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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



WHAT GOD HAS DONE
FOR YOU

THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, honors Jehovah God, the Ruler of the universe. It comforts people with the good news that God's heavenly Kingdom will soon end 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 continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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COVER SUBJECT

What God Has Done for You 3

An Occasion You Should Not Miss 6

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Finding Strength in My Weakness 7

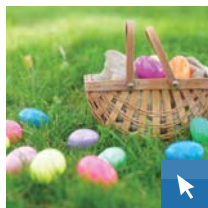
Interfaith—Is It God's Way? 10

Making Known the Word of God in Medieval Spain 12

Bible Questions Answered 16



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OTHER BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED —What Does the Bible Say About Easter?

(Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > BIBLE QUESTIONS
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What God Has Done for You

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16, *King James Version*.

That is one of the best-known and most widely quoted texts in the entire Bible. It has been said that no other verse “so succinctly summarizes God’s relationship with humanity and the way of salvation.” For that reason, in some countries this scripture or simply the reference “John 3:16” is often displayed at public events, on car stickers, in graffiti, and elsewhere.

In all likelihood, those who display the text feel convinced that God’s love guarantees their everlasting salvation. What about you? What does God’s love mean to you? And what do you think God has done that demonstrates his love for you?

“GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

Many people are willing to credit God with the creation of the physical universe, nature, and humans themselves. Living organisms are so intricate and well made that there must surely be some great intelligence behind their existence. A good number of people thank God daily for the gift of life. They also recognize that they are completely dependent on God for all of life’s necessities—such as air, water, food, and the earth’s natural cycles—so that they can continue to live and enjoy what they do.

We do well to thank God for all these things, for he truly is our Maker and Sustainer. (Psalm 104:10-28; 145:15, 16; Acts 4:24) We can appreciate God’s love for us when we think about all that he is doing just to make life possible. The apostle Paul put it this way: “[God] gives to

all people life and breath and all things. For by him we have life and move and exist.”—Acts 17: 25, 28.

God’s love, however, is expressed in more ways than just caring for us physically. He has also elevated and dignified us by giving us spiritual capacity and helping us to satisfy it. (Matthew 5:3) In this way, obedient mankind has the prospect of becoming part of God’s family, his “children.”—Romans 8:19-21.

As John 3:16 goes on to say, God showed his love for us by sending his Son, Jesus, to the earth to teach us about his God and Father and to die for us. Many, though, will admit that they do not truly understand *why* it was necessary for Jesus to die for mankind and *how* Jesus’ death is an expression of God’s love for us. Let us see how the Bible explains the reason for Jesus’ death and its value.

“HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON”

All mankind is mortal, subject to the scourge of sickness, old age, and death. Yet that is not what Jehovah God originally purposed. He gave the first humans the prospect of living forever in a paradise on earth. But there was one condition: They had to obey him. God said that if they chose not to, they would die. (Genesis 2:17) The first man did indeed rebel against God’s authority, and he brought death upon himself and his offspring. “Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because they had all sinned,” explains the apostle Paul.—Romans 5:12.

God, however, “loves justice.” (Psalm 37:28) Even though he could not ignore the deliberate act of transgression on the part of the first man, God has not condemned all humanity to suffering and death forever on account of one man’s disobedience. On the contrary, by applying the legal principle of “life for life,” he has balanced



Jesus willingly came to earth and gave his life to save mankind from sin and death

the scales of justice and made everlasting life possible once again for obedient humans. (Exodus 21:23) The question is, How could Adam’s loss of perfect human life be recovered? The answer: Someone had to offer up, or sacrifice, a life of equal value to Adam’s—a perfect human life.

Clearly, no imperfect descendant of Adam was capable of offering such a price, but Jesus was. (Psalm 49:6-9) Born without the stain of inherited sin, Jesus was perfect, just as Adam had been. Thus, by surrendering his life, Jesus ransomed mankind from slavery to sin. By so doing, he offered descendants of the first human couple the opportunity to enjoy the same perfect life that Adam and Eve once did. (Romans 3:23, 24; 6:23) Is there anything that we need to do to benefit from such a magnanimous act of love?

“WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM”

Going back to John 3:16, we note the words “whosoever believeth in [Jesus] should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This means that gaining the gift of everlasting life is conditional. If we are to “have everlasting life,” we need to believe in Jesus *and* obey him.

You might wonder: ‘How is obeying involved? Did Jesus not say that “whosoever believeth in him” will have everlasting life?’ Yes, belief, or faith, is essential. However, it is important to remember that in the Bible, faith is much more than simply believing. According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the word used by John in the original language signifies “reliance upon, not mere credence.” In order to have God’s favor, one needs more than a mental recognition that Jesus is the Savior. The believer must also sincerely endeavor to apply what Jesus taught. If there is no action, any profession of faith is hollow. “Faith without works is dead,” says the Bible. (James 2:26) Put another way, what is required of the believer is that he *exercise* faith in Jesus—that is, he must *live* in accord with his belief and faith.

Paul explains the point this way: “The love the Christ has compels us, because this is what we have concluded, that one man [Jesus] died for all . . . And he died for all so that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised up.” (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15) Sincere gratitude for Jesus’ sacrifice should move us to make changes in our life—from selfishly living for ourselves to living for Jesus, who died for us. That is to say, we need to give priority in our lives to practicing what Jesus taught. Such a change will necessarily affect our values, our choices, and everything we do. What will be the reward for those who do believe and exercise faith in Jesus?

“SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE”

The last part of John 3:16 expresses God’s promise to those who exercise faith in the ransom provision and live according to divine standards. God intends that such faithful ones “should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Different destinies, however, await individuals who benefit from God’s love.

To one group, Jesus promised everlasting life in heaven. He clearly told his faithful disciples that he was about to prepare a place for them so that they might rule with him in glory. (John 14:2, 3; Philippians 3:20, 21) Those resurrected to life in heaven “will be priests of God and of the Christ, and they will rule as kings with him for the 1,000 years.”—Revelation 20:6.

Only a limited number of Christ’s followers would receive such a privilege. In fact, Jesus said: “Have no fear, *little flock*, for your Father has approved of giving you the Kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) How numerous would that “little flock” be? Revelation 14:1, 4 says: “I saw, and look! the Lamb [the resurrected Jesus Christ] standing on [the heavenly] Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who have his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. . . . These were bought from among mankind as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” In comparison with the countless billions who have ever lived, 144,000 individuals constitute just a “little flock.” These are described as kings, so over whom will they rule?

Jesus spoke of a second group of faithful ones who will receive benefits from the heavenly Kingdom. As seen at John 10:16, Jesus noted: “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; those too I must bring in, and they will listen to my voice, and they will become one flock, one shepherd.” Those “sheep” look forward to everlasting life on earth—the same prospect that Adam and Eve originally entertained. How do we know that their future is earthly?

On numerous occasions, the Bible speaks of Paradise conditions to come on earth. To see this for yourself, you might wish to open your Bible and read the following passages: Psalm 37:9-11; 46:8, 9; 72:7, 8, 16; Isaiah 35:5, 6; 65:21-23; Matthew 5:5; John 5:28, 29; Revelation 21:4. Those verses foretell an end to war, famine, sickness, and death. They speak of a time when good people will have the joy of being able to build their own houses, cultivate their own land, and raise their children in peaceful surroundings.* Does such a prospect not appeal to you? We have good reason to believe that those promises will soon be realized.

* For more information on those prophecies, see chapter 3 of the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

GOD HAS DONE MUCH

If you pause to consider all that God has done for you and for mankind as a whole, it is clear that he has already done a great deal. We have life, intelligence, a measure of health, and the means necessary to support life. More than that, God's gift of the ransom through Jesus, who died for us, can mean even greater blessings, as we learn from John 3:16.

