

SEPTEMBER 1, 2014

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Will Man Ruin the Earth
Beyond Repair?

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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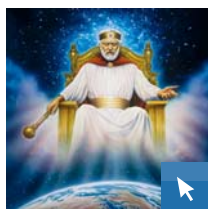
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Will Man Ruin the Earth Beyond Repair?

“A generation is going, and a generation is coming, but the earth remains forever.”

—KING SOLOMON, 11TH CENTURY B.C.E.*

To the ancient Bible writer, the fleeting nature of man stood in sharp contrast with the permanence of the earth. Indeed, for thousands of years, generations have come and gone, and yet the planet Earth has proved to be remarkably resilient and stable in its ability to host life—until now.

The years since World War II have been dubbed by some as the Great Acceleration. In a single lifetime, people have seen remarkable advances in transportation, communication, and other technologies, which have brought unprecedented economic changes. Many enjoy a stan-

dard of living once thought impossible. In the meantime, the earth’s population has nearly tripled.

All of this, however, has not come without cost. Human activities are said to be pushing the earth beyond its natural cycles. In fact, some scientists say we have entered a new geological epoch called the Anthropocene—an age in which humans are making an increasingly notable impact on the planet.

The Bible foretold a time when man would ‘ruin the earth.’ (Revelation 11:18) Some wonder if we are living in such a time. How much further damage will be done? Is there a point of no

* From Ecclesiastes 1:4 in the Bible.



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Man's Mismanagement of Our Planet

Atmosphere. “There is unequivocal evidence that Earth’s lower atmosphere, ocean, and land surface are warming . . . The dominant cause of the warming since the 1950s is human activities.”—American Meteorological Society, 2012.

Land. “Nearly 50% of the land surface has been transformed by direct human action, with significant consequences for biodiversity, nutrient cycling, . . . and climate.”—*Global Change and the Earth System*.

Oceans. “Around 85% of global fish stocks are over-exploited, depleted, fully exploited or in recovery from exploitation.”—BBC, September 2012.

Biodiversity. “Many scientists think . . . the blame for [the next mass extinction], perhaps the fastest in Earth’s history, falls firmly on the shoulders of humans.”—From *science.nationalgeographic.com*.

return? Indeed, will man ruin the earth beyond repair?

A POINT OF NO RETURN?

Is the earth headed for a point of no return? Some scientists feel that the effect of changes can be difficult to predict. Because of this, they are concerned that we might be approaching “tipping points” where sudden and unanticipated climate changes could bring disastrous results.

Consider, for example, the West Antarctic Ice Sheet. Some believe that with sustained global warming, there is a point where the melt of this ice sheet could be irreversible. This is because ice cover naturally reflects the sun’s rays. But as the ice sheet thins and shrinks, the ocean below, which is less reflective, is eventually exposed. The dark ocean surface absorbs more heat, which in turn leads to greater melting. A self-feeding, runaway cycle could be created. The resulting rise in sea levels from the meltwater could spell disaster for hundreds of millions of people.

MOUNTING ECOLOGICAL DEBT

Various road maps have been drawn up to deal with the “planetary emergency” we now face. One long-standing strategy has been called sustainable development, which means promoting economic and social growth within the ecological limits of the planet. What have been the results?

Sadly, like the global financial debt crisis, earth’s ecological debt continues to mount unabated. Humans continue to consume our planet’s resources faster than these can be replenished naturally. Can something be done? One ecologist frankly acknowledged: “In a sense, we don’t have any clue how to manage the planet successfully.” The situation very much fits the Bible’s assessment: “It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step.”—Jeremiah 10:23.

On the other hand, the Bible assures us that God, the Creator, will not allow man to bankrupt the planet environmentally. At Psalm 115:16, we read: “The earth [God] has given to the sons of men.” Yes, our planet is a “good gift” from our

heavenly Father. (James 1:17) Would we expect God's gift to be temporary in nature, as though it came with an expiration date? Of course not! That is evident from the inherent design of our planet.

