



MARCH 1, 2011

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

THE  
"GOOD NEWS  
OF THE KINGDOM"  
WHAT IS IT?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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FACSIMILE OF ►  
THE WASHINGTON  
MANUSCRIPT OF  
FOUR GOSPELS.  
MATTHEW 24:14 IS  
HIGHLIGHTED

From the book *Facsimile of the  
Washington Manuscript of the Four  
Gospels in the Freer Collection 1912*



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# A Prophecy of Enormous Importance

"This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come."—MATTHEW 24:14.

**T**HAT verse, scholars agree, is highly important. It is important because of the global scope of the work it describes. And it is important because it points to what Christians should be doing—a preaching work that would precede and herald the momentous and far-reaching event that Jesus called "the end."

That prophetic verse is being fulfilled today. You are involved because the good news contains both an invitation and a warning. It offers you a choice: Accept God's Kingdom or oppose it. The choice you make affects your very life.

Consider the context. Several days before Jesus was impaled, the disciples came to him and asked him about the future. They were interested in knowing about the establishment of God's Kingdom, of which Jesus had so often spoken. They also wanted to know about "the conclusion of the system

of things," or as some translations render that expression, "the end of the world."—Matthew 24:3, *American Standard Version*; *King James Version*.

In reply, Jesus foretold that there would be large-scale wars, famines, pestilences, and great earthquakes. He also said that lawlessness would increase, false religious teachers would mislead many, and true Christians would be hated and persecuted. All of this was bad news.—Matthew 24:4-13; Luke 21:11.

But there was also good news. Jesus next spoke the words quoted above, words that have intrigued and inspired men for centuries. Though people agree about the importance of Jesus' words, they disagree about the meaning. What exactly is this good news? What is the Kingdom? When is this prophecy to be fulfilled, and by whom? And what is "the end"? Let us see.



# What Is God's Kingdom?

"This good news of the kingdom . . ."—MATTHEW 24:14.

**I**N HIS famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave a model prayer, which includes this petition to God: "Let your kingdom come." Countless millions have memorized that prayer and have repeated it often. In the words of one encyclopedia, it is "the principal prayer used by all Christians in common worship." Yet, many who recite it have little idea what the Kingdom is or what it will do when it comes.—Matthew 6:9, 10.

That is not surprising. Christendom's leaders offer conflicting, confusing, and complicated explanations as to what the Kingdom is. One writes that God's Kingdom is "something supernatural, . . . an inner link with the living God . . . , an experience with God in which men and women find salvation." Another defines the gospel of the Kingdom as "instruction about the church." And the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "The kingdom of God [is] righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

You will find a much clearer explanation on page 2 of this journal. It reads: "God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a para-

dise." Let us see how the Bible supports that understanding.

## The Future Rulers of All the Earth

A kingdom is a government ruled by a king. The King of God's Kingdom is the resurrected Jesus Christ. His enthronement in heaven was described in a vision given to the prophet Daniel, who wrote: "I kept on beholding in the visions of the night, and, see there! with the clouds of the heavens someone like a son of man [Jesus] happened to be coming; and to the Ancient of Days [Jehovah God] he gained access, and they brought him up close even before that One. And to him there were given rulership and dignity and kingdom, that the peoples, national groups and languages should all serve even him. His rulership is an indefinitely lasting rulership that will not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be brought to ruin."—Daniel 7:13, 14.

The Bible book of Daniel also shows that the Kingdom would be firmly established by God, that it will put an end to all human governments, and that it will never be overthrown. Chapter 2 describes an inspired dream that the king of Babylon had, in which he saw a great statue, representing a

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succession of world powers. The prophet Daniel interpreted that dream. In “the final part of the days,” he wrote, “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite.”—Daniel 2:28, 44.

The King of God’s Kingdom does not rule alone. During his ministry on earth, Jesus assured his faithful apostles that they, along with others, would be resurrected to heaven and would sit on thrones. (Luke 22:28-30) He did not mean literal thrones, for as Jesus indicated, the Kingdom would be in the heavens. The Bible describes these corulers as being from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” They would be “a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth.”—Revelation 5: 9, 10.

### Why the News of the Kingdom Is Good

Notice that Christ Jesus is given rulership over all “peoples, national groups and languages” and that those associated with him will “rule as kings over the earth.” Who, then, will be the subjects of this Kingdom? Those who respond positively to the good news that is being preached today. Subjects also include those who will be resurrected to life on earth and who will have the prospect of living forever.

The Bible eloquently describes the blessings the people will enjoy under the Kingdom. Here are a few of them:

*“He is making wars to cease to the extremity of the earth. The bow he breaks apart and does cut the spear in pieces; the wagons he burns in the fire.”—Psalm 46:9.*

*“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.”—Isaiah 65:21, 22.*

*“[God] will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.”—Revelation 21:3, 4.*

*“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.*

*“The hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear his [Jesus’] voice and come out, those who did good things to a resurrection of life.”—John 5: 28, 29.*

*“The meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.”—Psalm 37:11.*

That is certainly good news! What is more, fulfilled Bible prophecies show that the time is near for the Kingdom to establish its righteous rule over all the earth.

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# What Is the Good News?

“This good news . . .”—MATTHEW 24:14.

CHRISTIANS are to preach the “good news of the kingdom” by telling others about it, explaining that the Kingdom is the future world government that will rule the earth in righteousness. Yet, the expression “good news” is also used in other ways in the Bible. For example, we find reference to “the good news of salvation” (Psalm 96:2); “the good news of God” (Romans 15:16); and “the good news about Jesus Christ.”—Mark 1:1.

Simply stated, the good news includes all the truths about which Jesus spoke and his disciples wrote. Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told his followers: “Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

The good news is about both the Kingdom of God and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ

of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19, 20) So the work of true Christians is not just to inform others about the Kingdom; they must also endeavor to make disciples.

How are the churches doing in this regard? Those who do not understand what the Kingdom is—and there are many—cannot accurately teach others about it. Instead, they preach feel-good sermons about forgiveness of sins and faith in Jesus. They also seek to win converts through social work or by building hospitals, schools, and homes for the poor. While such efforts may boost church

membership, they do not produce true Christians who sincerely seek to live in harmony with what Jesus taught.

One theologian writes: “You will find few scholars or leaders in Christian circles who deny that we are supposed to make disciples or apprentices to Jesus and teach them to do all things that Jesus said. . . . Jesus’ instructions on this matter are, after all, starkly clear. We just don’t do what he said. We don’t seriously attempt it. And apparently we don’t know how to do it.”

Similarly, a survey of Catholics in the United States revealed that 95 percent agreed that preaching the good news is a requirement of their faith. Yet, almost all felt that the best way to do this was, not by talking about it, but by living their life in such a way that it would be an example to others. One of those polled said: “Evangelization is different from words, words, words. We need to *be* the Good News.” *U.S. Catholic*, the magazine that conducted the survey, said that many hold back from sharing their faith because of “the church’s poor image with the recent sex abuse scandal and problematic church teachings.”

Elsewhere, a Methodist bishop lamented that his churches are divided and confused, lacking the nerve to carry out their mission and holding much the same values as does society in general. In a tone of frustration, he asked: “Who are the responsible bearers of the gospel of the Kingdom?”

The bishop did not provide an answer to his question. But there is an answer. You will find it in the next article.

# Who Are Preaching the Good News?

“ . . . will be preached in all the inhabited earth.”—MATTHEW 24:14.