Everlasting life in peaceful, pleasant conditions, without the threat of illness, war, famine, or death, would surely open the door to endless happiness and blessings. Whether you will receive those blessings depends entirely on you. The question that remains really is, What are you doing for God?

An Occasion You Should Not Miss

On the night before he surrendered his life, Jesus instructed his faithful followers to remember, or commemorate, his sacrifice. Using the unleavened bread and the red wine before them, he instituted what has been called the Last Supper or the Lord's Evening Meal and commanded: "Keep doing this in remembrance of me."—Luke 22:19.

Each year, Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide gather to commemorate Jesus' death on its anniversary. In 2014, the Memorial falls on Monday, April 14, after sundown.

You are cordially invited to attend this meeting, during which further information on the significance of Jesus' sacrificial death will be presented. Attendance at this event is completely free. No collections will be taken. The person who gave you this magazine can tell you the time and location of the Memorial that will be held in your area, or you may consult our Web site, jw.org. Please make a note of the occasion, which we hope you will not miss. ■



Finding Strength in My Weakness

AS TOLD BY MAITE MORLANS

Seeing my fragile 65-pound (29 kg) body seated in a wheelchair, no one would think that I am strong. But as my body loses its power, inner strength keeps me going. Let me explain how strength and weakness have shaped my life.

Thinking of my childhood brings back memories of happy days in a country cottage in the south of France, where my parents lived. My father made a swing for me, and I loved running around the garden. In 1966, Jehovah's Witnesses visited our home and had long conversations with my father. Just seven months later, he resolved to become a Witness. My mother soon followed in his footsteps, and they raised me in a warm family environment.

My problems began shortly after we returned to Spain, my parents' home country. I started feeling stabbing pains in my hands and ankles. After two years of visiting many doctors, we found a renowned rheumatologist, who solemnly said, "It's too late." My mother started to weep. Strange expressions, such as "autoimmune chronic illness" and "juvenile polyarthritis,"* echoed around



At age four

that cold, gray room. Though I understood little as a ten-year-old girl, I realized that the news was bad.

The doctor suggested treatment in a children's sanatorium. On my arrival, the austere building dismayed me. Discipline was strict: The nuns cut my hair and dressed me in a dowdy uniform. 'How can I endure life here?' I thought, tearfully.

JEHOVAH BECOMES REAL TO ME

Because my parents had taught me to serve Jehovah, I refused to take part in Catholic rituals in the sanatorium. The nuns found it hard to understand why I refused. I implored Jehovah not to abandon me, and I soon felt his protective arm around me, like the warm, firm hug of a loving father.

My parents were allowed to visit me briefly on Saturdays. They brought me Bible publications to read to keep my faith strong. Children normally could not have their own books, but the nuns allowed me to keep them along with my Bible, which I read every day. I also talked to other girls

* Juvenile polyarthritis is a type of chronic arthritis that affects children. The body's own immune system attacks and destroys healthy tissues, causing pain and swelling in the joints.



about my hope of living forever in the earthly Paradise, where nobody would get sick. (Revelation 21:3, 4) Despite feeling sad and lonely at times, I was glad that my faith and trust in Jehovah were growing stronger.

After six long months, the doctors sent me home. My illness had not relented, but I felt happy to be back with my parents. My joints became more deformed, and I suffered more pain. I entered my teenage years very weak. Yet, at the age of 14, I got baptized, determined to serve my heavenly Father the best I could. However, I sometimes felt disappointed in him. “Why me? Please heal me,” I prayed. “Don’t you see how much I am suffering?”

Adolescence was a tough time for me. I had to accept that I would not get better. I could not help comparing myself with my friends—so healthy and full of life. I felt inferior, and I became introverted. Nevertheless, my family and friends supported me. I fondly remember Alicia—20 years older than I am—who became a true friend. She helped me to look beyond my illness and to take an interest in others rather than brooding on my own problems.

