eliminated? Who of us has not lost a loved one to some disease, accident, or disaster? God here promises that death will be no more, which suggests that the children who might be born then will not have to face the prospect of growing up and then getting old—ending in death. This prophecy also means no more Alzheimer's disease, osteoporosis, fibroid tumors, glaucoma, or even cataracts—so common in old age.

[24] You would no doubt agree that mourning and outcry would decrease with the removal of death, old age, and disease. Yet, what about grinding poverty, child abuse, and oppressive discrimination based on background or skin color? Were such things—common today—to continue, we would not be rid of mourning and outcry. Thus, life under "a new heaven and a new earth" will not be marred by these present causes of sorrow. What a change! We have, though, considered so far only three of the four occurrences in the Bible of the phrase "new heavens and a new earth." There is one more that ties in with what we have examined and that underscores why we have reason to look forward to when and how God will fulfill his promise to 'make all things new.' The following article deals with that prophecy and what it can mean for our happiness.

23. The end of what conditions is guaranteed by John's prophecy?
24. How will the 'new heaven and new earth' prove to be a blessing, and what will we yet consider?

THE NEW WORLD —WILL YOU BE THERE?

"There is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good during one's life; and also that every man should eat and indeed drink and see good for all his hard work. It is the gift of God."—ECCLESIASTES 3:12, 13.

MANY people think of Almighty God as severe, stern. Yet, the above text is a truth that you will find in his inspired Word. It accords with his being "the happy God" and with his placing our first parents in an earthly paradise. (1 Timothy 1:11; Genesis 2: 7-9) When seeking insight into the future that God promises for his people, we should not be surprised to learn of conditions that will bring us lasting enjoyment.

[2] In the preceding article, we examined three of the four instances where the Bible foretells "new heavens and a new earth." (Isaiah 65:17) One of those reliable predictions is recorded at Revelation 21:1. The subsequent verses tell of the time when Almighty God will drastically change earthly conditions for the better. He will wipe out tears of grief. No more will people die from old age, sickness, or accidents. Mourning, outcry, and pain will be gone. What a delightful prospect! But can we be sure that it will come, and what impact could that prospect have on us right now?

1. Why can we be optimistic about the future?
2. What are some things that you look forward to?

Reasons for Confidence

[3] Note how Revelation 21:5 continues. It quotes God, seated on his heavenly throne, as declaring: "Look! I am making all things new." That divine promise is better than any national declaration of independence, any present-day bill of rights, or any human aspiration for the future. It is an absolutely reliable declaration by the One who the Bible says "cannot lie." (Titus 1:2) Understandably, you might feel that we could stop right here, relishing this exquisite prospect and trusting God. But we need not stop. There is more for us to learn about our future.

[4] Reflect on what the preceding article established as to the Bible's promises of new heavens and a new earth. Isaiah foretold such a new system, and his prophecy had a fulfillment when the Jews returned to their homeland and reestablished true worship. (Ezra 1: 1-3; 2:1, 2; 3:12, 13) Yet, was that all that Isaiah's prophecy pointed to? Definitely not! The things he foretold would be fulfilled in a grander way in the distant future. Why do we reach that conclusion? Because of what we read at 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21: 1-5. Those passages point to new heavens and a new earth that will benefit Christians on a global scale.

[5] As noted earlier, the Bible uses the phrase "new heavens and a new earth" four times. We have considered three of these and have reached encouraging conclusions. Pointedly, the Bible foretells that God will eliminate wickedness and other causes of suffering and that he will then further bless mankind in his promised new system.

[6] Let us now examine the remaining instance of the expression "new heavens and a new earth," at Isaiah 66:22-24: "'Just as the new heavens and the new earth that I am making are standing before me,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'so the offspring of you people and the name of you people will keep standing. And it will certainly occur that from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath all flesh will come in to bow down before me,' Jehovah has said. 'And they will actually go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that were transgressing against me; for the very worms upon them will not die and their fire itself will not be extinguished, and they must become something repulsive to all flesh.'"

[7] This prophecy had an application among the Jews reestablished in their land, but there would be another fulfillment. That had to be down the stream of time from when Peter's second letter and the book of Revelation were written, for they pointed to a future 'new heaven and earth.' We can look for that grand and complete fulfillment in the new system. Consider some of the conditions that we can look forward to enjoying.

[8] Revelation 21:4 indicated that death will be no more. The passage in Isaiah chapter 66 agrees with that. We can see from verse 22 that Jehovah knows that the new heavens and the new earth will not be temporary, of limited duration. Furthermore, his people will endure; they will "keep standing" before him. What God has already done for his chosen people gives us reason for confidence. True Christians have faced vicious persecution, even fanatical efforts to wipe them out. (John 16:2; Acts 8:1) Yet, even very power-

3. Why can we trust the Bible's promises about the future?

4, 5. What Bible prophecies already considered can bolster our confidence about what lies ahead?

6. What does a fourth prophecy mentioning "new heavens and a new earth" foretell?

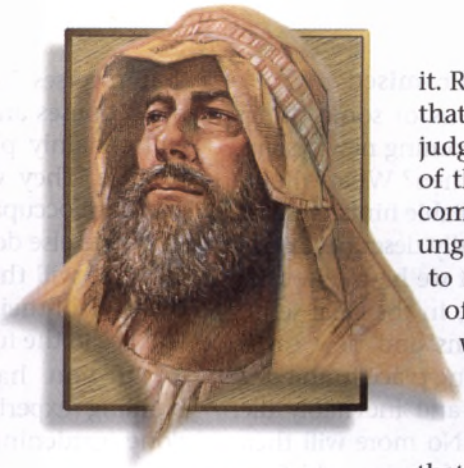
7. Why should we conclude that Isaiah 66:22-24 will have a fulfillment in coming days?

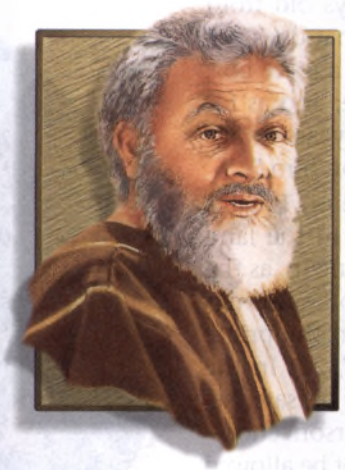
8, 9. (a) In what sense will God's people "keep standing"? (b) What is the import of the prophecy that Jehovah's servants will worship "from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath"?

ful enemies of God's people, such as Roman Emperor Nero and Adolf Hitler, have not been able to eradicate God's loyal ones, who bear his name. Jehovah has preserved the congregation of his people, and we can be sure that he can keep it standing lastingly.