WHAT THE CREATOR PURPOSES

The Bible book of Genesis tells in great detail how God carefully crafted the earth. Initially, the earth was described as "formless and desolate, and there was darkness upon the surface." Yet, specific mention is made of "waters"—essential for life—existing on the planet. (Genesis 1:2) God then said: "Let there be light." (Genesis 1:3) Evidently the sun's rays penetrated the atmosphere, and there came to be light visible on earth for the first time. The formation of dry land and seas is then recounted. (Genesis 1:9, 10) Next, "grass, seed-bearing plants and trees yielding fruit" made their appearance. (Genesis 1:12) Elements needed for processes and cycles that are vital for life—such as photosynthesis—were thus in place. What was the purpose behind such extensive preparation?

The ancient prophet Isaiah described God as "the One who formed the earth, its Maker who firmly established it, who did not create it simply for nothing, but formed it to be inhabited." (Isaiah 45:18) Clearly, God's purpose is for the earth to be inhabited by man forever.

Sadly, man has misused God's beautiful gift to the point of ruination. Yet, the Creator's purpose has not changed. A man of old said: "God is not a mere man who tells lies, nor a son of man who changes his mind. When he says something, will he not do it?" (Numbers 23:19) In fact, rather than allow the earth to be ruined, the time is rapidly approaching for God to "bring to ruin those ruining the earth."—Revelation 11:18.

EARTH FOREVER OUR HOME

Jesus Christ in his famous Sermon on the Mount said: "Happy are the mild-tempered, since they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) Later in that same sermon, Jesus revealed the means by which the earth would be rescued from ruin. He instructed his followers to pray: "Let

The Zone of Life

What is the "zone of life," or biosphere? According to NASA, it is "the portion of Earth and its atmosphere that can support life." Like the shell of an egg, the biosphere is a very thin layer, or zone, that encompasses our planet.

The biosphere consists of living things and the environment—the atmosphere, the land, and the oceans—from which they derive the energy and nutrients needed for life. For instance, plants capture solar energy and use it to convert carbon dioxide, water, and minerals into oxygen and food. Humans and animals take in oxygen and food and return carbon dioxide and other matter to the system. And the cycle repeats itself. Thus, the biosphere can sustain life indefinitely.

For good reason, then, God is described as "the One who established the *productive land* by his wisdom." (Jeremiah 10:12) As one Bible scholar observed, "the habitable part of the earth is admirably fitted for the use and service of man."



your Kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also on earth." Yes, God's Kingdom, or government, will accomplish God's purpose for the earth.—Matthew 6:10.

Regarding the remarkable changes the Kingdom will bring, God declares: "Look! I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5) Does this mean that God will replace the earth with a new one? No, for there is really nothing inherently wrong with our planet. Rather, God will do away with those responsible for the planetary crisis, "those ruining the earth," that is, the present-day human system with its governmental structure. This will be replaced by "a new heaven and a new earth"—a new heavenly government, God's Kingdom, ruling over a new earthly society.—Revelation 21:1.

To eliminate the ecological debt caused by man, God will rebalance the ecological budget, so to speak. Describing what God will do, the psalmist was inspired to write: "You care for the earth, making it abundantly fruitful and very rich." With a regulated climate and, above all, God's blessing, the earth will become a paradise yielding plenty of food.—Psalm 65:9-13.

According to his secretary Pyarelal, Mohandas Gandhi, the late spiritual leader of India, ob-

served: "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not for every man's greed." God's Kingdom will address the root cause of earth's problems by bringing about a change in people's hearts. The prophet Isaiah foretold that under Kingdom rule, people "will not cause any harm or any ruin" to one another or to the earth. (Isaiah 11:9) In fact, millions of people today from all walks of life are already learning about God's elevated standards. They are being taught to love God and neighbor, to show a thankful spirit, to care for the environment, to conserve natural resources, and to lead a life supportive of the Creator's purpose. They are being prepared for life in a paradise earth.—Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 22:37-39; Colossians 3:15.