FINDING WAYS TO MAKE MY LIFE MEANINGFUL

When I was 18, I suffered a severe relapse, and even attending Christian meetings left me exhausted. Nevertheless, I took advantage of all my “spare time” at home to study the Bible carefully. The book of Job and the Psalms helped me to understand that at present Jehovah God cares for us primarily spiritually rather than physically. My frequent prayers brought me “the power beyond what is normal” and “the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.”—2 Corinthians 4:7; Philippians 4:6, 7.

At the age of 22, I had to face up to life in a wheelchair. I feared that people would stop noticing me and see only a wheelchair with a sickly

woman. However, the wheelchair restored some of my independence, and the “curse” became a blessing. A friend named Isabel suggested that I set a personal goal of spending 60 hours in the preaching work with her for one month.

At first, I thought the idea was ridiculous. But I asked Jehovah for help, and with support from my family and friends, I did it. That hectic month passed quickly, and I found that I had overcome my fears and embarrassment. I enjoyed it so much that in 1996 I decided to become a regular pioneer—spending a set number of hours each month in the ministry. It was one of my best decisions, drawing me closer to God and even strengthening me physically. Engaging in the ministry allowed me to share my faith with many people and help some to become God’s friends.

JEHOVAH KEEPS HOLD OF ME

In the summer of 2001, I suffered a bad car accident and broke both legs. As I lay in a hospital bed in excruciating pain, I fervently offered a silent prayer: “Please, Jehovah, don’t leave me!” Just then, a woman in a nearby bed asked me, “Are you one of Jehovah’s Witnesses?” I had no strength to answer, so I just nodded. “I know you people! I usually read your magazines,” she said. Those words comforted me greatly. Even in my pitiful state, I could give a witness for Jehovah. What an honor!

When I recovered a bit, I decided to witness some more. My mother wheeled me around the hospital ward with my two legs in plaster. Each day, we visited a few patients, asked how they were, and left some Bible literature with them. Those visits were exhausting, but Jehovah gave me the needed strength.

In the past few years, my aches and pains have increased and the loss of my father added to my distress. Still, I try to keep a positive outlook. How? Whenever possible, I try to be with friends

and relatives, and that helps take my mind off my problems. And when I am alone, I read, study the Bible, or preach to others by phone.

I also try to enjoy simple pleasures, such as the breeze on my face or the fragrance of flowers. These give me reasons to be thankful. A good sense of humor also works wonders. One day while out preaching, my friend, who was pushing my wheelchair, paused to make a note. Suddenly I was rolling down a slope out of control, and I crashed into a parked car. Both of us were

Often I close my eyes and
open my private “window”
into the new world that God
promises

With my parents in 2003



I find joy in preaching the good news by phone

shocked, but when we saw that nothing serious had happened, we had a good laugh.

There are many things in life I cannot do. I call them my pending wishes. Often I close my eyes and open my private “window” into the new world that God promises. (2 Peter 3:13) I imagine myself healthy, walking about and enjoying life to the full. I take to heart King David’s words: “Hope in Jehovah; be courageous and strong of heart.” (Psalm 27:14) Although my body has become more and more fragile, Jehovah has made me strong. I continue to find strength in my weakness. ■

INTERFAITH Is It God's Way?

“Does religion unite or divide us?” That question was posed to the readers of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Of those who responded, the vast majority—some 89 percent—felt that religion divides us.

SUPPORTERS of interfaith, however, view the matter quite differently. “Show me a religion that doesn’t care about compassion . . . , that doesn’t care about stewardship of the environment . . . , that doesn’t care about hospitality,” asked Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core.

Indeed, Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Muslims, and many others have on occasion joined forces to fight poverty, campaign for human rights, work to ban land mines, or draw attention to environmental issues. Multi-faith dialogue circles have participated in efforts to seek mutual understanding and inspiration. They celebrate their diversity with candle-lighting ceremonies, festivals, music, prayers, and so on.

Is the mingling of religions the way to heal the conflict among faiths? Is interfaith God’s way of bringing about a better world?