[9] Similarly, those faithful to God as part of the new earth, the society of true worshipers in the new world, will keep standing individually because they will be rendering pure worship to the Creator of all things. That will not be occasional or haphazard worship. God's Law, provided to Israel through Moses, called for certain acts of worship each month, as marked by the new moon, and each week, as marked by the Sabbath day. (Leviticus 24:5-9; Numbers 10:10; 28: 9, 10; 2 Chronicles 2:4) So Isaiah 66:23 points to regular, ongoing worship of God, week after week and month after month. Atheism and religious hypocrisy will not exist then. "All flesh will come in to bow down before" Jehovah.

[10] Isaiah 66:24 assures us that the peace and righteousness of the new earth will never be in danger. Wicked people will not ruin it. Recall that 2 Peter 3:7 says that ahead of us is "the day of judgment and of destruction of the ungodly men." Those coming to their end will be ungodly. No harm will come to innocents, unlike what often happens in human wars, where civilian casualties outnumber military ones. The Great Judge guarantees us that his day will be a destruction of the *ungodly.*





Isaiah, Peter, and John foretold aspects of the "new heavens and a new earth"

[11] The surviving righteous ones will see that God's prophetic word is true. Verse 24 foretells that "the carcasses of the men that were transgressing against" Jehovah will be proof of his judgment. The graphic language Isaiah used may seem shocking. Yet, it is consistent with a historical fact. Outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem were dumps for garbage and, occasionally, for the corpses of executed criminals judged unfit for a decent burial.* There the worms and incinerating fire would soon eliminate both the garbage and those corpses. Evidently, Isaiah's imagery illustrates the finality of Jehovah's judgment on transgressors.

10. Why can you be confident that the new world will not be permanently marred by wicked ones?

* See *Insight on the Scriptures,* Volume 1, page 906, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

11. What does Isaiah show will be the future of any who turn against God and his worship?

What He Has Promised

[12] Revelation 21:4 tells us of some things that will *not* exist in the coming new system. However, what *will* exist then? What will life be like? Can we get any reliable hints? Yes. Isaiah chapter 65 prophetically describes conditions that we will enjoy if we have Jehovah's approval to live when he, in the final sense, creates these new heavens and new earth. Those blessed with a lasting place in the new earth will not grow old and inevitably die. Isaiah 65:20 assures us: "No more will there come to be a suckling a few days old from that place, neither an old man that does not fulfill his days; for one will die as a mere boy, although a hundred years of age; and as for the sinner, although a hundred years of age he will have evil called down upon him."

[13] When this was first fulfilled on Isaiah's people, it meant that the babes in the land were safe. No enemies were coming in, as the Babylonians once did, to carry off sucklings or to cut down men who were in the prime of their life. (2 Chronicles 36:17, 20) In the coming new world, people will be safe, secure, able to enjoy life. If a person chooses to rebel against God, he will not be allowed to continue living. God will remove him. What if the rebellious sinner is a hundred years old? He will die "as a mere boy" compared to having endless life.—1 Timothy 1:19, 20; 2 Timothy 2:16-19.

[14] Instead of concentrating on how a willful sinner might be removed, Isaiah describes the living conditions that will prevail in the new world. Try to picture yourself in the scene. What might first come to your mind's eye are things close to home. Isaiah treats that in verses 21 and 22: "They will certainly build houses and have occupancy; and they will certainly plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build and someone else have occupancy; they will not plant and someone else do the eating. For like the days of a tree will the days of my people be; and the work of their own hands my chosen ones will use to the full."

[15] If you have not yet gained building experience or done gardening,

Isaiah's prophecy suggests that an education awaits you. Would you, though, be willing to learn with the help of capable instructors, perhaps kind neighbors who happily lend you a hand? Isaiah did not say whether your house will have large paneless windows with blinds, so that you can enjoy tropical breezes, or closed glass windows through which you

12. Isaiah gives what further indications regarding life in the new world?
13. How does Isaiah 65:20 assure us that God's people will enjoy security?
14, 15. Based on Isaiah 65:21, 22, to what rewarding activities can you look forward?

can observe changing seasons. Will you design a house with a slanted roof to shed rain and snow? Or will the local climate suggest a flat roof—like one of those in the Middle East—a roof where you can gather with your family for delightful meals and conversation? —Deuteronomy 22:8; Nehemiah 8:16.

16 More important than knowing such details is that you will have your own residence. It will be yours—not like today when you might slave to build but then another person benefits. Isaiah 65:21 also says that you will plant and eat the fruitage. Clearly, that summarizes the general situation. You will derive intense satisfaction from your efforts, the fruits of your own labors. You will be able to do that over a long life—"like the days of a tree." That certainly meets the description "all things new"!—Psalm 92:12-14.

16. Why can you expect the new world to be permanently satisfying?

17 If you are a parent, these words will touch your heart: "They will not toil for nothing, nor will they bring to birth for disturbance; because they are the offspring made up of the blessed ones of Jehovah, and their descendants with them. And it will actually occur that before they call out I myself shall answer; while they are yet speaking, I myself shall hear." (Isaiah 65:23, 24) Do you know from experience the pain of 'bringing to birth for disturbance'? We need not list the range of problems children may have that bring disturbance to parents and others. Related to that, we have all observed parents so preoccupied with their own careers, activities, or pleasures that they spend little time with their children. In contrast, Jehovah assures us that he will hear and respond to our needs, even anticipate them.

18 While you are thinking about what you may enjoy in the new world, picture the scene that God's prophetic word sets out: "'The wolf and the lamb themselves will feed as one, and the lion will eat straw just like the bull; and as for the serpent, his food will be dust. They will do no harm nor cause any ruin in all my holy mountain,' Jehovah has said." (Isaiah 65:25) Human artists have tried to paint that scene, but this is no mere word picture produced with artistic license. This will be real. Peace will prevail among humans and will be matched by peace with the animals. Many biologists and animal lovers spend the

17. Parents will find what promise especially encouraging?

18. Why can you expect to enjoy the animals in the new world?

best years of their life learning about a few types of animals or just one species or breed. In contrast, think what you will be able to learn when animals are not dominated by fear of humans. Then you will be able to approach even birds and tiny creatures whose habitat is the forest or jungle—yes, observe, learn from, and enjoy them. (Job 12:7-9) You will be able to do so safely, free of danger from man or animal. Jehovah says: "They will do no harm nor cause any ruin in all my holy mountain." What a change that will be from what we see and experience today!

19 As mentioned earlier, humans are unable to foretell the future accurately, despite widespread concerns related to a new millennium. That leaves many frustrated, confused, or in despair. Peter Emberley, director at a Canadian university, wrote: "Many [adults] are finally confronting primary questions of existence. Who am I? What am I truly striving for? What is the legacy I leave for the next generation? They are struggling at mid-life to achieve order and meaning in their lives."

20 You can understand why that is the case with many. They may seek to enjoy life through hobbies or exciting forms of recreation. Yet, they do not know what the future holds, so life may lack significance, order, or real meaning. Now contrast that with your view of life, in the light of what we have considered. You know that in Jehovah's promised new heavens and new earth, we will be able to look about and say from our heart, 'Truly, God has made all things new!' How we will enjoy that!