**T**HE good news is being preached worldwide by Jehovah’s Witnesses. They do this in a variety of ways. One way is by . . .

**The Spoken Word.** Like Jesus and his disciples, Jehovah’s Witnesses go to people with the good news. (Luke 8:1; 10:1) They do not simply expect people to come to them. Witnessing to people about God’s Kingdom is something all Witnesses—numbering over seven million—engage in. They preach from house to house, on the street, by telephone, and by other means. Last year, the Witnesses spent more than one and a half *billion* hours in this activity.

They teach others not only about God’s Kingdom but also about “all the things [Jesus] commanded.” (Matthew 28:20) They regularly conduct over eight million free home Bible studies.

The Witnesses are preaching worldwide—in 236 lands. They preach to people of all

walks of life. They preach in the country and the city, in Amazon jungles and the Siberian taiga, in African deserts and the Himalaya Mountains. They are not paid for this work; they do it at their own expense and using their own time, motivated by their love of God and of neighbor. They also make known the good news through . . .

**The Printed Page.** This magazine, the full title of which is *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah’s Kingdom*, is now published in 185 languages and has a circulation of more than 42 million copies each issue. The companion magazine, *Awake!*, which also publicizes the Kingdom, is published in 83 languages and has a circulation of about 40 million copies each issue.

Books, brochures, tracts, CDs/MP3s, and DVDs that explain Bible teachings are available in some 540 languages. The Witnesses have produced and distributed more than 20 billion of these items in just the past ten years, averaging about three for every individual living on earth!

Jehovah’s Witnesses have also printed or commissioned the printing of various translations of the Bible. The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*—translated, printed, and distributed by the Witnesses—is now available in whole or in part in 96 languages. More than 166 million copies have been distributed. The Witnesses also share the good news of the Kingdom . . .

**At Christian Meetings.** Weekly meetings held at local Kingdom Halls are not merely religious services; they are designed to

*The good news is being preached worldwide by Jehovah’s Witnesses*



educate. Talks are given on subjects pertaining to the Bible, and the Bible is studied with the help of the *Watchtower* magazine and other publications. At the meetings, Witnesses also learn to be more effective proclaimers of the good news.

The Witnesses study the same material in over 107,000 congregations throughout the earth, contributing to their unity. These meetings are open to the public. No collection is ever taken. Of course, none of this would have much meaning if the Witnesses failed to practice what they preach. Therefore, they try to recommend the good news . . .

**By Personal Example.** They endeavor to be exemplary in Christian conduct, doing their best to treat others the way they would have others treat them. (Matthew 7:12) Though they are imperfect and sometimes fall short, they sincerely desire to act in a loving way toward all people not only by sharing the good news but also by extending a helping hand whenever possible.

Jehovah's Witnesses are not trying to convert the world by their preaching. Rather, when that work is done to Jehovah's satisfaction, the end will come, as Jesus foretold. What will that mean for the earth and the people on it?

## What Is “the End”?

“ . . . and then the end will come.”—MATTHEW 24:14.

**T**HERE seems to be no shortage of end-of-the-world scenarios. Books, movies, and magazines, ranging from the comic to the scientific, portray an assortment of doomsday catastrophes. They include annihilation by nuclear war, asteroid collision, deadly virus, runaway climate change, or invaders from outer space.

Religious views also vary; many teach that “the end” will bring an end to all life on earth. Commenting on Matthew 24:14, one theologian wrote these dire words: “This verse is one of the most important in all the Word of God . . . Our generation faces potential destruction of such total proportions that few of us try to envisage the awful reality.”

Such views usually overlook an important fact: Jehovah God “firmly established” the earth; he “did not create it simply for nothing, [but] formed it even to be inhabited.”

(Isaiah 45:18) So when Jesus referred to “the end,” he did not mean that the earth would be destroyed; neither did he mean that humanity would be obliterated. He meant that the wicked—those who stubbornly refuse to live in harmony with Jehovah’s loving direction—would be destroyed.

Consider an illustration. Suppose you owned a beautiful home and allowed people to live in it for free. Some of the tenants lived peaceably with one another and took good care of your home. Others, however, made nothing but trouble, fought with one another, and abused the good tenants. They damaged your property and stubbornly refused to respond to your efforts to stop them.

What would you do to correct matters? Would you destroy your home? Not likely. You would probably evict the bad tenants and repair what damage had been done.



Jehovah will act in a similar manner. He inspired the psalmist to write: "Evildoers themselves will be cut off, but those hoping in Jehovah are the ones that will possess the earth. And just a little while longer, and the wicked one will be no more; and you will certainly give attention to his place, and he will not be. But the meek ones themselves will possess the earth, and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace."—Psalm 37:9-11.

The apostle Peter spoke about the same subject. Under inspiration, he wrote: "There were heavens from of old and an earth standing compactly out of water and in the midst of water by the word of God, and by those means the world of that time suffered destruction when it was deluged with water." (2 Peter 3:5, 6) Here the apostle refers to the Flood of Noah's day. The world of ungodly people suffered destruction, but the earth was not destroyed. That global Deluge set "a pattern for ungodly persons of things to come."—2 Peter 2:6.

Peter then added: "The heavens and the earth that are now are stored up for fire." If we were to stop there, we might get the wrong idea. Note, though, that the verse goes on to say: "And of destruction of the ungodly men." The destruction is not of the earth but

of the ungodly. What follows? Peter wrote: "There are new heavens [God's Messianic Kingdom] and a new earth [a righteous human society] that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell."—2 Peter 3:7, 13.

Bible prophecy also shows that the time for "the end" to come is near. Read Matthew 24:3-14 and 2 Timothy 3:1-5 to see features that prove this to be true.\*

Does it strike you as curious that there is so much confusion about Matthew 24:14, a verse that even a child can understand? There are reasons for this. Satan has blinded people to the precious truths found in God's Word. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Also, God has hidden his purposes from the haughty and has revealed them to humble ones. In this regard, Jesus said: "I publicly praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intellectual ones and have revealed them to babes." (Matthew 11:25) What an honor it is to be among the humble ones who understand what the Kingdom of God really is and who can look forward to the blessings it will bring to all who support it!

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\* For detailed information, see chapter 9 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

***The Kingdom will bring "the end"  
to all wickedness on earth***



## IS GOD'S KINGDOM

# a Condition of the Heart?

"The Kingdom of God comes by way of a listening heart," observes Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Jesus of Nazareth*. For some, God's Kingdom is just that—a change that takes place inside a person when he accepts Jesus Christ and develops faith. Is God's Kingdom simply a personal transformation, a kingdom 'only in your heart'?

**F**OR Jesus, the Kingdom was indeed something close to his heart. The Kingdom was "the axis of Jesus' preaching," acknowledges Pope Benedict. During most of his relatively short ministry, Jesus traveled throughout the land, "preaching the good news of the kingdom." (Matthew 4:23) By his teaching and by the miracles he performed, Jesus made clear that the Kingdom is more than a person's acceptance of God and obedience to him. It involves rulership, judgment, and everlasting blessings.

### Rulership and Judgment

On one occasion during the final days of Jesus' ministry, the mother of Jesus' close disciples James and John came to Jesus and said: "Give the word that these my two sons may sit down, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." (Matthew 20:21) Clearly, she was not speaking about something in the heart of her sons. She understood that the Kingdom involved rulership with Jesus, and she wanted her sons to have a share in it. In fact, Jesus did promise his 11 faithful apostles that they would be in his Kingdom and "sit on thrones" and "judge" with him. (Luke 22:30) To his followers, then, Jesus' Kingdom was to be a real rulership—an administration, a government.

