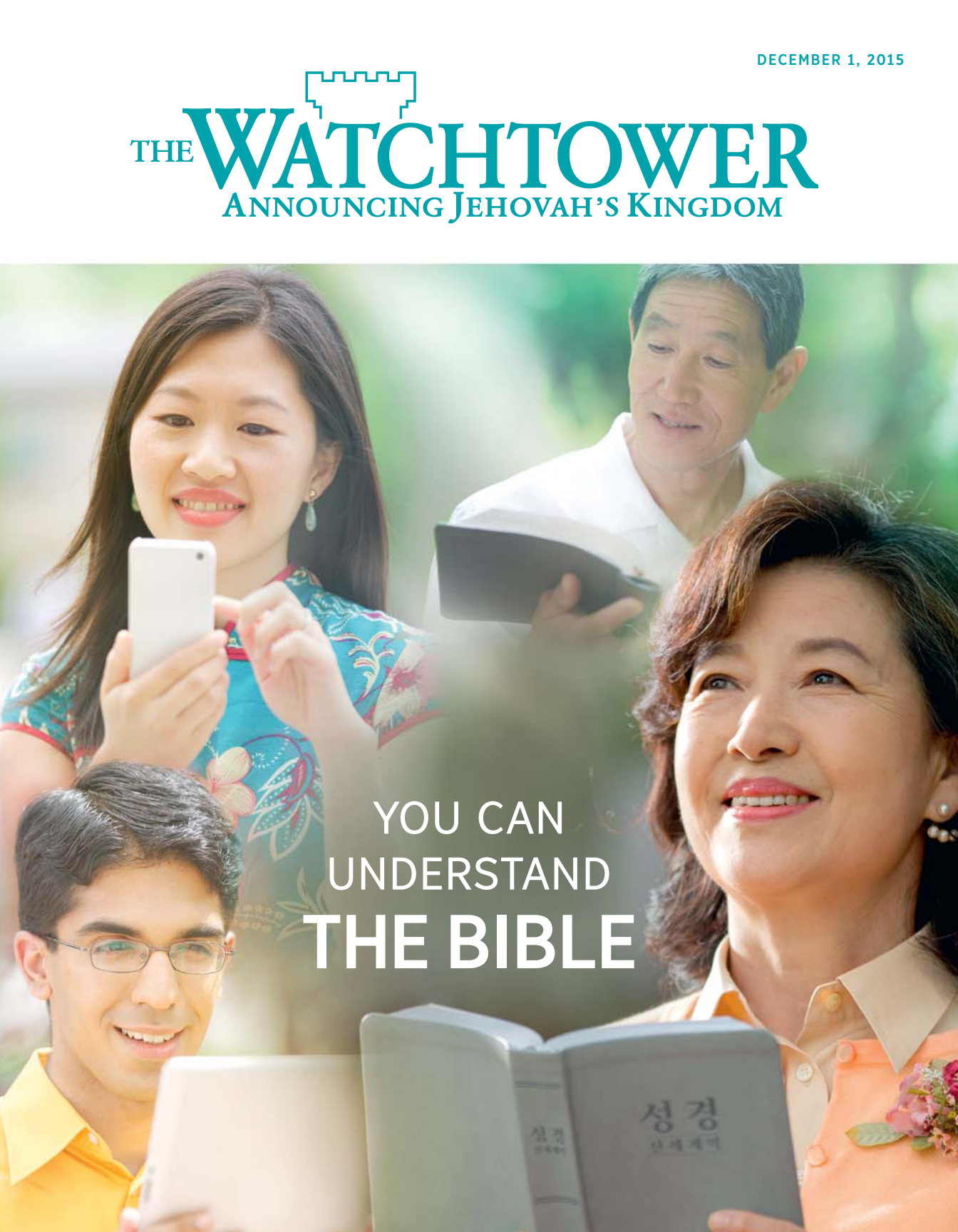


DECEMBER 1, 2015

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



YOU CAN
UNDERSTAND
THE BIBLE

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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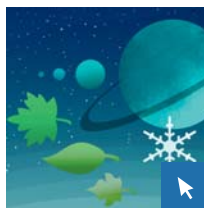
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Why Understand the Bible?

“The Bible is a religious classic. But it’s a foreign book and not relevant to the Chinese.” —LIN, CHINA.

“I can’t even understand the holy books of my Hindu religion. So how could I understand the Holy Bible?”
—AMIT, INDIA.

“I respect the Bible as an old book and have heard that it’s a best seller. But I’ve never personally seen a copy.” —YUMIKO, JAPAN.

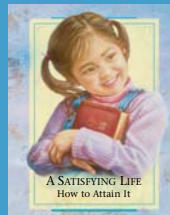
Many people around the world hold the Bible in high esteem. Yet they may know little, if anything, about the Bible’s contents. That is certainly true of millions living in Asia, but it is also true of many in lands where the Bible is widely circulated.