19, 20. Why are God's people quite different from most people today?

How Would You Answer?

- Why can we conclude that Isaiah 66:22-24 foretells what yet lies ahead?
- What do you especially look forward to among the things mentioned in the prophecies at Isaiah 66:22-24 and Isaiah 65:20-25?
- What reasons do you have for being confident about your future?

21 It is not presumptuous to imagine living in God's new world. He invites, even urges, us to worship him in truth now and to qualify for life when 'they will do no harm nor cause any ruin in all his holy mountain.' (Isaiah 65:25) Were you aware, though, that Isaiah earlier made a similar comment and that he included an element that is crucial to our truly enjoying the new world? Isaiah 11:9 says: "They will not do any harm or cause any ruin in all my holy mountain; because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea."

22 "The knowledge of Jehovah." When God makes all things new, earth's inhabitants will have accurate knowledge of him and of his will. That will involve much more than learning from animal creation. His inspired Word is involved. For example, reflect on how much we have seen from examining just the four prophecies that mention "new heavens and a new earth." (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1) You have good reason for reading the Bible daily. Is that a feature of your routine? If not, what adjustments can you make so that each day you will read some of what God has to say? You will find that beyond looking forward to enjoying the new world, you will receive increased enjoyment right now, even as the psalmist did. —Psalm 1:1, 2.

21. What common element do we find at Isaiah 65:25 and Isaiah 11:9?

22. Our consideration of four Bible prophecies should reinforce our determination to do what?

Are You RECOMMENDING YOURSELF to Others?

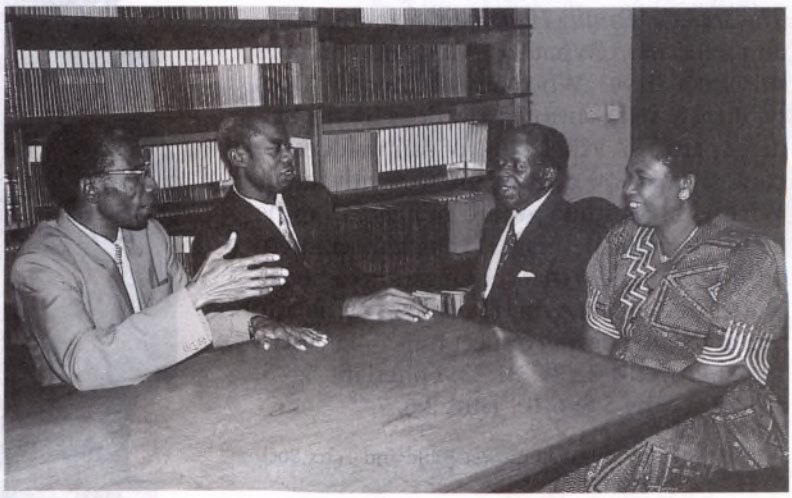
'I don't care what other people think!' In a moment of anger or frustration, perhaps you have found yourself making this bold assertion. But once the surge of bravado has ebbed, you may give way to a feeling of anxious concern. Why? Because most of us really do care about what others think of us.

INDEED, we should care about the feelings of others. Especially must we as Christians, ordained ministers of Jehovah God, have a healthy concern about how others view us. After all, we are "a theatrical spectacle to the world." (1 Corinthians 4:9) At 2 Corinthians 6:3, 4, we find the apostle Paul's sound counsel: "In no way are we giving any cause for stumbling, that our ministry might not be found fault with; but in every way we recommend ourselves as God's ministers."

What, though, does it mean to recommend ourselves to others? Does it mean to promote ourselves or to call undue attention to ourselves and our abilities? No. But it does call for applying the words of 1 Peter 2:12: "Maintain your conduct fine among the nations, that . . . they may as a result of your fine works of which they are eyewitnesses glorify God." Christians recommend themselves by letting their conduct speak for itself! Ultimately, this brings praise, not to us, but to God. Nevertheless, our recommending ourselves to others may also have personal benefits. Let us examine three areas in which this might prove true for you.

As a Potential Marriage Mate

Take, for example, the matter of marriage. It is a gift from Jehovah God, the one "to whom



Many parents wisely inquire about the reputation of someone their son or daughter is interested in marrying

every family in heaven and on earth owes its name." (Ephesians 3:15) Perhaps it is your desire to marry some day. If so, to what extent are you recommending yourself as a potential marriage partner? Yes, what reputation have you made for yourself as a single Christian man or woman?

In some lands this is of great concern to families. In Ghana, for example, when two persons wish to marry each other, it is the tradition for the prospective couple to inform their parents. These, in turn, inform other family members. The man's family then sets about ascertaining the woman's reputation in the neighborhood. When the parents are convinced of the woman's suitability, they will inform the woman's family of their son's intention to marry the daughter. The woman's family now checks the reputation of the man before consenting to the marriage. A Ghanaian adage thus says, "Ask those who should know before you enter into marriage."

What about Western lands, where individuals are generally allowed to select their own marriage mates? Even there, a mature Christian man or woman would be wise to seek a candid recommendation from those who know a potential mate well, such as parents or mature friends. According to the book *The Secret of Family Happiness,* a young woman might ask: " 'What kind of reputation does this man have? Who are his friends? Does he display self-control? How does he treat elderly persons? What kind of family does he come from? How does he interact with them? What is his attitude toward money? Does he abuse alcoholic beverages? Is he temperamental, even violent? What congregation responsibilities does he have, and how does he handle them? Could I deeply respect him?'—Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 22:29; 31:23; Ephesians 5:3-5, 33; 1 Timothy 5:8; 6:10; Titus 2:6, 7."*

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

A man would likewise want to inquire about any Christian woman he is considering marrying. According to the Bible, Boaz took such an interest in Ruth, the woman he later married. When Ruth asked: "How is it I have found favor in your eyes so that I am taken notice of, when I am a foreigner?" Boaz said: "The report was fully made to me of all that you have done." (Ruth 2:10-12) Yes, not only did Boaz personally observe that Ruth was a loyal, dedicated, and hardworking woman but he also received favorable comments from others.

Similarly, your conduct will have a bearing on whether others view you as a suitable marriage mate. Just how are you recommending yourself to others in this regard?

As an Employee

The workplace is another area where maintaining good conduct can work to your benefit. Competition for jobs may be intense. Employees who are known for insubordina-

A brother recommends himself for privileges of service by being considerate of others

tion, habitual lateness, and dishonesty are often fired. Companies may also lay off experienced employees so as to cut costs. When unemployed ones seek new jobs, they may find that companies will check with their previous employers to ascertain their work habits, attitude, and experience. Many Christians have successfully recommended themselves to employers by their respectful behavior, modest attire, pleasant demeanor, and outstanding Christian qualities.