What about the people in general in Jesus'

day? Did they understand the Kingdom to be just a personal transformation, or did they expect something more? Well, shortly before Passover 33 C.E. when Jesus was entering Jerusalem riding a colt, the crowd welcomed him and some cried out: "Save, we pray, the Son of David!" (Matthew 21:9) Why did they cry out that way? No doubt they had come to recognize that Jesus was the promised Messiah and that God would give him an everlasting Kingdom, "the throne of David his father." They longed for the salvation, peace, and justice that the Kingdom would bring. —Luke 1:32; Zechariah 9:9.

### Everlasting Blessings

Even people who appeared to have little interest in Jesus' ministry had knowledge of one of his teachings. At Jesus' execution, a criminal impaled alongside him pleaded: "Jesus, remember me when you get into your kingdom." What was Jesus' reply? "You will be with me in Paradise," he assured the dying man.—Luke 23:42, 43.

That robber evidently believed that after being raised from the dead, Jesus would receive or enter into a Kingdom. Jesus would have not only the authority to resurrect and reform the man—along with millions of others—but also the desire to do it. Yes, empowered as Ruler in the spirit realm, Jesus would

bring everlasting blessings to mankind earth wide through the Kingdom.—John 5:28, 29.

### A Kingdom in Their Midst

Did Jesus not say: “The kingdom of God is in your midst”? Yes, those words of Jesus are found at Luke 17:21. In fact, some Bible versions say “the kingdom of God is within you,” while others say “is among you.” (See, for example, the *King James Version* and *The New English Bible*.) What did Jesus mean by that statement?

The context shows that Jesus addressed those words to an antagonistic Jewish religious group called the Pharisees. They had their own expectations regarding the Messiah and his Kingdom. For them, the Messiah would come “with the clouds of the heavens” as a glorious King, to deliver the Jews from the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel. (Daniel 7:13, 14) Jesus, however, pointed out their error by telling them: “The kingdom of God is not coming with striking observableness.” Then he added the words: “Look! the kingdom of God is in your midst.”—Luke 17:20, 21.

While Jesus taught and performed miracles that clearly identified him as the promised King of that Kingdom, the Pharisees, lacking clean hearts and genuine faith, simply became more opposed. They doubted Jesus’ credentials and claims. So he laid the facts before them: The Kingdom, represented by its designated King, was ‘in their midst.’ He did not ask that they look inside themselves.\* Jesus and his disciples were standing before them. “God’s kingdom is here with you,” he said.—Luke 17:21, *Contemporary English Version*.

\* The pronoun “you” in the expression rendered “within you” in some Bible translations is plural in the original Greek and refers to the Pharisees, to whom Jesus was speaking. Surely, Jesus could not have been talking about the Pharisees’ personal transformation or their receptive heart condition.

Was God’s Kingdom in the heart of Jesus’ obstinate and murderous opposers?



### A Kingdom Close to Your Heart

While God’s Kingdom does not exist *in* the hearts of sinful humans, it should be something *close* to our hearts. By his teaching and powerful works, Jesus endeavored to build in his listeners heartfelt faith in a righteous administration that would bring true peace and security. He wanted them to have faith that would affect their lives for the better. In fact, he taught them to pray: “Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.” (Matthew 6:9, 10) Many of Jesus’ listeners were touched by his words and came to have faith that moved them to follow Jesus in the pursuit of the blessings of God’s Kingdom.

Would you like to have this kind of faith? What, then, must you do to build such faith? Recall the opening words of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount: “Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need, since the kingdom of the heavens belongs to them.” (Matthew 5:3) Why not accept the invitation to study the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses, who brought you this magazine? Then you will come to have hope, not in a personal transformation alone, but in a right and just rulership—a Kingdom that will bring peace and security to all.



## DOES THE BIBLE CONDEMN Gambling?

**P**OPULAR films and television shows have often portrayed gambling—especially at casinos—as the pastime of the beautiful, wealthy, and sophisticated. Of course, viewers generally realize that these portrayals are mere fiction or fantasy.

In the real world, though, lottery tickets, sports betting, and online gambling compete with casinos for the gambler's attention. Gambling is “almost a universal vice whose appeal has spread like a brushfire,” says the book *Internet Gambling*. Poker, for example, is now featured as a mainstream sport on television and the Internet. According to one newspaper, experts estimate that in the United States, the number of poker players doubled during a recent 18-month period.

Gambling has been described as wagering money on an uncertain outcome. Many people reason that as long as the money belongs to the gambler and he does not become addicted, there is nothing wrong with gambling. In fact, the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says that gambling “is not considered sinful except when the indulgence in it is inconsistent with duty.” However, no Scriptural passages are cited to support that conclusion. How, then, should a Christian view this mat-

ter? Does the Bible condone or condemn gambling?

It must be noted that the Holy Scriptures do not directly mention gambling. This does not mean, however, that we are left with no direction on the matter. Instead of issuing rules governing every activity or situation, the Bible urges us to “go on perceiving what the will of Jehovah is.” (Ephesians 5:17) The Greek word translated “perceiving,” according to Bible scholar E. W. Bullinger, denotes bringing together the features of a subject by means of “mental activity, knowledge acquired by reflection and consideration.” A Christian can thus perceive God's will in this matter by bringing together and reflecting on Bible principles that relate to gambling. As you read the scriptures cited in the following discussion, you might ask yourself: ‘Does gambling harmonize with this scripture? What does God's Word indicate as to his will in this matter?’

### The Lure of Luck

Since gambling involves betting on uncertainties, belief in luck—a mysterious force that supposedly controls random events—plays a large role, especially when money is wagered. For example, auspicious



numbers are chosen for lottery tickets; the uttering of certain words is forbidden among superstitious mah-jongg players; and a puff of air is blown over dice before they are thrown. Why? Gamblers often believe that luck will, or at least might, influence the outcome.

Is it merely a harmless game to put one's trust in luck? Some people in ancient Israel felt that way. They believed that luck could bring them prosperity. How did Jehovah God feel about the matter? Through his prophet Isaiah, God told them: "You men are those leaving Jehovah, those forgetting my holy mountain, those setting in order a table for the god of Good Luck and those filling up mixed wine for the god of Destiny." (Isaiah 65:11) In God's eyes, belief in luck is a form of idolatry and is not compatible with true worship. It reflects trust in an imaginary force rather than in the true God. There is no reason to believe that God has changed his view.

### How the Prizes Are Won

Whether wagering online, purchasing a lottery ticket, placing a sports bet, or gaming in a casino, gamblers often overlook the source of the prize they are vying to win. Gambling differs from a legitimate transaction or purchase in that the player wants to win money that other players lose.\* "For

\* The October 8, 2000, issue of *Awake!*, pages 25 to 27, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, explained how investment in the stock market differs from gambling.

## The Excitement of Winning

Is gambling habit-forming, easily leading to addiction? Following a study of gamblers' responses to winning and losing, Dr. Hans Breiter noted that "a monetary reward in a gambling-like experiment produces brain activation very similar to that observed in a cocaine addict receiving an infusion of cocaine."

every millionaire that is created from lottery winnings," states Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, "there are millions of others who have lost their money!" What Bible principles can help a Christian to understand God's feelings about this?