UNITY—AT WHAT PRICE?

One of the largest of the interfaith organizations boasts that it has members representing over 200 different faiths and that it is active in 76 countries. Its declared objective is “to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation.” That, however, has proved to be easier said than done. For example, according to the organizers, their charter had to be carefully worded so as not to offend the many faiths and indigenous groups that signed the document. Why? One factor was that there was disagreement on whether God should be included in the charter. Subsequently, any reference to or mention of God was avoided.

If God is left out of the picture, what role does faith play? Furthermore, how does such an interfaith movement differ from any secular charitable or philanthropic organization? For good reason, the aforementioned interfaith body describes itself, not as a religious entity, but as “a bridge-building organization.”

IS PROMOTING GOOD—GOOD ENOUGH?

“All major religious traditions carry basically the same message: that is love, compassion and forgiveness,” says the Dalai Lama, a prominent interfaith proponent. He adds: “The important thing is that they should be part of our daily lives.”

Granted, the value of such virtues as love, compassion, and forgiveness cannot be over-

Is Truth Relative?

Supporters of interfaith often feel that no religion can lay sole claim to truth. In fact, they may say that exclusivism among religions is what gives rise to many of the problems we see today.

Contrary to such opinions, Jehovah is described as “the God of truth,” and he said of himself: “I do not change.” (Psalm 31:5; Malachi 3:6) About God, Jesus said: “Your word is truth.” (John 17:17) That truth is revealed in the divinely inspired Scriptures, the Bible. It instructs us and equips us “for every good work.”—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.



Photo by Franco Origlia/Getty Images

A 2011 interfaith gathering. Is the mingling of religions the way to heal the conflict among faiths?

emphasized. In what has been called the Golden Rule, Jesus said: "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them." (Matthew 7:12) But is true faith just a matter of promoting what is good?

About many who claimed to serve God in his day, the apostle Paul said: "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to accurate knowledge." What was the problem? "Because of not knowing the righteousness of God," Paul said, they were "seeking to establish their own." (Romans 10:2, 3) Lacking accurate knowledge of what God wanted them to do, their zeal—and faith—were really in vain.—Matthew 7: 21-23.

THE BIBLE'S VIEW OF INTERFAITH

"Happy are the peacemakers," Jesus said. (Matthew 5:9) Jesus practiced what he preached by promoting nonviolence and taking a message of peace to people of diverse religious backgrounds. (Matthew 26:52) Those who responded were drawn into an unbreakable bond of love. (Colossians 3:14) But was Jesus' objective merely to build bridges among people of various backgrounds so that they could get along in peace? Did he join with others in their religious practices?

The religious leaders of the sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees viciously opposed Jesus—even sought to kill him. How did he react? Jesus instructed his disciples: "Let them be. Blind guides is what they are." (Matthew 15:14) Jesus refused to acknowledge spiritual brotherhood with such individuals.

Some time later, a Christian congregation was formed in Corinth, Greece—a city renowned for its pluralistic, multireligious culture. How were the Christians there to act in that environment? The apostle Paul wrote them: "Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers." Why not? Paul reasoned: "What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer share in common with an unbeliever?" Then he gave this counsel: "Therefore, get out from among them, and separate yourselves."—2 Corinthians 6:14, 15, 17.

Clearly, the Bible speaks against the practice of interfaith. But you might wonder, 'How, then, can true unity be achieved?'

BUILDING TRUE UNITY

The International Space Station—a technological wonder orbiting the earth—is the result of the united efforts of some 15 nations. Could you imagine this project being accomplished if the participating nations did not agree on what blueprint to use?

That, essentially, is the situation with the modern-day interfaith movement. Although co-operation and respect are touted, there is no agreed-upon blueprint for building faith. As a result, moral and doctrinal issues remain as divisive as ever.