The creation account in Genesis concludes with the words: "God saw everything he had made, and look! it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) Truly, the earth is far too precious to end up in environmental bankruptcy. We are comforted in knowing that our planet's future rests safely in the hands of our loving Creator, Jehovah God. He promises: "The righteous will possess the earth, and they will live forever on it." (Psalm 37:29) May you be counted among "the righteous," who will call earth *their* eternal home. ■

The earth is far too precious to end up in environmental bankruptcy



Was God's Law to Israel Just and Fair?



SOME time ago, criminal courts in a Western land accepted faulty evidence against two men accused of murder and sentenced them to death. Once the error came to light, lawyers worked hard and gained freedom for one of the convicted. But the best attorneys could do nothing for the other—he had already been executed.

Since such travesties can arise in any legal system, the Bible urges: “Justice—justice you should pursue.” (Deuteronomy 16:20) Where judges follow that injunction, citizens benefit. God’s Law gave ancient Israel a legal system based on impartiality and fairness. Let us look at that Law to see whether “all [God’s] ways are justice.”—Deuteronomy 32:4.

JUDGES “WISE, DISCREET, AND EXPERIENCED”

People’s interests are served when jurists are competent, fair, and above corruption. God’s Law to Israel placed a high value on judges of that caliber. Early in the wilderness trek, Moses was told to look for “capable men fearing God, trustworthy men hating dishonest profit,” to serve as judges. (Exodus 18:21, 22) Forty years later, he reemphasized the need for “wise, discreet, and experienced men” to judge the people.—Deuteronomy 1:13-17.

Centuries later, King Jehoshaphat* of Judah commanded the judges: “Pay attention to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but

for Jehovah, and he is with you when you pass judgment. Now let the fear of Jehovah be upon you. Be careful about what you do, for with Jehovah our God there is no injustice, no partiality, no bribe-taking.” (2 Chronicles 19:6, 7) The king thus reminded the judges that if prejudice or greed affected their decisions, God would hold them responsible for any resulting harm.

When Israel’s judges lived up to those high standards, the nation felt protected and secure. But God’s Law also provided a set of principles that helped judges to reach fair decisions, even in the most difficult cases. What are some of those principles?

PRINCIPLES THAT LED TO FAIR DECISIONS

Though the judges selected were to be wise and capable men, they were not left to make judgments by relying on their own abilities or ingenuity. Jehovah God gave them principles or guidelines by which they could reach correct decisions. Here are some directions that were given to the Israelite judges.

Make a complete investigation. Through Moses, God instructed Israelite judges: “When you hear a case between your brothers, you are to judge with righteousness.” (Deuteronomy 1:16) Judges can render a fair verdict only if they have all the facts of a case. For that reason God instructed those handling judicial matters: “You should look into the matter, making a thorough investigation and inquiry.” Judges in court had to make

* The name Jehoshaphat means “Jehovah Is Judge.”

sure that the charge in a criminal case was “confirmed to be true” before proceeding.—Deuteronomy 13:14; 17:4.

Hear the testimony of witnesses. The statements of witnesses were vital to an investigation. God’s Law stipulated: “No single witness may convict another for any error or any sin that he may commit. On the testimony of two witnesses or on the testimony of three witnesses the matter should be established.” (Deuteronomy 19:15) To the witnesses, God’s Law commanded: “You must not spread a report that is not true. Do not cooperate with a wicked one by becoming a malicious witness.”—Exodus 23:1.

Require honesty in court proceedings. The penalty for lying in court gave pause to all involved: “The judges will thoroughly investigate, and if the man who testified is a false witness and has

brought a false charge against his brother, you should do to him just as he had schemed to do to his brother, and you must remove what is bad from your midst.” (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19) So if a man lied in court to take another’s inheritance, he stood to lose an equal amount. If he lied to have someone that he knew was innocent put to death, he would forfeit his own life. This guideline was a strong motivation to speak the truth.

Judge impartially. Once they had all the available evidence, the judges deliberated to reach a verdict. At this point, an outstanding detail of God’s Law became especially important: “You must not show partiality to the poor or show preference to the rich. With justice you should judge your fellow man.” (Leviticus 19:15) In all cases, judges were to decide a matter on its true merits, not

Did God’s Law Authorize Revenge?