The last of the Ten Commandments given to Israel stated: "You must not desire your fellowman's wife, nor his slave man nor his slave girl nor his bull nor his ass *nor anything that belongs to your fellowman.*" (Exodus 20:17) Desiring a fellow man's things—his material possessions, wealth, and money—was a serious sin, listed along with desiring his

*Whose money  
are gamblers  
hoping to win?*



wife. Centuries later, the apostle Paul repeated this command for Christians: “You must not covet.” (Romans 7:7) Might a Christian who seeks to win what another person loses be guilty of covetousness?

“Whether they [most gamblers] admit it or not,” writes columnist J. Phillip Vogel, “before the action gets going they secretly dream of turning whatever stake they have—even if it’s only a few dollars—into a windfall.” Such gamblers dream of making it big or striking it rich in one easy stroke. This obviously is contrary to the Bible’s counsel that a Christian should “do hard work, doing with his hands what is good work, that he may have something to distribute to someone in need.” (Ephesians 4:28) And the apostle Paul specifically stated: “If anyone does not want to work, neither let him eat.” He added: “They should eat food they themselves earn.” (2 Thessalonians 3:10, 12) But might gambling be considered legitimate work?

Although gambling can be an intense game, any money awarded has been *won*, not *earned* or obtained as a return for work done or services rendered. In gambling, money is wagered against the odds, with the outcome highly dependent on chance, and it is based on the hope that sooner or later things will turn out well. In short, a gambler seeks to get something for nothing. True Christians, on the other hand, are admonished to earn money by honest work. “With a man there is nothing better than that he should eat and indeed drink and cause his soul to see good *because of his hard work*,” wrote wise King Solomon. Then he added: “This is from the hand of the true God.” (Ecclesiastes 2:24) Yes, servants of God do not build their hope on fantasy or search for shortcuts but look to God for happiness and blessings.

### “A Snare” to Be Avoided

Even if a player should beat the odds and win, he would do well to consider not just the momentary excitement of winning but the long-term effects of gambling. “An inheritance is being got by greed at first,” says Proverbs 20:21, “but its own future will not be blessed.” Many lottery winners and other gamblers have learned, to their regret or sorrow, that the riches they won did not bring them happiness. How much better it is to heed the Bible’s counsel not to rest our hope on “uncertain riches, but on God, who furnishes us all things richly for our enjoyment.”—1 Timothy 6:17.

There is a much more sinister side to gambling besides winning and losing. “Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin,” says God’s Word. (1 Timothy 6:9) A snare is designed to entangle a victim. Countless numbers of people, determined to wager only a small amount of money or to try their hand at gambling just a few times, have become entangled and unable to escape gambling addiction. It has destroyed careers, hurt loved ones, and ruined families.

Having considered the many scriptures related to the subject of gambling, do you perceive what God’s will is in the matter? The apostle Paul urged his fellow Christians: “Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2) God’s will, not popular sentiment, should guide a Christian’s life. As “the happy God,” Jehovah wants us to enjoy life, free of the bitter fruitage that results from the snare that gambling is.—1 Timothy 1:11.



Institute of Archaeology/Hebrew University © Tel Rehov Excavations

## “A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY”

**W**HEN Jehovah God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, he promised to bring them “to a land good and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey.”—Exodus 3:8.

As the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, they raised cows, sheep, and goats, thus having an abundant supply of milk. What, though, about honey? Some believe that the expression refers to sweet syrup made from dates, figs, or grapes. And most of the specific Bible references to the honey of bees is to wild honey, not to a cultivated crop. (Judges 14:8, 9; 1 Samuel 14:27; Matthew 3:1, 4) Was the land really “flowing” with honey as well as with milk?

A recent archaeological find in modern-day Israel provides a clearer picture. Of the discovery, a Hebrew University press release stated: “This is the earliest apiary [beehive colony] to be revealed to date in an archaeological excavation anywhere in the Ancient Near East, said Prof. (Amihai) Mazar. It dates from the 10th to early 9th centuries B.C.E.”

The archaeologists found more than 30 bee-

hives in three rows, and they estimated that the total area would have contained some 100 beehives. Study of the beehives has found parts of bees’ bodies and beeswax molecules in the remains. Scholars estimate that “as much as half a ton of honey could be culled each year from these hives.”

In ancient times, not only was honey delicious food but beeswax was used in the metal and leather industries. Another use was for writing boards made of a wooden panel with a recess filled with beeswax, which could be melted down for reuse. What conclusion do the archaeologists draw from this discovery?

“While the Bible tells us nothing about beekeeping in Israel at that time,” continues the press release, “the discovery of the apiary at Tel Rehov indicates that beekeeping and the extraction of bees’ honey and honeycomb was a highly developed industry as early as the First [Solomon’s] Temple period. Thus, it is possible that the term ‘honey’ in the Bible indeed pertains to bees’ honey.”





## LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

This article raises questions you may have asked and shows where you can read the answers in your Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses would be pleased to discuss these answers with you.

# Who Is Jesus Christ?

### 1. Who is Jesus Christ?

Unlike any other human, Jesus lived in heaven as a spirit person before he was born on earth. (John 8:23) He was God's first creation, and he helped in the creation of all other things. He is the only one created directly

by Jehovah and is thus called God's "only-begotten" Son. Jesus served as God's Spokesman, so he is also called "the Word."—John 1: 1-3, 14; *read Proverbs 8:22, 23, 30; Colossians 1:15, 16.*

### 2. Why did Jesus come to earth?

God sent his Son to earth by transferring his life from heaven to the womb of a virgin Jewess named Mary. So Jesus did not have a human father. (Luke 1: 30-35) Jesus came to earth (1) to teach the truth about God, (2) to set an example in doing God's will, and (3) to give his perfect life as "a ransom."—*Read Matthew 20:28; John 18:37.*



### 3. Why do we need a ransom?

A ransom is a price paid to release a person from bondage. Death and old age were not part of God's original purpose for mankind. How do we know that? God told the first man, Adam, that if he committed what the Bible calls sin, he would die. If Adam had not sinned, he would never have died. Even though Adam's life did not end until centuries

later, he began to die from the day he disobeyed God. (Genesis 2:16, 17; 5:5) Adam passed on to all his descendants sin and its penalty, death. Thus, death "entered" the world of mankind through Adam. That is why we need a ransom.—*Read Romans 5:12; 6:23.*



#### 4. Why did Jesus die?

Who could pay the ransom to free us from death? When we die, we pay the penalty only for our own sins. No imperfect man can pay for the sins of others.—*Read Psalm 49:7-9.*

Since Jesus did not inherit imperfection from a human father, he died, not because of his own sins, but for the sins of others. God sent his Son to die for us as an expression of His extraordinary love for mankind. Jesus also showed love for us by obeying his Father and giving his life for our sins.—*Read John 3:16; Romans 5:18, 19.*



#### 5. What is Jesus doing now?

By curing the sick, raising the dead, and rescuing people in peril, Jesus demonstrated what he would eventually do for all obedient mankind. (Luke 18:35-42; John 5:28, 29) After Jesus died, God restored him to life as a spirit person. (1 Peter 3:18) Jesus then waited at God's right hand until Jehovah gave him power to rule as King over all the earth. (Hebrews 10:12, 13) Now Je-

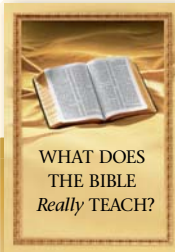
sus is ruling as King in heaven, and his followers on earth are announcing the good news worldwide.—*Read Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 24:14.*

Soon, Jesus will use his power as King to put an end to all suffering and those who cause it. Millions who exercise faith in Jesus and obey him will enjoy life in a paradise on earth.—*Read Psalm 37:9-11.*



*Millions who exercise faith in Jesus and obey him will enjoy life in a paradise on earth*

For more information, see chapter 4 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



# Did Jesus Really Die on a Cross?

A 17TH-CENTURY DRAWING OF AN EXECUTION ON A *STAUROS*, FROM LIPSIUS' "DE CRUCE"



"THE cross," says one encyclopedia, "is the most familiar symbol of Christianity." Many religious paintings and works of art depict Jesus nailed to a cross. Why is this symbol so widespread in Christendom? Did Jesus really die on a cross?