The Bible contains God's standards, which are like a blueprint. We can build our lives on what the Bible says. Those who have embraced it have overcome racial and religious prejudices and have learned to work together in peace and unity. Foretelling this, God said: "I will change the language of the peoples to a pure language, so that all of them may call on the name of Jehovah, to serve him shoulder to shoulder." Unity results from the "pure language," God's standard of worship.—Zephaniah 3:9; Isaiah 2:2-4.

Jehovah's Witnesses cordially invite you to visit a Kingdom Hall near you to see for yourself the remarkable peace and unity that exist among them.—Psalm 133:1. ■

Making Known the Word of God in Medieval Spain

“When I journey to Spain, I hope that I will see you and be accompanied partway there by you after I have first enjoyed your company for a time.”—Romans 15:24.



THE apostle Paul wrote those words to his fellow Christians in Rome in about the year 56 C.E. Whether Paul actually made the journey to Spain, the Bible does not say. In any case, through the efforts of Paul or other Christian missionaries, the good news from God’s Word, the Bible, did reach Spain by the second century C.E.

Soon, Christian communities began to develop and flourish in Spain. With that, there arose the need for the people there to have the Bible translated into Latin. This was because by the second century, Spain had long been under Roman rule and Latin had become the common language throughout the vast Roman Empire.

LATIN BIBLES FILLED THE NEED

Early Spanish Christians produced several Latin translations known collectively as the *Vetus Latina Hispana*. These Latin Bibles circulated in Spain for many years before Jerome completed his renowned Latin *Vulgate* early in the fifth century C.E.

Jerome’s translation—which he completed in Bethlehem, Palestine—reached Spain in record time. When Lucinius, an affluent Bible student, learned that Jerome was preparing a Latin translation, he wanted to have a copy of this new translation as soon as possible. He dispatched six scribes to Bethlehem to copy the text and take it back to Spain. In the following centuries,

the *Vulgate* gradually supplanted the *Vetus Latina Hispana*. Those Latin translations enabled the people of Spain to read the Bible and understand its message. But as the Roman Empire came to an end, new linguistic needs arose.

THE BIBLE ON SLATES

In the fifth century, the Visigoths and other Germanic tribes invaded Spain, and a new language—Gothic—arrived on the peninsula. The invaders practiced a form of Christianity known as Arianism, which rejected the Trinity doctrine. They also brought with them their own translation of the Scriptures—Ulphilas’ Gothic Bible. This Bible was read in Spain until the end of the sixth century, when Reccared, the Visigothic king, became a Catholic and renounced Arianism. He had all Arian books collected and destroyed, including Ulphilas’ Bible. As a result, all Gothic texts disappeared from Spain.

Yet, the Word of God continued to spread in Spain during this period. Apart from Gothic, there was still a Latin dialect widely spoken in Spain, which later gave birth to the Romance languages spoken on the Iberian Peninsula.* The oldest documents in this Latin dialect are known as Visigothic slates, since they were written on pieces or slabs of slate. They date from the sixth and seventh centuries, and some contain pas-

* These include Castilian, Catalan, Galician, and Portuguese.

sages from the Psalms and the Gospels. One slate contains the entire 16th Psalm.

The existence of Scriptural texts on humble slates shows that ordinary people both read and copied the Word of God at that time. Apparently, teachers used these Bible texts as exercises for pupils who were learning to read and write. The slates were a cheap writing material, in contrast with the expensive parchment that the medieval monasteries used to produce their illustrated Bibles.