Honesty is such a quality—one that is given high priority by many employers. Like the apostle Paul, we want to "conduct ourselves honestly in all things." (Hebrews 13:18) In one mining company in Ghana, pilfering was reported. The supervisor at the treatment plant, a Witness, retained his job while others were fired. Why? The management had observed his honesty over the years. His hard work and respect for authority were also well-known. Yes, his upright conduct saved his job!

What are some other things a Christian can do to recommend himself in the job market? Learn to be skilled at whatever job you are given. (Proverbs 22:29) Work diligently and conscientiously. (Proverbs 10:4; 13:4) Treat your employer and work supervisor with respect. (Ephesians 6:5) Punctuality, honesty, efficiency, and hard work are qualities employers esteem, and those qualities can help you to find employment even when jobs are scarce.

Congregation Privileges

Now more than ever, mature men are needed to take the lead in the Christian congregation. The reason? Isaiah prophesied: "Make the place of your tent more spacious. And let them stretch out the tent cloths of your grand tabernacle." (Isaiah 54:2) In fulfillment of this prophecy, Jehovah's worldwide congregation keeps on experiencing growth.

So if you are a Christian man, how can you recommend yourself as one qualified to serve in an appointed capacity? Consider the example of the young man Timothy. Luke reports that Timothy "was well reported on by the brothers in Lystra and Iconium." Yes, by his fine conduct, this young man had recommended himself to others in two different cities. Paul therefore invited Timothy to join him in the traveling ministry.—Acts 16:1-4.

How can a man today 'reach out for an office of oversight' in an appropriate, godly way? Certainly not by campaigning for appointment but by cultivating the spiritual qualities needed for such responsibilities. (1 Timothy 3:1-10, 12, 13; Titus 1:5-9) He can also show that he is "desirous of a fine work" by having a full share in the preaching and disciple-making work. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) Those who recommend themselves as responsible Christian men take a sincere interest in the welfare of their spiritual brothers. They follow the advice of the apostle Paul: "Share with the holy ones according to their needs. Follow the course of hospitality." (Romans 12:13) By doing such things, a Christian man can truly 'recommend himself as a minister of God.'

At All Times

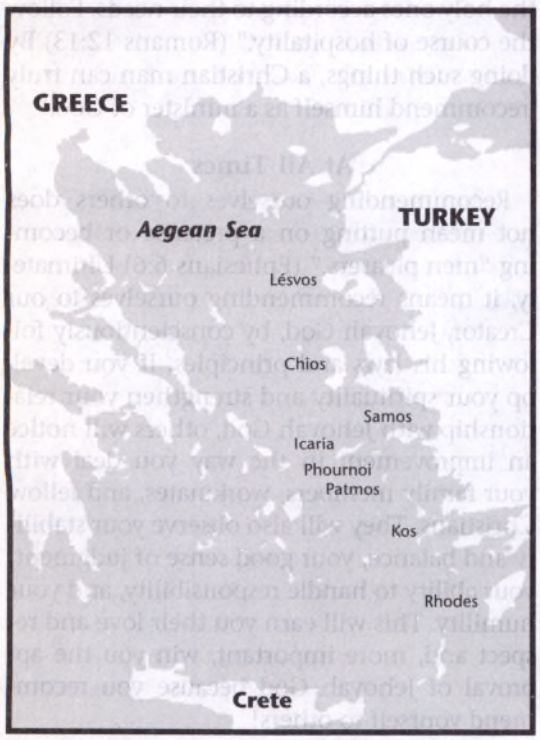
Recommending ourselves to others does not mean putting on a pretense or becoming "men pleasers." (Ephesians 6:6) Ultimately, it means recommending ourselves to our Creator, Jehovah God, by conscientiously following his laws and principles. If you develop your spirituality and strengthen your relationship with Jehovah God, others will notice an improvement in the way you deal with your family members, workmates, and fellow Christians. They will also observe your stability and balance, your good sense of judgment, your ability to handle responsibility, and your humility. This will earn you their love and respect and, more important, win you the approval of Jehovah God because you recommend yourself to others!

Fishing for Men in the Aegean Sea

WITH mainland Greece to the north and west, the island of Crete to the south, and Turkey to the east, the Aegean Sea covers a vast area of the eastern Mediterranean. The cradle of some great early civilizations, the Aegean Sea is studded with islands and islets. The rugged outlines of the islands, which have a smattering of tiny, white houses gleaming in the sunlight, inspired one poet to liken them to "stone horses with rampant manes."

Little wonder these islands have become one of the most popular tourist attractions in the world! Their physical beauty is enhanced by the sterling qualities of the men and women who live and work there. Down to earth and hospitable, yet independent, these people add a special touch to the uniqueness of the area.

Many of the islanders make a living by fishing in the waters of the Aegean Sea. Another kind of important "fishing," however, is producing bountiful results in that area. "Fishers of men," evangelizers of the good news of God's Kingdom, traverse the islands of the Aegean, making Christian disciples.—Matthew 4:18, 19; Luke 5:10.



About 19 centuries ago, Christian evangelizers visited islands of the Aegean. In about 56 C.E., the apostle Paul, returning from his third missionary journey, stopped briefly at the islands of Lésvos, Chios, Samos, Kos, and Rhodes. Ever a zealous preacher, Paul must have preached to some of the islanders. (Acts 20:14, 15, 24; 21: 1, 2) Following his two years of imprisonment in Rome, he most likely visited Crete and engaged in Christian activity there. Near the end of the first century, the apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos "for speaking about God and bearing witness to Jesus." (Revelation 1:9) How do modern-day proclaimers of the good news fare in these islands?

Rewarding Preaching Campaigns

Preaching in these island groups is difficult and demanding. It requires great effort and self-sacrifice. Some islands are far apart. Transportation by sea or air is random to some of them and nonexistent to others, especially during wintertime. The sea can be rough, particularly when the *meltemia*—seasonal strong northern winds—blow. Moreover, the villages on many of the islands are isolated and hard to reach because the dusty, unpaved roads are often barely passable. Some villages can be reached only by small boats.

Take, for example, the island of Icaria. The 11 publishers of the Kingdom good news in the small congregation there cannot cover all the villages on that island and the nearby islets. Thus, Christian brothers and sisters from Samos come to help preach to the people of Icaria, as well as to those on the islands of Phournoi, Patmos, and Lipsos. Recently, during one such two-day cam-

paign, the Witnesses were able to place 650 magazines, 99 brochures, and 25 books on Bible topics! They were surprised to meet people who had no idea who Jehovah is, people who begged them to stay and teach them more from the Bible. A lady told one Witness: "Well, now you leave. But I still have many questions on the Bible. Who is going to help me?" The Christian sister promised to follow up the interest by using the telephone, and she did start a Bible study in that way.