Many would point to the Bible for the answer. For example, according to the *King James Version*, at the time of Jesus' execution, onlookers made fun of Jesus and challenged him to "come down from the cross." (Matthew 27:40, 42) Many other Bible translations read similarly. *Today's English Version* says of Simon from Cyrene: "The soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross." (Mark 15:21) In these verses, the word "cross" is translated from the Greek word *stauros*'. Is there a solid basis for such a translation? What is the meaning of that original word?

## Was It a Cross?

According to Greek scholar W. E. Vine, *stauros*' "denotes, primarily, an upright pale or stake. On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb *stauroō*, to fasten to a stake or pale, are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed cross."

*The Imperial Bible-Dictionary* says that the word *stauros*' "properly signified a *stake*, an upright pole, or piece of paling, on which anything might be hung, or which might be used in impaling a piece of ground." The dictionary continues: "Even amongst the Romans the *crux* (Latin, from which our *cross* is derived) appears to have been originally an upright pole." Thus, it is not surprising that *The Catholic Encyclopedia* states: "Certain it is, at any rate, that the cross originally consisted of a simple vertical pole, sharpened at its upper end."

There is another Greek word, *xy'lon*, that Bible writers used to describe the instrument of Jesus' execution. *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* defines *xy'lon* as "a piece of timber, a wooden stake." It goes on to say that like *stauros*', *xy'lon* "was simply an upright pale or stake to which the Romans nailed those who were thus said to be crucified."

In line with this, we note that the *King James Version* reads at Acts 5:30: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree [*xy'lon*]." Other versions, though rendering *stauros*' as "cross," also translate *xy'lon* as

“tree.” At Acts 13:29, *The Jerusalem Bible* says of Jesus: “When they had carried out everything that scripture foretells about him they took him down from the tree [*xy/lon*] and buried him.”

In view of the basic meaning of the Greek words *stauros*’ and *xy/lon*, the *Critical Lexicon and Concordance*, quoted above, observes: “Both words disagree with the modern idea of a cross, with which we have become familiarised by pictures.” In other words, what the Gospel writers described using the word *stauros*’ was nothing like what people today call a cross. Appropriately, therefore, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* uses the expression “torture stake” at Matthew 27:40-42 and in other places where the word *stauros*’ appears. Similarly, the *Complete Jewish Bible* uses the expression “execution stake.”

### Origin of the Cross

If the Bible does not really say that Jesus was executed on a cross, then why do all the churches that claim to teach and follow the Bible—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox—adorn their buildings with the cross and use it as a symbol of their faith? How did the cross come to be such a popular symbol?

The answer is that the cross is venerated not only by churchgoers who claim to follow the Bible but also by people far removed from the Bible and whose worship far predates that of “Christian” churches. Numerous religious reference works acknowledge that the use of crosses in various shapes and forms goes back to remote periods of human civilization. For example, ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics and depictions of their gods and goddesses often show a cross in the shape of a T with a circle at the top. It is called the ansate, or handle-shaped, cross and is thought to be a symbol of life. In time, this form of the cross was adopted and used extensively by the Coptic Church and others.

According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, “the primitive form of the cross seems to have been that of the so-called ‘gamma’ cross (*crux gammata*), better known to Orientalists and students of prehistoric archaeology by its Sanskrit name, *swastika*.” This sign was widely used among Hindus in India and Buddhists throughout Asia and is still seen in decorations and ornaments in those areas.

It is not known exactly when the cross was adopted as a “Christian” symbol. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New*

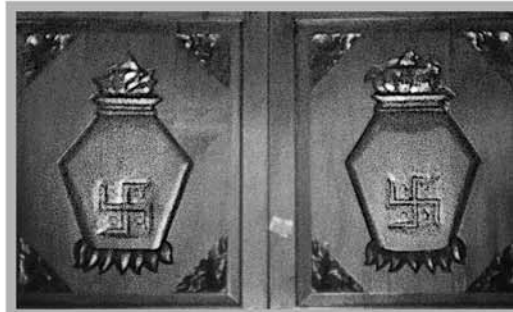
What the Gospel writers described was nothing like what people today call a cross

EGYPTIAN WALL PAINTING (c. 14th century B.C.E.) FEATURING THE ANSATE CROSS, A SYMBOL OF LIFE



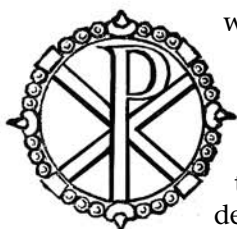
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THE GAMMA CROSS ON THE LAXMI NARAYAN HINDU TEMPLE



*Testament Words* states: “By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols,” including the cross.

Some writers point to the claim by the sun-god worshipper Constantine that in 312 C.E., while on one of his military campaigns, he had a vision of a cross superimposed on the sun along with the motto in Latin “*in hoc vince*” (by this conquer).



Some time later, a “Christian” sign was emblazoned on the standards, shields, and armor of his army. (Pictured at left.) Constantine purportedly converted to Christianity, though he was not baptized until 25 years later on his deathbed. His motive was questioned by some. “He acted rather as if he were converting Christianity into what he thought most likely to be accepted by his subjects as a catholic [universal] religion, than as if he had been converted to the teachings of Jesus the Nazarene,” says the book *The Non-Christian Cross*.

Since then, crosses of many forms and shapes have come into use. For example, *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* tells us that what is called St. Anthony’s cross “was shaped like a capital T, thought by some to be derived from the symbol of the [Babylonian] god Tammuz, the letter *tau*.” There was also the St. Andrew’s cross, which is in the shape of the letter X, and the familiar two-beamed cross with the crossbar lowered. This latter type, called the Latin cross, is erroneously “held by tradition to be the shape of the cross on which our Lord died.”

## What First-Century Christians Believed

The Bible shows that in the first century, many who heard Jesus became believers and accepted the redeeming value of his sacrificial death. After the apostle Paul preached to the Jews in Corinth, proving that Jesus is the Christ, says the Bible, “Crispus the presiding officer of the synagogue became a believer in the Lord, and so did all his household. And many of the Corinthians that heard began to believe and be baptized.” (Acts 18:5-8) Instead of introducing some religious symbol or image into their worship, Paul instructed his fellow Christians to “flee from idolatry” and from any other practice drawn from pagan worship.—1 Corinthians 10:14.