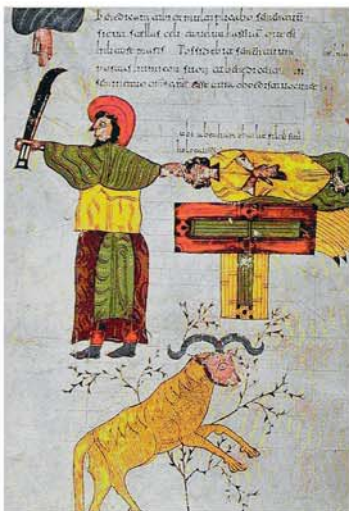
One priceless illustrated Bible is housed in the church of San Isidoro in León, Spain. Dated 960 C.E., it has 516 leaves measuring about 18 inches (47 cm) by 13 inches (34 cm) and weighing some 40 pounds (18 kg). Another, now in the Vatican Library, is the Bible of Ripoll, dated about 1020 C.E. It is one of the most profusely illuminated Bibles of the Middle Ages. To produce such works of art, a monk might have spent a

whole day creating one initial letter or a whole week preparing a title page. Precious as they are, those Bibles, however, did little to spread the message of God's Word among the people.

THE BIBLE IN ARABIC

By the eighth century, another language began to take root in Spain as a result of the Islamic invasion of the peninsula. In the areas that the Muslims colonized, Arabic gained ground over Latin and the need arose for a Bible in this new language.

Many Arabic translations of the Bible—especially of the Gospels—doubtless circulated in medieval Spain. Apparently, in the eighth century, John, a bishop of Seville, translated the entire Bible into Arabic. Sadly, most of those Arabic translations have been lost. One Arabic translation of the Gospels from the middle of the tenth century is preserved in the cathedral of León, Spain.



A detail from the highly illuminated León Bible. Precious as they are, such Bibles did little to spread the message of God's Word among the people



A slate slab with Bible text in a Latin dialect, sixth century C.E.

From the fifth to the eighth century C.E., the Bible in Latin and Arabic enabled the Spanish people to read God's Word

An Arabic translation of the Gospels, tenth century C.E.



SPANISH VERSIONS APPEARED

During the late Middle Ages, Castilian, or Spanish, began to take shape on the Iberian Peninsula. This new tongue was destined to become an important vehicle for spreading the Word of God.* The earliest translation of Bible text into Spanish appeared in *La Fazienda de Ultra Mar* (Deeds From Across the Seas), of the early 13th century. This work contains an account of a journey to Israel, and it includes material from the Pentateuch and other books of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the Gospels and the Epistles.

Church authorities were not pleased with this translation. In 1234, the Council of Tarragona decreed that all Bible books in the vernacular must be handed over to the local clergy to be burned. Happily, this decree did not put a stop to further Bible translation. King Alfonso X (1252-1284), considered to be the founder of Spanish prose, wanted the translation of the Scriptures into the new language and supported it. Spanish translations from this period include the so-called Pre-Alfonsine Bible and the Alfonsine Bible that appeared shortly thereafter, which was the largest translation into Spanish of its time.

Both of those works helped to establish and enrich the nascent Spanish language. Scholar Thomas Montgomery says regarding the Pre-Alfonsine Bible: "The translator of this Bible produced an admirable work with regard to accuracy as well as elegant language. . . . The language is simple and clear, as was needed for a Bible prepared for people unversed in Latin."

Those early Spanish Bibles, however, were translated from the Latin *Vulgate* rather than from the original languages. Starting in the 14th century, Jewish scholars produced several Spanish translations of the Hebrew Scriptures

King Alfonso X supported Bible translation into Spanish

Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid



Pages of the 13th-century Pre-Alfonsine (left) and Alfonsine (right) Bibles

directly from the Hebrew. At the time, Spain had the largest Jewish community in Europe, and Jewish translators had access to good Hebrew manuscripts for making their translations.*

One outstanding example was the Alba Bible, completed in the 15th century. A prominent Spanish nobleman, Luis de Guzmán, commissioned Rabbi Moisés Arragel to translate the Bible into *castizo* (pure) Spanish. He gave two reasons for requesting this new translation. First, he said: "The Bibles that today are found in the Romance language are very corrupt," and second, "People like us very much need the marginal notes for the obscure passages." His request reveals that people of his day had a keen interest in reading and understanding the Bible. It further indicates that the Scriptures in the vernacular language already had quite a wide distribution in Spain.