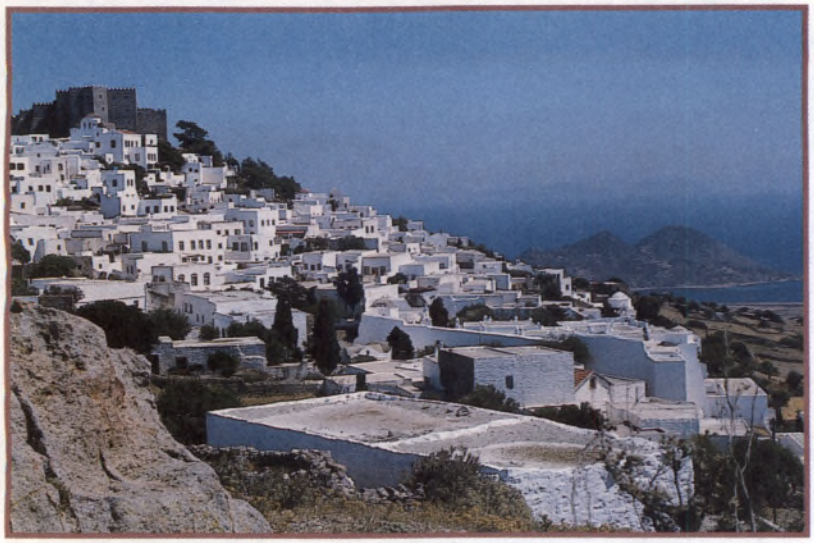
Lésvos Island

When a traveling overseer visited Icaria, he arranged to cover the entire island in one weekend. He enlisted the help of about 30 Kingdom publishers from Samos. The visiting brothers had to pay for staying two nights at a hotel and for renting cars and four-wheel-drive vehicles. There had been two days of heavy rain, and the weather forecast for the weekend was bleak. But the brothers did not let this hinder them, recalling the words of Ecclesiastes 11:4: "He that is watching the wind will not sow seed; and he that is looking at the clouds will not reap." Eventually, the weather did improve slightly, and after having covered the whole island with their important message, the brothers returned home happy and satisfied.

The 16 publishers who live on the island of Andros put forth great effort to cover the entire island. When two brothers reached an isolated village, they were determined to preach to all the inhabitants. They talked to people in their homes, on the streets, and in the fields. They even visited the police station and left literature there. Confident that they had contacted all the villagers, they were about to leave. As they were departing from the central square, they saw the Greek Orthodox priest coming. Realizing that he had not been given a witness, they offered him a small publication, which he gladly accepted. Now they knew for certain that no one had been overlooked in their preaching efforts!

Gavdos (or Cauda)—an islet under the belly of Crete with only 38 inhabitants—is considered to be the southernmost point of Europe. (Acts 27:16) A traveling overseer and his wife, along with another married couple, spent three days preaching there. To save on expenses, they slept in a tent. All the inhabitants were reached with the good news, and the brothers were delighted that people there were not prejudiced. They had heard nothing—good or bad—about Jehovah's Witnesses. The local people, including the priest, accepted 19 books and 13 brochures. As the Witnesses were returning to Crete in a small boat, the sea became turbulent, putting their lives at risk. "We thanked Jehovah that we got home alive, but we also glorified him for letting us honor his name at this southernmost point of Europe," they said.

Patmos is the island where the apostle John wrote the last book of the Bible, Revelation. Until recently there was no Witness of Jehovah on Patmos. A preaching campaign on that island was carefully organized by the brothers from Samos. They knew that they could expect fierce opposition because the island is a stronghold of the Greek Orthodox Church. Two sisters who were presenting the good news to a lady were invited into her home. The lady's husband persistently asked who had sent the sisters to their house. When they explained that



The island of Patmos

they were visiting every house, he asked again: "Are you sure that some neighbor did not send you here?" The wife, who had come to know about Jehovah's Witnesses while in Zaire, later explained to the sisters what had happened that morning. She said: "I was praying to Jehovah, as I did on other days, that he send some Witnesses to the island. My husband laughed at me. When I saw you at the door, I was surprised and so was my husband. That is why he kept asking who sent you to our home." A Bible study was immediately started with the lady. The study was conducted over the telephone for ten months, although this cost a lot of money both for the sister and the interested woman. She was baptized and is now the only Witness on that island where the apostle John was isolated 1,900 years ago.

"Fishing" in Ports

Cruise liners stop at the numerous ports of the Aegean islands every summer, bringing loads of visiting vacationers. Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses have a unique opportunity to reach people of many nations and tongues. The congregations keep in stock Bible literature in many different languages, and the publishers place thousands of magazines with tourists. Some cruise ships visit the same ports each week, which affords the brothers excellent opportunities to make return visits and even to conduct Bible studies with some of the ships' crew members.

In the summer of 1996, a sister who is a full-time preacher on Rhodes witnessed to a young Jamaican man who worked on a cruise liner that visited that port every Friday. The next Friday the man was invited to attend a district convention to be held on the island. English Bible in hand, the pioneer sister helped him to understand some of the Bible truths presented on the program. The young man was deeply impressed by the love and warmth shown by the Witnesses at the convention. The following Friday, he invited two pioneers onto the ship. The pioneers took with them literature in English and Spanish. Their witnessing bags were emptied in less than an hour! The young Jamaican studied the Bible every Friday until the end of summer. The next summer he was back, ready to resume his study.

The island of Crete

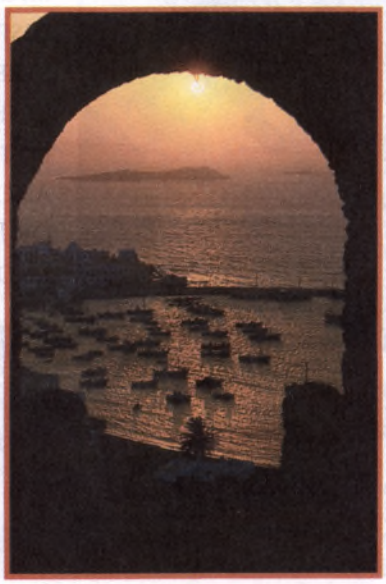
This time, though, he decided to change his job in order to be able to make spiritual progress. Then off he went again. How happy the brothers in Rhodes were to learn that this young man was baptized in early 1998!

Catching Migratory "Fish"

The Aegean Sea is renowned for its abundant migratory fish, such as sardines and swordfish, that cross its waters and end up in the nets of skilled fishermen. In a similar manner, Kingdom evangelizers find many receptive hearts among immigrant workers who have moved to Greece from many Eastern European countries.