The words “eye for eye, tooth for tooth,” found in the Bible, have caused no little contention. (Exodus 21:24) To some people, it is nothing less than divine approval of revenge. But such thinking conflicts with God’s command: “You must not take vengeance nor hold a grudge against the sons of your people.” (Leviticus 19:18) How, then, are we to understand those words in Exodus?

Exodus 21:22 presents a scenario in which two men are fighting and one of them strikes a pregnant woman, causing her to deliver prematurely. If mother and baby survived, the injured woman’s husband would not be authorized to strike back. Rather, the man who struck the new mother would have to “pay the dam-

ages imposed on him by the husband of the woman; and he must pay it through the judges.” In other words, the judges in court would make the striker pay a fine to the husband of the injured mother. If she or her child died because of injuries, those same judges would have the perpetrator put to death.

In this case, the *court*, not the victim, applied “life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth . . .” (Exodus 21:23, 24) That principle reminded judges that punishment should be neither excessive nor insufficient. Bible scholar Richard Elliott Friedman states: “The basic principle appears to be that punishment should correspond to the crime and never exceed it.”



Miscarriages of justice can be avoided when principles in God's Law are followed

What gave rise to the idea that God's Law authorized personal acts of revenge? It is noteworthy that at Matthew 5:38, 39, we find Jesus' words: "*You heard that it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.'*" However, I say to you: Do



not resist the one who is wicked, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other also to him." It seems that by Jesus' day, some religious teachers had included the 'law of retaliation' in their *oral* tradition as approval for personal vengeance. Jesus, however, made clear that such a teaching had no support in God's Law to Israel.

on the outward appearance or social position of those involved.

These principles, plainly stated centuries ago in God's Law to Israel, can still be useful in courtrooms today. When they are followed, miscarriages and miscarriages of justice can be avoided.

THE PEOPLE WHO BENEFITED FROM TRUE JUSTICE

To the Israelites, Moses posed this question: "What great nation has righteous regulations and judicial decisions like this entire Law that I am putting before you today?" (Deuteronomy 4:8) Indeed, no other nation enjoyed those benefits. Under the reign of King Solomon, who in his youth sought to carry out Jehovah's laws, the people "lived in security" and enjoyed peace and prosperity, "eating and drinking and rejoicing." —1 Kings 4:20, 25.

Regrettably, the Israelites eventually turned their backs on their God. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declared: "Look! They have rejected the word of Jehovah, and what wisdom do they have?" (Jeremiah 8:9) The result was that Jerusalem became "the bloodguilty city" full of "detestable things." Finally it was brought to ruin and lay desolate for 70 years.—Ezekiel 22:2; Jeremiah 25:11.

The prophet Isaiah lived through troublesome times in Israel's history. Looking back, he was moved to declare a great truth about Jehovah God and His Law: "When there are judgments from you for the earth, the inhabitants of the land learn about righteousness."—Isaiah 26:9.

To his delight, Isaiah was inspired to prophecy about the rule of the Messianic King, Jesus Christ, saying: "He will not judge by what appears to his eyes, nor reprove simply according to what his ears hear. He will judge the lowly with fairness, and with uprightness he will give reproof in behalf of the meek ones of the earth." (Isaiah 11:3, 4) What wonderful prospects for all who become subjects of the Messianic King under God's Kingdom!—Matthew 6:10. ■

A Rewarding Life of Service to God

AS TOLD BY **PETER CARRBELLO**

From an early age, I was troubled by racial prejudice and fear of failure as well as my own timid nature. Hoping to find comfort from the Bible, I went to our local Catholic Church to get help to understand it. Receiving none, I began focusing on sports.



Soon I got involved in gymnastics and bodybuilding. Eventually I opened a physical therapy studio in San Leandro, California, U.S.A., and worked with bodybuilders, including one who won the title Mr. America. Developing what was considered to be a sculpted body, however, did not fill the void inside me.