* See the article "The Divine Name and Alfonso de Zamora's Quest for Textual Accuracy," in the December 1, 2011, issue of this magazine.

“The Spanish people knew the Bible much better than the people of Germany or England before the time of Luther.”—Historian Juan Orts González



The Alba Bible, the first translation in *castizo* (pure) Spanish, 15th century C.E.

Thanks to the medieval translators and copyists, educated people in Spain could read the Bible in their own language without great hindrance. As a result, historian Juan Orts González observed that “the Spanish people knew the Bible much better than the people of Germany or England before the time of Luther.”

By the close of the 15th century, however, the Spanish Inquisition forbade the translation and possession of the Scriptures in any vernacular language. A long night for the Bible descended on Spain. Three centuries passed before the ban was finally lifted. During that difficult time, a few valiant translators produced new Spanish versions abroad and had them smuggled into Spain.*

As this history of the Bible in medieval Spain reveals, opposers have endeavored to suppress the Word of God in many ways. Nonetheless, they were unable to silence the sayings of the Almighty.—Psalm 83:1; 94:20.

* See the article “Casiodoro de Reina’s Fight for a Spanish Bible,” in the June 1, 1996, issue of this magazine.

The Bible in Other Vernacular Languages of Spain

Catalan The Bible was translated into Catalan in the 13th century. One version, known as the Rhymed Bible, was a partial translation of the Scriptures in rhyme to help the reader to memorize the text. In the same century, between 1287 and 1290, Jaume de Montjuich translated the first complete Bible into Catalan at the order of King Alfonso II of Catalonia and Aragon.

Valencian In the early 15th century, Bonifacio Ferrer translated the Bible into Valencian, and it was printed in 1478. This Valencian version was the first Bible to be printed in Spain. Regrettably, the flames of the Inquisition devoured every copy, and only its final page has survived. This sheet is in the collection of the Hispanic Society of America in New York.

Basque In 1571, Jean de Liçarrague translated the Greek Scriptures into Basque, thanks to the sponsorship of the queen of Navarre. Liçarrague’s work helped lay the foundation for a unified Basque grammar. It has been said that Liçarrague was for Basque what Jerome was for Latin and Luther for German.

The tireless work of many scholars enabled the Bible to take root and spread in medieval Spain. Modern translators have followed in the footsteps of those pioneers who translated the Scriptures into Latin, Gothic, Arabic, and Spanish. As a result, millions of Spanish-speaking people today can read God’s Word in the tongue that touches their heart. ■

How does Jesus' death benefit us?

When God created humans, he intended for them to live forever on earth without ever suffering sickness or death. However, the first man, Adam, disobeyed the Creator and lost the prospect of living forever. As descendants of Adam, we inherited death from him. (Romans 5:8, 12; 6:23) The true God, Jehovah, sent his Son, Jesus, to the earth to die and redeem what Adam had lost.—**Read John 3:16.**

Jesus' death makes forgiveness of our sins and life without end possible for us. The Bible gives us a picture of what life on earth will be like when we are no longer afflicted by aging, disease, and death.—**Read Isaiah 25:8; 33:24; Revelation 21:4, 5.**

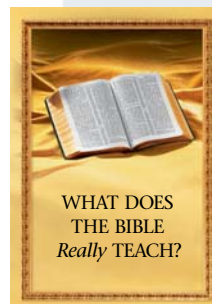
How should we remember Jesus' death?

The evening before he died, Jesus told his followers to remember his death by means of a simple ceremony. Commemorating Jesus' death that way each year allows us to contemplate how much Jesus and Jehovah love mankind.—**Read Luke 22:19, 20; 1 John 4:9, 10.**

This year, the Memorial of Jesus' death falls on Monday, April 14, after sunset. You are invited to attend with Jehovah's Witnesses locally.—**Read Romans 1:11, 12.**



Jesus died to make everlasting life possible for mankind. How would you picture life without end on earth?



For more information, see chapters 4 and 5 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Available for download at www.jw.org

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