Historians and researchers have found no evidence to validate the use of the cross among the early Christians. Interestingly, the book *History of the Cross* quotes one late 17th-century writer who asked: “*Can it be pleasing to the blessed Jesus to behold His disciples glorying in the image of that instrument of capital punishment on which He [supposedly] patiently and innocently suffered, despising the shame?*” How would you answer?

Worship acceptable to God does not require objects or images. “What agreement does God’s temple have with idols?” Paul asked. (2 Corinthians 6:14-16) Nowhere do the Scriptures suggest that a Christian’s worship should include the use of a likeness of the instrument used to impale Jesus.—Compare Matthew 15:3; Mark 7:13.

What, then, is the identifying mark of true Christians? Not the cross or any other symbol, but love. Jesus told his followers: “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.”—John 13:34, 35.





## OUR READERS ASK . . .

### Did God create the Devil?

■ Since the Bible says that God “created all things,” some have concluded that God must have created the Devil. (Ephesians 3:9; Revelation 4:11) The Bible clearly shows that he did not.

Jehovah created the person who *became* the Devil. Thus, the existence of this one as the chief opposer of God must be reconciled with what the Scriptures reveal about Jehovah as the Creator. Of him, it is said: “Perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness, with whom there is no injustice; righteous and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:3-5) From that statement, we can conclude that Satan had at one time been perfect and righteous, namely, one of God’s angelic sons. At John 8:44, Jesus said that the Devil “did not *stand fast* in the truth,” implying that Satan had at one time been truthful and guiltless.

However, like the rest of Jehovah’s intelligent creatures, the angel who became Satan had the freedom to choose between right and wrong. By choosing a course in opposition to God and inciting the first human couple to join him, he made himself Satan, which means “Resister.” —Genesis 3:1-5.

That wicked spirit creature also made himself the Devil, meaning “Slanderer.” Satan was the invisible pretender who was behind the serpent and cunningly used lies to trick Eve into disobeying the Creator’s plainly stated law. That is why Jesus called Satan “the father of the lie.” —John 8:44.

How, though, could a perfect spirit creature—who had neither weaknesses from within nor wicked influences from without—become wrongly inclined? He evidently craved worship that belonged only to God and saw the possibil-

ity of bringing humans under his rule instead of that of Jehovah. By continuing to dwell on this prospect of rulership instead of dismissing it, he allowed the idea to fester until, at last, he acted upon it. The process is described in the book of James: “Each one is tried by being drawn out and enticed by his own desire. Then the desire, when it has become fertile, gives birth to sin.” —James 1:14, 15; 1 Timothy 3:6.

To illustrate: Imagine an accountant who sees an opportunity to manipulate records in such a

### By choosing a course in opposition to God, a perfect angelic creature made himself Satan

way as to steal from his company for personal profit. He might quickly dismiss that wrong thought. If, instead, he dwells on this possibility, then the idea will grow in its appeal, and he is likely to carry it out. If he does, he has, in effect, *made himself* a thief. If he lies about his crime, he becomes a liar too. In a similar way, by cultivating wrong desires and acting on them, the angel whom God created used his free will to engage in deception and rebel against his Father, thus making himself Satan the Devil.

Thankfully, Satan the Devil will be destroyed in God’s due time. (Romans 16:20) Meanwhile, worshippers of Jehovah God are informed of Satan’s designs and given protection from his machinations. (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11) So by all means “oppose the Devil, and he will flee from you.” —James 4:7.



## DRAW CLOSE TO GOD

### “You Will Have a Yearning”

**I**T IS painful to watch a loved one suffer and die. We naturally grieve such a loss. It is comforting to know, however, that our Creator, Jehovah God, understands our grief. More than that, he longs to use his almighty power to restore life to the dead. Notice the hope conveyed in the words of Job, recorded at Job 14:13-15.

Consider the setting. Job, a man of outstanding faith, undergoes severe trials—including the loss of his material possessions, the death of all his beloved children, and a painful illness. In the throes of misery, he calls out to God: “O that in Sheol [mankind’s common grave] you would conceal me!” (Verse 13) Job sees Sheol as a welcome relief. There, as if a treasure hidden by God, he will be free of hardship and pain.\*

Will Sheol become Job’s permanent shelter? Job believes otherwise. He continues his prayer: “O that . . . you would set a time limit for me and remember me!” Job confidently hopes that his stay in Sheol will be temporary and that Jehovah will not forget him. Job likens the time that he will spend in Sheol to “compulsory service”—an enforced period of waiting. For how long? “Until my relief comes,” he says. (Verse 14) That relief will mean release

\* One reference work says that Job’s words “conceal me” can mean “to lay [me] away in security as a precious deposit.” Another source says that these words suggest “hide me as a treasure.”

from Sheol—in other words, a resurrection from the dead!

Why is Job convinced that his relief will come? Because he knows how our loving Creator feels about His faithful worshippers who have died. Says Job: “You will call, and I myself shall answer you. For the work of your hands you will have a yearning.” (Verse 15) Job acknowledges that he is the work of God’s hands. The Life-Giver who was responsible for Job’s formation in the womb can certainly restore him to life after he has died.—Job 10:8, 9; 31:15.

Job’s words teach us a tender lesson about Jehovah: He has special attachment to those who, like Job, place themselves in his hands, allowing him to mold and shape them into people who are desirable in his eyes. (Isaiah 64:8) Jehovah treasures his faithful worshippers. For loyal ones who have died, he has “a yearning.” The Hebrew word thus rendered is “unquestionably one of the strongest words to express the emotion of longing desires,” says one scholar. Yes, not only does Jehovah remember his worshippers but he also longs to restore them to life.

Thankfully, in the book of Job—one of the first Bible books to be written—Jehovah saw fit to reveal his purpose to resurrect the dead.\* He wants to reunite you with your loved ones who have died. That thought can make the loss easier to bear. Why not learn more about this loving God and how you can let him mold you into the kind of person who will see His purpose become a reality?

\* To learn more about the Bible’s promise of a resurrection to life in a righteous new world, see chapter 7 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses.



**SUGGESTED BIBLE READING FOR MARCH:**

■ Esther 1–Job 15



## DID YOU KNOW?

### **Who were “those of the household of Caesar” who sent Christian greetings through Paul to the Philippians?**



■ The apostle Paul wrote from Rome to the Philippian congregation in about 60 to 61 C.E., and the Caesar he mentioned was Emperor Nero. But who in Nero’s household would be sending greetings to Christians in Philippi? —Philippians 4:22.

It would be a mistake to assume that the term “household of Caesar” necessarily referred to the immediate relatives of the emperor. Rather, it encompassed all the people, including slaves and freedmen, both in Rome and in the provinces, who were in the emperor’s service. “The household of Caesar” would therefore include thousands of servants. They would care for

various responsibilities of a managerial or servile nature in the emperor’s palaces and on his estates and properties. Some would even play a role in the administration of government.

Some of the emperor’s servants in Rome evidently became Christians. Whether that was a result of Paul’s preaching in Rome is unknown. In any case, they apparently had a special interest in the Philippian congregation. Since Philippi was a Roman colony inhabited by many retired soldiers and government servants, it is possible that some Christians there were friends of those on whose behalf Paul conveyed greetings.

### **What was the levirate marriage mentioned in the Mosaic Law?**



■ In ancient Israel, if a man died sonless, it was expected that his brother marry the widow in order to produce offspring to continue the dead man’s family line. (Genesis 38:8) The arrangement, later incorporated into the Mosaic Law, was known as brother-in-law, or levirate, marriage. (Deuteronomy 25:5, 6) The actions of Boaz, described in the book of Ruth, show that this duty extended to other male relatives of the dead man’s family if none of his brothers survived.—Ruth 1:3, 4; 2:19, 20; 4:1-6.