MY SEARCH REWARDED

A friend at my studio, knowing my desire to understand the Bible, suggested that I meet someone he knew. The next morning, one of Jehovah's Witnesses came to my home. For four hours he answered my questions right from the Bible. I asked him to return the same evening, and we discussed the Bible until midnight. I was delighted with what I learned and asked if I could go with him the next day to see how he conducted the ministry. I was amazed at the way he could open the Bible and show people answers to their questions. That, I decided, was what I wanted to do!

So I gave up my business and spent my days in the ministry with this pioneer, as full-time ministers of Jehovah's Witnesses are called. In May 1948, I was baptized at a convention at the

Cow Palace Arena in San Francisco, California. Later that year I became a pioneer myself.

In the meantime, I asked the Witnesses to visit my mother. She was receptive and soon became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Despite opposition from her family, she was faithful to God until her death many years later. No other members of our family became Witnesses.

MEETING MY FUTURE WIFE

In 1950, I moved to Grand Junction, Colorado, where I met Billie. She was born in 1928 and grew up during the Great Depression. Her mother, Minnie, read the Bible to her every night by the flickering light of a kerosene lamp. By age four, Billie could read, and she knew many Bible stories by heart. In the late 1940's, her mother learned from studying the Bible with the Witnesses that hell is, not a place of torment, but mankind's common grave. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) Both Minnie and her husband became Witnesses.

In 1949, Billie returned from college in Boston and started to study the Bible seriously. Instead of becoming a schoolteacher, she decided to dedicate her life to God. She was baptized at

the 1950 international convention of Jehovah's Witnesses at Yankee Stadium in New York. Not long afterward, we met, got married, and began the full-time ministry together.

We started off in Eugene, Oregon, and made many lifelong friends. In 1953 we moved to Grants Pass, Oregon, to help the small congregation there. Later that year we were invited to the 23rd class of Gilead, the Witnesses' school for training missionaries, located near South Lansing, New York, some 250 miles (400 km) northwest of New York City.

MISSIONARY WORK IN BRAZIL

In December 1954, five months after our graduation from Gilead, Billie and I took off in a two-propeller plane for Brazil. An hour into the flight, one engine failed, but we landed safely in Bermuda. After another emergency landing in Cuba and 36 hours of exhausting transit, we arrived at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

After a brief stay, Billie and I, along with two other missionaries, were off to Bauru, São Paulo, to open up a new missionary home. The city had a population of over 50,000, and we were the first Witnesses there.

We started calling on people at their homes, but at once the local Catholic priest began to oppose our activity. He followed us and warned householders not to listen. Within a few weeks, though, a large family we studied with accepted Bible truth and later got baptized. Soon others also began to study.

The baptized family had a relative who was the president of a prominent club. I made arrangements to use the club facilities to hold an assembly. When the local priest insisted that the contract be canceled, the president met with club members and told them: "If you cancel, I resign!" The assembly was approved.

The following year, in 1956, we were invited to the district convention in Santos, São Paulo. Nearly 40 Witnesses from our congregation traveled there by train. Upon our return to Bauru, I

The first Kingdom Hall in Bauru—a rented place with a sign I painted, 1955



found a letter in the mail assigning me to serve as a traveling overseer to visit congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. Thus began a career of nearly 25 years in Brazil, traversing most parts of that vast country.

WHAT THE MINISTRY WAS LIKE

In those days travel was primitive. We eventually covered practically the whole country by bus, train, wagon, and bicycle, as well as on foot. One of the first cities we visited was Jaú, São Paulo. There the priest challenged us.

"You cannot preach to 'my sheep!'" he demanded.

"They are not yours," we replied. "They belong to God."

We arranged to show a film about our worldwide preaching work, entitled *The New World Society in Action*, but the priest formed a mob to attack us. We immediately informed the police. When the priest and his mob of parishioners arrived at the theater, they were met by a solid wall of policemen with guns pointed at them. The large audience enjoyed the film immensely.

The same climate of religious hatred and opposition was at work practically everywhere we

In just one
year, we had a
zealous group
of Kingdom
publishers in
Bauru



served back then. For example, in Brusque, near Blumenau, Santa Catarina, we met two pioneers serving under intense opposition. But their endurance and perseverance were richly rewarded. Now, over 50 years later, there are more than 60 thriving congregations in that region as well as a beautiful Assembly Hall in the nearby city of Itajaí!