Rezi was ten years old when she first read about Jehovah and his purposes in the pages of *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* That was in Albania. Three years later she moved with her family to the island of Rhodes. One day, Rezi prayed to Jehovah to help her find his people in her new home. The next day her father came home with those familiar magazines, *The Watchtower* and *Awake!,* much to Rezi's joy. Rezi came in contact with the sister who had given the magazines to her father, and soon she started studying from the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life.* At times, she asked to have a study three times during the same day! After two months she became an unbaptized publisher, and in March 1998, she was baptized at the age of 14. That same day, she started auxiliary pioneering, and six months later she enrolled as a regular pioneer, or full-time minister.

A brother on the island of Kos was studying with some people from Russia. When he asked them if they had any friends who would like to study the Bible, they led him to an Armenian couple—Leonidas and his wife, Ophelia—in a village some 20 miles away. A surprise awaited the brothers. The Armenian couple brought out a bag full of Armenian and Russian Bible literature published by the Watch Tower Society! They explained that they had studied the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses and had progressed to the point of becoming unbaptized publishers. Because of political upheaval and economic difficulties, they had to leave their homeland. As soon as they arrived in Kos, they started studying with Leonidas' mother and sister, who were already there. All of a sudden, the Witness had three new Bible studies to conduct —one with Ophelia, one with Leonidas, and one with his mother and sister. This required traveling on a motorcycle 20 miles each way three times a week. Leonidas and his wife got baptized some months later. What a reward for the self-sacrificing spirit of the local brothers!

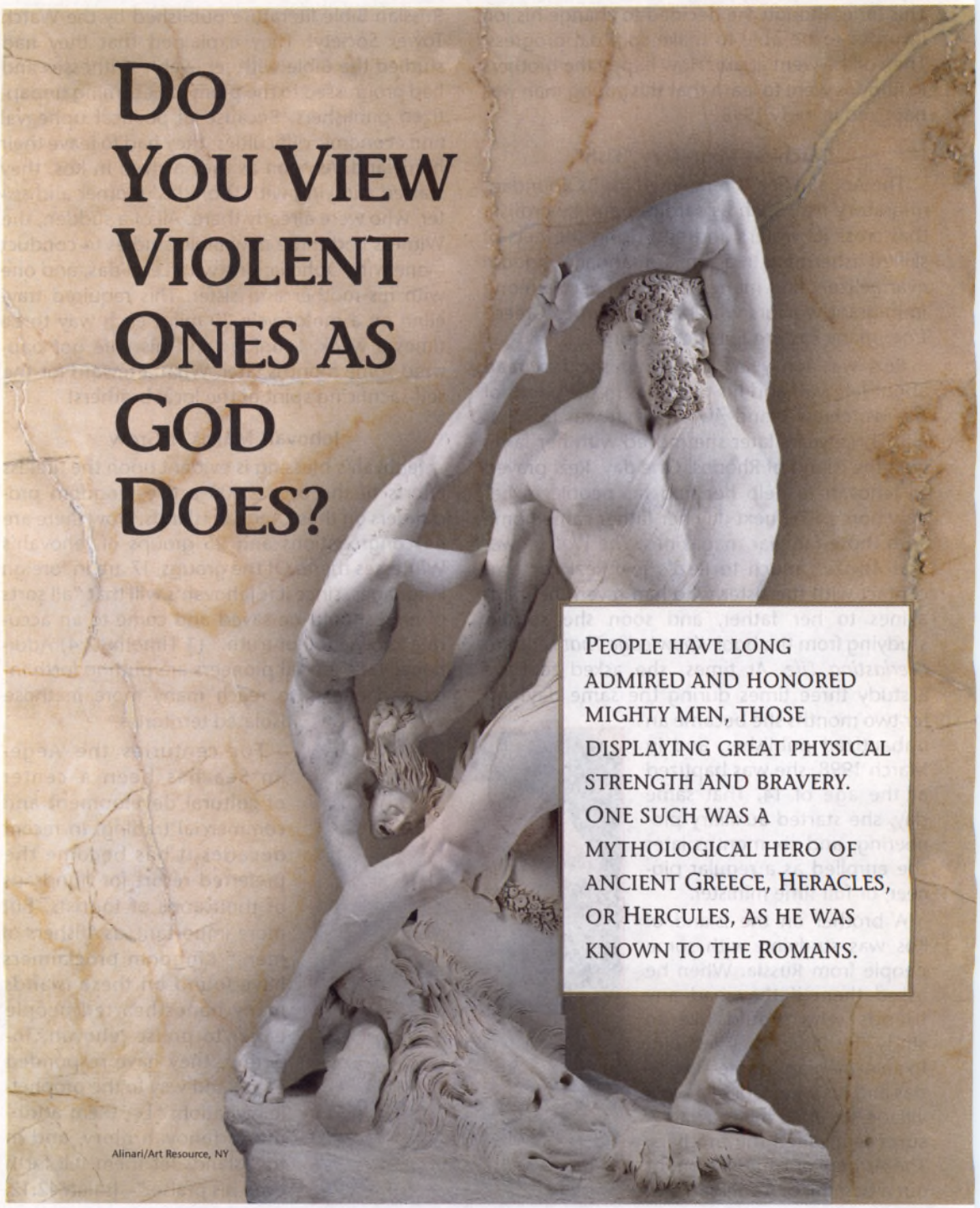


Jehovah Makes It Grow

Jehovah's blessing is evident upon the tireless efforts of the over 2,000 active Kingdom proclaimers on these Aegean islands. Now there are 44 congregations and 25 groups of Jehovah's Witnesses there. Of the groups, 17 are in foreign languages, since it is Jehovah's will that "all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:4) Additionally, 13 special pioneers are putting forth increased efforts to reach many more in those isolated territories.

For centuries the Aegean Sea has been a center of cultural development and commercial trading. In recent decades it has become the preferred resort for hundreds of thousands of tourists. But more important, as "fishers of men," Kingdom proclaimers have found on these islands many honesthearted people eager to praise Jehovah. Together, they have responded in a grand way to the prophetic invitation: "Let them attribute to Jehovah glory, and in the islands let them tell forth even his praise."—Isaiah 42:12.

Do You View Violent Ones as God Does?



People have long admired and honored mighty men, those displaying great physical strength and bravery. One such was a mythological hero of ancient Greece, Heracles, or Hercules, as he was known to the Romans.

Alinari/Art Resource, NY

HERACLES was a superhero of great fame, the mightiest of fighters. According to legend, he was a demigod, the child of the Greek god Zeus, and Alcmene, a human mother. His exploits began while he was yet a babe in the cradle. When a jealous goddess sent two huge serpents to kill him, Heracles strangled them. In later life he fought battles, vanquished monsters, and struggled with death to save a friend. He also destroyed cities, raped women, flung a boy from a tower, and killed his wife and children.

Though not a real person, from remote times the mythical Heracles figured in stories of the ancient lands known to the Greeks. The Romans worshiped him as a god; merchants and travelers prayed to him for prosperity and protection from danger. Stories about his exploits have fascinated people for thousands of years.