The fact that brother-in-law marriage was practiced in Jesus’ day is shown by the Sadducees’ reference to

it, recorded at Mark 12:20-22. The first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus said that the practice not only preserved the family name but also kept property in the family and provided for the welfare of the widow. Back then, a wife had no hereditary right to her husband’s property. However, a child born from a levirate union would have retained the hereditary possession of the deceased man.

The Law did permit relatives to refuse to perform brother-in-law marriage. But refusal by a man to “build up his brother’s household” was considered disgraceful.—Deuteronomy 25:7-10; Ruth 4:7, 8.



## A LETTER FROM MEXICO

### “Does Jehovah Love Us Even Though We Are Indians?”

**M**ELESIO, an O’dam-speaking man, occasionally came down from the mountains to find work. He attended Christian meetings and took Bible literature back to share with his people. He begged for someone to visit them and teach them more about the Bible.

The O’dam, a very isolated ethnic group, live high in the Sierras in north central Mexico, some 150 miles (240 km) from the nearest congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Several of us decided to visit them.

Obtaining a pickup, tents, and sleeping bags, and taking enough food and gasoline for three days, we set out from the city of Durango. Starting at four o’clock in the morning, we drove for eight hours up a dusty mountain track to where it ended. This was the entry point to the region of the O’dam. Ahead lay a deep ravine and another mountain.

We left the pickup at a *ranchito*, and for the next three hours we proceeded on foot, carrying our equipment to the bottom of the ravine. There we made camp, gathered enough wood for a bonfire to ward off wild animals, and slept in three-hour shifts to keep the fire going.

Early the next morning, we began to climb the mountain. There were many paths, and we got lost several times. One in our group spoke a little O’dam, so we shared a brief Bible message at dwellings along the way. To our surprise, people began telling us that in Los Arenales, our destination, there were some who called themselves Jehovah’s Witnesses and that they held Bible meetings there. This was surprising but encouraging news.

With blistered feet, we arrived at Los Arenales. The community consisted of scattered adobe houses with cardboard roofing—no school, no electricity. Cut off from the out-



*Melesio with his wife, four daughters,  
and mother-in-law*



side world, the people lived in extreme poverty, subsisting on corn tortillas and little else. We found Melesio, a slender young man who was overjoyed to see us. He invited us to his simple home and told us that he had been praying every day that Jehovah would send His Witnesses to teach his family and his fellow O'dam the Bible. He felt unable to answer all their questions.

The O'dam practice shamanism. They use such charms as eagle feathers and bones, worship the forces of nature, and live in fear of the shamans, who exploit them. Melesio explained that when he learned on his trips to the city that Jehovah is the true God, he destroyed all his idolatrous objects. The community expected their gods to punish him with death. When nothing happened, they realized that Jehovah was more powerful than their gods. Consequently, they began to attend the Bible study that Melesio conducted with his family, using our literature.

"I told them that first they had to burn all their amulets and idols," said Melesio. Many overcame their superstitious fears, and the number attending grew to over 80. Amazed to hear this, we decided to hold a meeting that very afternoon. We sent word by messengers on horseback to those who regularly met at Melesio's house. Although it was midweek and on short notice, 25 came, arriving on foot and on burro.

With Melesio interpreting, we held a question-and-answer session on the Bible. They asked questions like: "Does Jehovah love us even though we are Indians?" "Does he hear prayers in O'dam?" "When Armageddon comes, will Jehovah take us into account even though we live so far from the cities?" Using the Bible, we were happy to assure



*A Bible study and a Christian meeting in Los Arenales*

these humble people that Jehovah cares for the meek, no matter what language they speak or how isolated they are. They begged us to send someone to teach them more.

After the meeting, we shared our food with these newfound friends. Night had fallen, and it was very cold at that altitude, so we were grateful when they offered us a room that was under construction to sleep in. The next morning they led us back down to our pickup by a shortcut, and we traveled back to Durango, tired but content.

What a privilege it was to meet these sincere people, most of whom cannot read or write or speak Spanish but who want to learn about the true God and worship him! Since our visit, six Witnesses have been to the community, staying for three weeks. They provided spiritual help to about 45 people who sincerely want to serve Jehovah. All of them attend the meetings regularly.

One final note. The only little store in Los Arenales does not sell cigarettes anymore. This is because so many people are studying the Bible and they have all stopped smoking. They have also legalized their marriage.

Servicio Postal Mexicano, Corros de Mexico





## RUSSIA'S SUMMER DISTRICT CONVENTIONS BRING BLESSINGS

**E**VERY summer, nature-loving Russians stream out of their urban apartments to the countryside to spend time in summer cottages called dachas. For them, it is a time for getting away from the hectic pace of the city. Over the last few summers, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia have also been seen heading for the countryside in large numbers—but for a different reason.

Despite restrictions on their preaching work in some cities, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continue to meet openly for worship, exercising their constitutional right to religious freedom. In some cases, however, op-

position and pressure from misinformed authorities or local Russian Orthodox clergy have made it difficult for them to engage suitable facilities for their annual summer district conventions. So the Witnesses have organized outdoor "forest" or "field" conventions. From 2007 to 2009, such outdoor spiritual "picnics" have been held about 40 times in 25 locations throughout Russia.

One Witness who has attended conventions in Russia for many years recalls: "In past years when we rented stadiums and buildings in large cities, many sincere people and local authorities have been able to draw



their own conclusions about our organization based on the cleanliness and order that they saw. Now we are forced to meet in the forest, where only wild animals look on. It is regrettable that the public cannot observe these wonderful gatherings attended by people of diverse backgrounds, races, and religions."

Although such gatherings are happy occasions, one Witness admits: "It is a joy to see the self-sacrifice and loyalty of fellow Witnesses who adapt to different circumstances. But, honestly, when the authorities make it difficult for us to hold our conventions, it can be taxing both physically and emotionally. It also limits our freedom to worship the almighty God in a dignified way." How have Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia coped with the challenge?

### **Forest Conventions Countrywide**

Often, last-minute cancellations of rental agreements mean that convention organizers have only a few days to make alternate arrangements for thousands of delegates. For example, in 2008, Witnesses in Cheboksary, Chuvash Republic, had to hold the district convention at a large campground surrounded by birch trees and overlooking the Volga River. The task confronting them was enormous. Out of 1,930 expected delegates, 1,700 had to be accommodated at the campground. They needed showers and sinks equipped with hot and cold water, toilets, and electricity. And all the delegates had to be fed.

The brothers met the challenge. Carpenters, electricians, and plumbers were found. A group of 350 Witnesses volunteered to assist with the work, 14 of whom lived on-site for ten days. They sawed planks and hauled straw and put up tents, shower stalls, and toilets. Another group of brothers made numerous trips to town to purchase supplies. Since

there was no place for cold-food storage, the brothers decided to provide everyone with three hot meals a day, cooked on-site. The campground administration cooperated by hiring some workers to prepare food for the delegates. In the end, 500 delegates brought their own tents, 150 rented housing near the campground, 15 happily bedded down in some hay in a stable, and the rest stayed in tents put up by the brothers.