A highlight of our traveling work was the delightful time we spent working with fellow Witnesses to make preparations for large conventions. In the 1970's, I was privileged to serve as convention overseer in the large Morumbi Stadium. An appeal was sent out to about a hundred congregations in nearby areas to provide ten people each to clean the stadium the night before the convention.

With Billie



As the soccer players left the stadium that night, some were heard to mock, "Look at all the little women with their brooms and mops." Yet, by midnight the whole stadium was clean! The stadium manager exclaimed, "It would have taken my crew a whole week to do what you Witnesses did in only a few hours!"

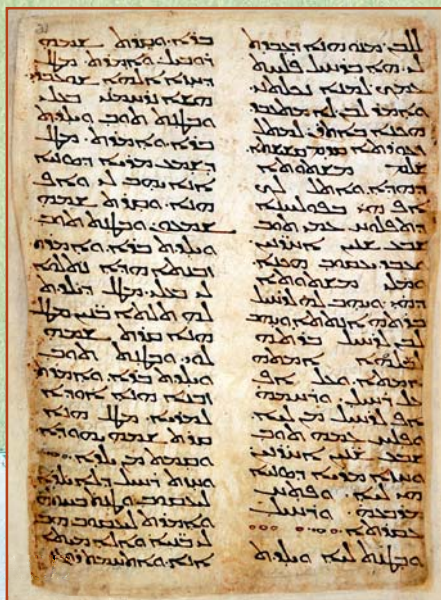
RETURN TO THE UNITED STATES

In 1980 my father died, and soon afterward we returned to the United States to care for my mother, in Fremont, California. We found work cleaning buildings at night and continued to pioneer and help the Portuguese people in the area. Later we moved to nearby San Joaquin Valley, where we sought out Portuguese-speaking people in the vast area from Sacramento to Bakersfield. Now there are about ten Portuguese-language congregations in California.

After my mother's death in 1995, we moved to Florida and cared for Billie's father until his death. Her mother had died in 1975. In 2000 we moved to the high desert country in southwest Colorado and served here preaching full-time to the Native Americans on the Navajo and Ute reservations in the area. Sadly, Billie died in February 2014.

How happy I am that over 65 years ago, I met one of Jehovah's Witnesses who answered my many questions right from the Bible! I am especially glad that I checked to make sure that what he said was what the Bible really teaches. This led me to a rewarding life of service to God. ■

Syriac Peshitta of the Pentateuch,
464 C.E., the second-oldest dated
manuscript of Bible text



The Syriac Peshitta

A Window on the World of Early Bible Translations

For nine days in 1892, the twin sisters Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson journeyed by camel through the desert to St. Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai. Why would these two women in their late 40's undertake such a journey at a time when travel in what was called the Orient was so dangerous? The answer may help strengthen your belief in the accuracy of the Bible.

JUST before returning to heaven, Jesus commissioned his disciples to bear witness about him "in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) This the disciples did with zeal and courage. Their ministry in Jerusalem, however, soon stirred up strong opposition, resulting in the martyrdom of Stephen. Many of Jesus' disciples found refuge in Antioch, Syria, one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, some 350 miles (550 km) north of Jerusalem.—Acts 11:19.

In Antioch, the disciples continued to preach "the good news" about Jesus, and many non-Jews became believers. (Acts 11:20, 21) Though Greek was the common language within the walls of Antioch, outside its gates and in the province, the language of the people was Syriac.

THE GOOD NEWS TRANSLATED INTO SYRIAC

As the number of Syriac-speaking Christians increased in the second century, there arose a need for the good news to be translated into their tongue. Thus, it appears that Syriac, not Latin, was the first vernacular into which parts of the Christian Greek Scriptures were translated.

What Is Syriac?