The Origin of the Legend

Do the stories of Heracles and other mythological heroes have a basis in reality? In a sense, they may. The Bible tells of a time, early in human history, when "gods" and "demigods" really did walk the earth.

Describing that era, Moses wrote: "Now it came about that when men started to grow in numbers on the surface of the ground and daughters were born to them, then the sons of the true God began to notice the daughters of men, that they were good-looking; and they went taking wives for themselves, namely, all whom they chose."—Genesis 6:1, 2.

Those "sons of the true God" were not humans; they were angelic sons of God. (Compare Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:4, 7.) The Bible writer Jude relates that some angels "did not keep their original position but forsook their own proper dwelling place." (Jude 6) In other words, they left their assigned place in God's heavenly organization because they preferred to live with beautiful women on earth. Jude adds that these rebellious angels were like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who 'committed fornication excessively and went out after flesh for unnatural use.'—Jude 7.

The Bible does not provide full details about the activities of these disobedient angels. However, ancient legends of Greece and elsewhere paint a picture of numerous gods and goddesses that moved among humanity, either visibly or invisibly. When taking human form, they had great beauty. They ate, drank, slept, and had sexual intercourse among themselves and with humans. Though supposedly holy and immortal, they lied and deceived, quarreled and fought, seduced and raped. Such mythological accounts may reflect, though in an embellished and distorted form, the actual pre-Flood conditions mentioned in the Bible book of Genesis.

Mighty Ones of Old, Men of Fame

The disobedient materialized angels had sexual relations with women, and the women bore children. These were not ordinary children. They were Nephilim, half human and half angel. The Bible account says: "The Nephilim proved to be in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of the true God continued to have relations with the daughters of men and they bore sons to them, they were the mighty ones who were of old, the men of fame."—Genesis 6:4.

The Hebrew word "nephilim" literally means "fellers," those who fell others, or who cause others to fall, through violent acts. Thus, it is not surprising that the Bible account adds: "The earth became filled with violence." (Genesis 6:11) The mythological demigods, such as Heracles and the Babylonian hero Gilgamesh, strongly resemble Nephilim.

Notice that the Nephilim were called

"mighty ones" and "men of fame." Unlike the righteous man Noah, who lived in the same period, the Nephilim were not interested in promoting the fame of Jehovah. They were interested in their own fame, glory, and reputation. Through mighty acts, which undoubtedly involved violence and bloodshed, they earned the fame they craved from the ungodly world around them. They were the superheroes of their day—feared, respected, and seemingly invincible.

While the Nephilim and their debased angelic fathers may have enjoyed fame in the eyes of their contemporaries, they certainly were not famous in God's sight. Their way of life was detestable. Consequently, God acted against the fallen angels. The apostle Peter wrote: "God did not hold back from punishing the angels that sinned, but, by throwing them into Tartarus, delivered them to pits of dense darkness to be reserved for judgment; and he did not hold back from punishing an ancient world, but kept Noah, a preacher of righteousness, safe with seven others when he brought a deluge upon a world of ungodly people."—2 Peter 2:4, 5.

At the global Flood, the rebellious angels dematerialized and returned in disgrace to the spirit realm. God punished them by prohibiting them from again materializing human bodies. The Nephilim, the superhuman offspring of the disobedient angels, all perished. Only Noah and his small family survived the Deluge.

Men of Fame Today

Today, gods and demigods no longer walk the earth. Nevertheless, violence abounds. Today's men of fame are glorified in books, movies, television, and music. Far be it from them to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies, to seek peace, to forgive, or to walk away from violence. (Matthew 5:39, 44; Romans 12:17; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 3:11) Instead, modern-day mighty ones are admired for their strength and for their ability to fight, to avenge themselves, and to counter violence with superior violence.*

God's view of such ones has not changed since the days of Noah. Jehovah does not admire lovers of violence, nor is he entertained by their exploits. The psalmist sang: "Jehovah himself examines the righteous one as well as the wicked one, and anyone loving violence His soul certainly hates."—Psalm 11:5.

A Different Kind of Strength

Standing in direct contrast with the mighty men of violence is the most famous human who ever lived, Jesus Christ, a man of peace. While on earth he did "no violence." (Isaiah 53:9) When his enemies came to arrest him in the garden of Gethsemane, his followers had some swords. (Luke 22:38, 47-51) They could have formed a fighting mob to try to prevent him from being delivered up to the Jews.—John 18:36.

In fact, the apostle Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus, but Jesus said to him: "Return your sword to its place, for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:51, 52) Yes, violence begets violence, as human history has repeatedly dem-

* The violent characters in many video games and science-fiction movies often reflect these bad, violent characteristics more intensely.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Firmly Uphold Godly Teaching

Joyful Weddings That Honor Jehovah

Jehovah Is Greater Than Our Hearts

onstrated. Apart from the opportunity to defend himself with weapons, Jesus had another means of defense. He next said to Peter: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father to supply me at this moment more than twelve legions of angels?"—Matthew 26:53.

Rather than resorting to violence or angelic protection, Jesus allowed himself to be seized by those who killed him. Why? One reason was that he knew that the time had not yet arrived for his heavenly Father to end wrongdoing on earth. Instead of taking matters into his own hands, Jesus trusted in Jehovah.

This was not a position of weakness but one of great inner strength. Jesus demonstrated strong faith that Jehovah would put matters right in His own time and way. Because of his obedience, Jesus was exalted to a position of fame second only to Jehovah himself. The apostle Paul wrote concerning Jesus: "He humbled himself and became obedient as far as death, yes, death on a torture stake. For this very reason also God exalted him to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every other name, so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bend of those in heaven and those on earth and those under the ground, and every tongue should openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." —Philippians 2:8-11.

God's Promise to End Violence

True Christians pattern their lives after the example and teachings of Jesus. They do not admire or imitate the worldly men of fame and violence. They know that in God's due time, such ones will be swept away forever, just as surely as wicked ones were in the days of Noah.

God is the Creator of the earth and of humankind. He is also the rightful Sovereign. (Revelation 4:11) If a human judge has legal authority to render judicial decisions, God has even more authority to do so. His respect for his own righteous principles, as well as his love for those who love him, will compel him to end all wickedness and those practicing it. —Matthew 13:41, 42; Luke 17:26-30.

This will lead to enduring peace on earth, peace solidly founded on justice and righteousness. This was foretold in the well-known prophecy concerning Jesus Christ:

MODERN-DAY MIGHTY ONES ARE ADMIRED FOR THEIR STRENGTH AND FOR THEIR ABILITY TO COUNTER VIOLENCE WITH SUPERVIOLENCE

"There has been a child born to us, there has been a son given to us; and the princely rule will come to be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. To the abundance of the princely rule and to peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom in order to establish it firmly and to sustain it by means of justice and by means of righteousness, from now on and to time indefinite. The very zeal of Jehovah of armies will do this." —Isaiah 9:6, 7.