When the delegates arrived, they saw a sea of colorful plastic chairs in orderly rows. In front were two rustic stages decorated with flowers, one for the Russian program and the other for the program in the Chuvash language. Everyone enjoyed the spiritual program and appreciated the hard work of the volunteers. One of those preparing food exclaimed, "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would never have believed that there could be such an efficient and disciplined organization like yours!" Some compared the convention arrangements to the Festival of Booths celebrated by the nation of Israel in Bible times.

In other cities, the Witnesses often had just a single day to come up with and prepare an alternate district convention site. This was the case in Nizhniy Novgorod, where volunteers worked in around-the-clock shifts on a private plot of land. They had to cut down



One Witness volunteer helping to set up an outdoor convention



*Volunteers worked together to clean the grounds before the convention and to provide meals for thousands of convention delegates*

trees and bushes, mow the grass, and rid the area of ticks and ants. By the time the delegates arrived on Friday morning, the volunteers had brought in 2,000 plastic seats and ten portable toilets, set up sinks with water, constructed a stage, and set up a generator and a sound system. One brother reported: "The most amazing thing was that the brothers who had worked around the clock did not feel like heroes. Humbly, they continued to serve others during the convention. They literally spent themselves so that their brothers and sisters could feel comfortable and enjoy the spiritual instruction."

Another brother writes: "There was a real feeling of teamwork. Although it was the first time the brothers organized an outdoor convention and there was little time, they thought of everything so that during the program, there would be as few distractions as possible. Afterward, we didn't feel tired. It was as if Jehovah gave each of us wings!"

### **God's Spirit in Action**

In many ways, dealing with the problems involved in holding the conventions drew the local Witnesses closer together and showed God's spirit in action. In Smolensk, many of the booked accommodations were canceled on the eve of the convention. One elder reports: "When several buses of delegates arrived at one o'clock in the morning, there was nowhere to house them. I started to cry because I could do nothing for them. I

turned to Jehovah in prayer and begged him to deal with the problem. How happy I was when an hour later we had found alternate accommodations for everyone! It was just amazing and proved that Jehovah would not leave the righteous one in the lurch!" At another forest convention, the brothers turned to a local village for help with accommodations, and because of the fine reputation the Witnesses have in that area, the villagers willingly housed 2,000 delegates in their homes during the convention.

"Just the fact that the convention was able to be held was convincing evidence of how important it is to rely on Jehovah in all circumstances," says one Witness. This was especially the case when uninvited "guests" showed up to disrupt the convention. In Novoshakhtinsk, Russian Orthodox clergy and protesters came and sang hymns and chanted into microphones in an attempt to drown out the convention speaker. However, the police prevented them from disrupting the program. When one of the protesters, an Orthodox woman, fainted because of the heat, the brothers took her to the convention's First Aid Department and rendered medical assistance. She was completely taken by surprise.

### **Amazed by What They Saw**

Because of a heightened awareness of terrorism, large gatherings in Russia often attract the attention of law enforcement officials as well as curious locals. For example, a





*Everyone enjoyed the spiritual program and appreciated the hard work of the volunteers*

forest convention in Volzhskiy was observed by representatives of an anti-extremism police squad. One of them lost his mobile phone during the program, and the brothers helped him to find it at the Lost and Found Department. Shortly afterward, he received a phone call from his superior, who wanted to know whether there were any incitements to violence or extremism at the convention. The officer replied: "Everything is fine; 5,000 people are here and no violations. What extremism? It gives you something to think about. I lost my phone, and they found it and returned it to me!"

One guard was impressed by the cleanliness of the grounds and was surprised that with so many children in attendance, he could not find so much as a single candy wrapper. The owner of the campground where another convention was held met the

police, who had been alerted to reports of a large religious gathering. He led the police lieutenant to the third-floor balcony of a building overlooking the campground and said: "Just look at them! You can see for yourself. What order!" The owner was amazed that the Witnesses did not drink or smoke and left without a trace that anyone had been there, even taking their garbage with them. He exclaimed: "It was like a paradise!"

### **Unity Evident Among God's People**

After one forest convention, the head of a nearby village was moved to say: "I understand that you are modest people, but you are really powerful. While we are sitting each one in his own shell, you are able to unite people!" From Kaliningrad to Kamchatka, citizens of this vast country continue to be favorably impressed by the unity demonstrated by God's people at their large spiritual gatherings. No matter how quickly and unexpectedly their plans may have to change, one thing remains unchanged—their respectful attitude toward secular authority and their fellow man.

Whatever their situation may yet be, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia joyfully continue to meet together for spiritual instruction. They pray "concerning kings and all those who are in high station; in order that [they] may go on leading a calm and quiet life with full godly devotion and seriousness."—1 Timothy 2:2.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia continue to lead "a calm and quiet life with full godly devotion"



## Defend True Worship!

**Instructions:** Do this exercise in quiet surroundings. As you read the scriptures, imagine that you are part of the event. Visualize the scene. Hear the voices. Feel the emotions of the characters. Let the account come to life.

**Main characters:** Elijah, Ahab, and some 450 Baal prophets

**Summary:** Elijah proves that Jehovah is superior to Baal.

### ① **ANALYZE THE SCENE.—READ 1 KINGS 18:17-40.**

On a separate sheet of paper, draw a diagram showing where you imagine Elijah, the Baal prophets, and the altars to be in relation to one another.

What sounds do you “hear” during the chaotic scene described in verses 26 through 29? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What emotions do you sense in Elijah’s voice as he addresses the Baal prophets? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### ② **DIG DEEPER.**

Why was courage needed on Elijah’s part to approach Ahab and then go on to conduct a test that would humiliate hundreds of Baal prophets? (Clue: Read 1 Kings 18:4, 13, 14.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Using research materials at your disposal, find out something about Baal worship. For example, what type of practices were associated with it? What effect did Baal worship have on Israel? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Why, do you think, did Elijah dig a trench around Jehovah's altar and then have it filled with water? \_\_\_\_\_

**3 APPLY WHAT YOU LEARNED. WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT . . .**

The courage that is required to defend true worship. \_\_\_\_\_

The benefits that come to those who show such courage. \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR FURTHER APPLICATION.**

In what area(s) of life could you show more courage in defending true worship? \_\_\_\_\_

**4 WHAT ASPECT OF THIS ACCOUNT IS MOST MEANINGFUL TO YOU, AND WHY? \_\_\_\_\_**

**IF YOU  
DON'T HAVE  
A BIBLE,**  
ASK JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES  
FOR ONE, OR  
READ IT ONLINE AT  
**[www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org)**

## District Convention Information

Starting this year, the dates and locations of the annual district conventions will no longer appear in *The Watchtower*. The information can be accessed at the [jw.org](http://jw.org) Web site.





# JESUS “TAKES AWAY the SIN of the WORLD”

John the Baptizer stated that Jesus “takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) This drew attention to Jesus’ role in saving obedient mankind.

**Why, though, did Jesus have to die to save sinners?**

**What did he achieve by willingly giving up his life?**

**Who benefits from his death?**

**What can it mean for you?**

Each year, Jehovah’s Witnesses gather to commemorate Jesus’ death on its anniversary. This year, the anniversary falls on **Sunday, April 17**, after sundown.

Jehovah’s Witnesses warmly invite you to meet with them to examine the significance of Jesus’ death. The Bible’s answers to the above questions will be considered.

You may attend at a location nearest to your home. Please check with Jehovah’s Witnesses locally for the exact time and place.