Syriac is one of the dialects of Aramaic, an official language of the Persian Empire. It was spoken in northern Mesopotamia and around ancient Antioch, where many became believers of the good news in the first century C.E. As a written language, Syriac came into wide use in the second or third century C.E.

The *Peshitta* is one of the oldest and most important witnesses to the early transmission of the Bible text

By about 170 C.E., the Syrian writer Tatian (c. 120-173 C.E.) combined the four canonical Gospels and produced, in Greek or Syriac, the work commonly called the *Diatessaron*, a Greek word meaning “through [the] four [Gospels].” Later, Ephraem the Syrian (c. 310-373 C.E.) produced a commentary on the *Diatessaron*, thus confirming that it was in general use among Syrian Christians.

The *Diatessaron* is of great interest to us today. Why? In the 19th century, some scholars argued that the Gospels were written as late as the second century, between 130 C.E. and 170 C.E., and thus could not be authentic accounts of Jesus’ life. However, ancient manuscripts of the *Diatessaron* that have come to light since then have proved that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were already in wide circulation by the middle of the second century. They must therefore have been written earlier. In addition, since Tatian, when compiling the *Diatessaron*, did not make use of any of the so-called apocryphal gospels in the way he did the four accepted Gospels, it is evident that the apocryphal gospels were not viewed as reliable or canonical.

By the start of the fifth century, a translation of the Bible into Syriac came into general use in northern Mesopotamia. Likely made during the second or third century C.E., this translation included all the books of the Bible except 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation. It is known as the *Peshitta*, meaning “Simple” or “Clear.” The *Peshitta* is one of the oldest and most important witnesses to the early transmission of the Bible text.

Interestingly, one manuscript of the *Peshitta* has a written date corresponding to 459/460 C.E., making it the oldest Bible manu-

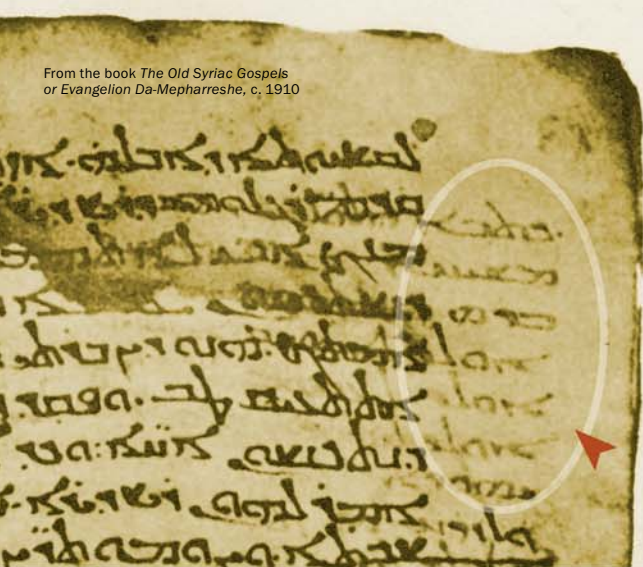
script with a definite date. In about 508 C.E., a revision of the *Peshitta* was made that included the five missing books. It came to be known as the *Philoxenian Version*.

MORE SYRIAC MANUSCRIPTS DISCOVERED

Until the 19th century, almost all the known Greek copies of the Christian Greek Scriptures were from the fifth century or much later. For this reason, Bible scholars were especially interested in such early versions as the Latin *Vulgate* and the Syriac *Peshitta*. At the time, some believed that the *Peshitta* was the result of a revision of an older Syriac version. But no such text was known. Since the roots of the Syriac Bible go back to the second century, such a version would provide a window on the Bible text at an early stage, and it would surely be invaluable to Bible scholars! Was there really an old Syriac version? Would it be found?

Yes, indeed! In fact, two such precious Syriac manuscripts were found. The first is a manuscript dating from the fifth century. It was among a large number of Syriac manuscripts acquired by the British Museum in 1842 from a monastery in the Nitrian Desert in Egypt. It was called the Curetonian Syriac because it was discovered and published by William Cureton, the museum’s assistant keeper of manuscripts. This precious document contains the four Gospels in the order of Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke.