For good reason, then, Christians heed the inspired counsel of long ago: "Do not become envious of the man of violence, nor choose any of his ways. For the devious person is a detestable thing to Jehovah, but His intimacy is with the upright ones." —Proverbs 3:31, 32.

Do You Remember?

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

• What eased the way for Christmas to be adopted in Korea?

There was an old belief in Korea and some other lands about a god of the kitchen who was thought to come through the chimney and bring gifts in December. Also, after World War II, U.S. soldiers distributed gifts and aid at local churches.—12/15, pages 4, 5.

• In fulfillment of Isaiah 21:8, what "watchman" has God had in our time?

Spirit-anointed Christians, serving as a watchman class, have alerted people to the meaning of world events that fulfill Bible prophecy. They have also helped Bible students to identify and avoid unscriptural doctrines and practices.—1/1, pages 8, 9.

• Who were the "Polish Brethren"?

They were a small religious group in the 16th and 17th centuries in Poland who encouraged adherence to the Bible and therefore rejected prevailing church doctrines, such as the Trinity, infant baptism, and hellfire. In time, they were severely persecuted and forced to scatter into other lands.—1/1, pages 21-3.

• Why are Bible prophecies rather than predictions by futurologists or astrologers to be trusted?

Human would-be prophets prove to be unreliable because they ignore Jehovah and the Bible. Only Bible prophecies can help you to know how events fit into God's purpose, benefiting yourself and your family lastingly.—1/15, page 3.

• What are some lines of evidence proving that we are living in the last days?

We can see the effects of the ouster of Satan from heaven. (Revelation 12:9) We live in the time of the final "king" mentioned at Revelation 17:9-11. The number of genuine anointed Christians is dwindling, yet it seems that some of them will still be on earth when the great tribulation begins.—1/15, pages 12, 13.

• When was the book of Habakkuk written, and why should we be interested in it?

This Bible book was written about 628 B.C.E. It contains Jehovah's judgment against ancient Judah and against Babylon. It also addresses the divine judgment soon to come on the present wicked system. —2/1, page 8.

• Where in the Bible can we find a mother's wise counsel for capable wives?

The final chapter of the book of Proverbs, chapter 31, is an excellent source of such counsel.—2/1, pages 30, 31.

• Why can we be grateful that Jehovah has revealed "the mind of Christ" to us? (1 Corinthians 2:16)

By means of the Gospel record, Jehovah has enabled us to learn of Jesus' thoughts, feelings, activities, and priorities. This can help us to be more like Jesus, especially in the emphasis we put on the lifesaving preaching work.—2/15, page 25.

• Does God answer prayers today?

Yes. Though the Bible shows that God does not answer all prayers, modern-day experiences prove that he has often responded to people who have prayed for comfort and help in such matters as resolving marital problems.—3/1, pages 3-7.

• What can we do to draw on God's strength?

We can ask for it in prayer, draw on the Bible for spiritual strength, and be strengthened through Christian association.—3/1, pages 15, 16.

• How can parents help their children to benefit more from Christian meetings?

They can help their children to remain awake, perhaps having them take a nap beforehand. Children can be encouraged to take "notes," such as by marking a paper each time familiar words or names are used.—3/15, pages 17, 18.

• What are some things that we can learn from Job's example?

Job put his relationship with God first, was just in dealing with fellow humans, strove to be loyal to his marriage mate, showed concern for the spirituality of his family, and endured faithfully under test.—3/15, pages 25-7.

• Does the Bible contain a hidden code that gives insight into encrypted messages?

No. Claims about a supposed hidden code could equally be made about certain secular books. Supposed codes in the Bible would be rendered pointless by variations in spelling in Hebrew manuscripts. —4/1, pages 30, 31.

Questions From Readers

Three of the Gospels relate the complaint about Jesus' being anointed with costly oil. Did many apostles complain, or was it primarily Judas?

We find this event related in the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, and John. It seems that Judas took the lead in complaining, with at least some other apostles then agreeing with him. This incident illustrates why we can be thankful for having four Gospel accounts. What each writer penned was accurate, but not all provide the same details. By comparing parallel accounts, we gain a fuller, more detailed view of many events.

The account at Matthew 26:6-13 gives the location—the house of Simon the leper, in Bethany—but does not name the woman who began pouring perfumed oil on Jesus' head. Matthew notes: "On seeing this *the disciples* became indignant" and complained that the oil could have been sold and the funds given to the poor.

Mark's account includes most of those details. But he adds that she broke open the container. It held perfumed oil that was "genuine nard," such as may have been imported from India. As to the complaint, Mark reports that "there were *some* expressing indignation," and *"they* were feeling great displeasure at her." (Mark 14:3-9) So the two accounts show that more than one apostle was involved in the complaining. How did it start though?

John, who was an eyewitness, added pertinent details. He names the woman—Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. John provided also this detail, which we can take as complementary rather than contradictory: "She greased the *feet* of Jesus and wiped his feet dry with her hair." Combining the accounts, we can see that Mary must have put the oil, which John confirms was "genuine nard," on Jesus' head and feet. John was very close to Jesus and was inclined to be indignant over slights to Him. We read: "Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, who was about to betray him, said: 'Why was it this perfumed oil was not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor people?' "—John 12:2-8.

Of course, Judas was "one of his disciples," but you can sense John's indignation that someone in this position was planning on betraying Jesus. Translator Dr. C. Howard Matheny observed about John 12:4: "The present participle 'being about' [or, "was about to"] and the present infinitive 'to be betraying' [or, "was about to betray"] both express linear or continuous action. This shows that the betrayal of Jesus by Judas was not a momentary action done on the spur of the moment for it was thought about and planned during many days." John added the insight that Judas complained "not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box and used to carry off the monies put in it."

It thus seems logical that the thief Judas initiated the complaining because he would have more to steal if the costly oil were sold and the funds put in the money box that he carried. Once Judas raised this complaint, some other apostles may have murmured assent at what seemed a valid point. Judas, however, was the main instigator of the complaint.

Giving That Is Precious in Jehovah's Eyes

The following letter was received by the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mozambique:

"I am a seven-year-old boy. I still go to primary school. I am sending this money I earned from raising a chick. I sold him for 12,000 Meticais [$1, U.S.]. I thank Jehovah for making the first chick I ever raised grow into a rooster. I would like my gift to be used for the work of Jehovah's Kingdom.

"PS: My father helped me write this letter."

Some people associate generosity with those who have a surplus of material things. However, when we read the Bible's account concerning the widow who dropped into the treasury chest "two small coins of very little value," we can appreciate that generosity is measured, not by quantity, but by the proper inclination of the heart.—Luke 21:1-4.

Jehovah appreciates every gift, no matter how small, that stems from a heart motivated by love. And he richly blesses those who imitate his generosity by giving of their time, energy, or material resources in behalf of his Kingdom.—Matthew 6:33; Hebrews 6:10.