The second manuscript that has survived to our day is the Sinaitic Syriac. Its discovery is linked with the adventurous twin sisters mentioned at the start of this article. Although Agnes did not have a university degree, she learned eight foreign languages, one of them Syriac. In 1892, Agnes made a remarkable discovery in the monastery of St. Catherine in Egypt.



The palimpsest called the Sinaitic Syriac. Visible in the margin is the underwriting of the Gospels



Courtesy of Westminster
College, Cambridge



Agnes Smith Lewis and St. Catherine's Monastery

There, in a dark closet, she found a Syriac manuscript. According to her own account, “it had a forbidding look, for it was very dirty, and its leaves were nearly all stuck together through their having remained unturned” for centuries. It was a palimpsest* manuscript of which the original text had been erased and the pages rewritten with a Syriac text about female saints. However, Agnes spotted some of the writing underneath and the words “of Matthew,” “of Mark,” or “of Luke” at the top. What she had in her hands was an almost complete Syriac codex of the four Gospels! Scholars now believe that this codex was written in the late fourth century.

The Sinaitic Syriac is considered one of the most important Biblical manuscripts discovered, right along with such Greek manuscripts as the Codex Sinaiticus and the Codex Vaticanus. It is now generally believed that both the Curetonian and Sinaitic manuscripts are extant copies of the old Syriac Gospels dating from the late second or early third century.

“THE WORD OF OUR GOD ENDURES FOREVER”

Can these manuscripts be useful to Bible students today? Undoubtedly! Take as an example

* The Greek word *pa·lim'pse·stos* means “scraped again.”

the so-called long conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, which in some Bibles follows Mark 16:8. It appears in the Greek Codex Alexandrinus of the fifth century, the Latin *Vulgate*, and elsewhere. However, the two authoritative fourth-century Greek manuscripts—Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus—both end with Mark 16:8. The Sinaitic Syriac does not have this long conclusion either, adding further evidence that the long conclusion is a later addition and was not originally part of Mark’s Gospel.

Consider another example. In the 19th century, almost all Bible translations had a spurious Trinitarian addition at 1 John 5:7. However, this addition does not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Neither does it appear in the *Peshitta*, thus proving that the addition at 1 John 5:7 is indeed a corruption of the Bible text.

Clearly, as promised, Jehovah God has preserved his Holy Word. In it we are given this assurance: “The green grass dries up, the blossom withers, but the word of our God endures forever.” (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25) The version known as the *Peshitta* plays a humble but important role in the accurate transmission of the Bible’s message to all of humanity. ■

Can angels help us?

Jehovah God created millions of angels long before he created humans. (Job 38:4, 7) These angels are powerful spirit creatures in God's service, sometimes being sent by him to guide and protect his servants on earth. (Psalm 91:10, 11) Today, angels are helping people to benefit from the good news that Jesus' followers are preaching.—**Read Revelation 14:6, 7.**

Should we pray to the angels for help? No. Prayer is an act of worship, which belongs only to God. (Revelation 19:10) Since angels are God's servants, they respond to instructions from him rather than from people. Therefore, we should always direct our prayers only to God through Jesus.—**Read Psalm 103:20, 21; Matthew 26:53.**

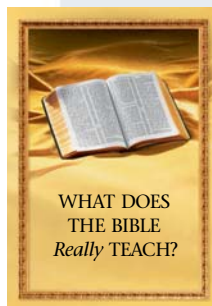
Are there bad angels?

Like humans, angels were created with free will and can choose to do right or wrong. Sadly, many angels rebelled against God. (2 Peter 2:4) First among these was Satan; others followed and became demons. In recent times, Satan and his demons were expelled from heaven and thrown down to the earth.—**Read Revelation 12:7-9.**

The dramatic increase in wickedness and violence since 1914 signals that God will soon put Satan and the demons out of action. Then God will restore the earth to its rightful state.—**Read Revelation 12:12; 21:3, 4.**



As they helped God's faithful servant Daniel in the past, today angels help people to benefit from the good news



For more information, see chapter 10 of this book, published by Jehovah's Witnesses
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