However, you might ask, ‘Why should I be interested in understanding the Bible?’ Unlocking the meaning of this sacred book can help you to do the following:

- Find contentment and happiness
- Deal with family problems
- Cope with anxieties
- Improve personal relationships
- Manage money wisely

Take, for instance, Yoshiko, in Japan. She wondered what the Bible was all about and decided to read it for herself. What was the result? “The Bible has helped me to find a purpose in life and hope for the future,” she said, adding: “I no longer feel empty inside.” Amit, quoted earlier, decided to examine the Bible personally. “I was amazed,” he says. “The Bible contains practical information for everyone.”

The Bible has profoundly affected the lives of millions of people. Why not examine it for yourself and see how it can benefit you?



For more information on how the Bible can benefit you, see the brochure *A Satisfying Life—How to Attain It*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



A Book to Be Understood

By all measures, the Bible is a very old book. How old is it? The writing of the Bible began in the Middle East some 3,500 years ago. By comparison, that was during the time of the mighty Shang dynasty of China and about ten centuries before Buddhism started in India.—See the box “Facts About the Bible.”

If a book is to be a helpful and beneficial guide to people, it must be understandable and relevant to them. The Bible is just such a book. It offers satisfying answers to life’s most important questions.

For example, have you ever wondered, ‘Why are we here?’ That question has baffled man for thousands of years, and it still does. Yet, the answer can be found in the first two chapters of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. There the Bible account reaches back to “the beginning”—billions of years ago—when our physical universe, including the galaxies, the stars, and the earth, came into existence. (Genesis 1:1) Then it describes, in progressive stages, how the earth came to be habitable, how various life forms came into existence, and how humans appeared on the scene—as well as the purpose of it all.

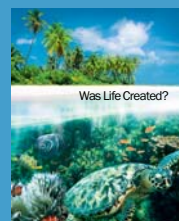
WRITTEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

The Bible gives practical counsel to help us solve everyday problems. That counsel is easy to understand. This is so in two aspects.

First, the Bible’s language is clear, direct, and appealing. Rather than using many expressions that are abstract or mystical, the Biblical text uses words that are concrete or that relate to our senses. Difficult ideas are expressed by words that are common to our daily experience.

For example, Jesus used many simple illustrations based on people’s daily experience in order to teach lessons that touched their heart. Many of these are found in what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount, which is recorded in chapters 5 to 7 of the Bible book of Matthew. Calling it “a practical discourse,” one commentator observed that its aim is “not to fill our heads with ideas, but to guide and regulate our practice.” You

For more information about the origin of life, see the brochure *Was Life Created?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Also available at www.jw.org.





Facts About the Bible

- The Bible is a collection of 66 sacred books.
- The contents of the Bible include history, laws, prophecy, poetry, proverbs, songs, and letters.
- The writing was begun in 1513 B.C.E. and completed in 98 C.E., a span of over 1,600 years.
- Some 40 men wrote the Bible under inspiration from God.

To learn more about the Bible, see the brochure *The Bible—What Is Its Message?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses. Also available at www.jw.org.



can read those chapters in perhaps 15 to 20 minutes, and you will be amazed to find how simple yet powerful Jesus' words are.

Another factor that makes the Bible easy to understand is its subject matter. It is not a book of mythology or fables. Rather, for the most part, it is, as *The World Book Encyclopedia* puts it, “about both great and ordinary people” and their “struggles, hopes, failures, and triumphs.” It is easy for us to relate to these accounts of real people and events and to understand the vital lessons contained therein.—Romans 15:4.

AVAILABLE TO ALL

For you to understand a book, it must be in a language that you know. Today it is likely that the Bible is available in a language you can understand, no matter where you live or what your nationality is. Consider what is involved in making that amazing feat possible.

Translation. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. That naturally limited the scope of its readership. In order to make the text available in other languages, tireless efforts have been made by sincere translators. Thanks to their labors, the Bible is now translated,

The Bible offers satisfying answers to life's most important questions

ed, in whole or in part, into about 2,700 languages. This means that over 90 percent of mankind can read at least some part of the Bible in their mother tongue.

Publishing. The original text of the Bible was written on perishable materials, such as leather and papyrus. To pass on the message, those writings had to be carefully copied and recopied by hand. Such copies were expensive, and few people could afford them. But with the invention of Gutenberg's printing press over 550 years ago, circulation of the Bible greatly accelerated. According to one estimate, more than five billion copies of the Bible, in whole or in part, have been distributed.

No other religious text can compare with the Bible in these respects. Clearly, the Bible is a book to be understood. However, understanding it can be challenging. But help is available. Where can you find it? And how can you benefit? Find out in the following article.

Finding Help to Understand the Bible

Imagine visiting a foreign land for the first time. You encounter people, customs, foods, and currency that are all unfamiliar to you. Understandably, you may feel frustrated.

You may feel the same way when you first read the Bible. You are stepping back into an ancient world that seems foreign to you. There you meet a people called Philistines, come across unusual customs, such as ‘ripping garments apart,’ or learn about a food called manna and a coin known as the drachma. (Exodus 16:31; Joshua 13:2; 2 Samuel 3:31; Luke 15:9) All of this could be confusing. As in the case of visiting a foreign land, would you not appreciate getting help from someone who could explain things to you?

HELP IN THE PAST

From the time the sacred writings were first penned in the 16th century B.C.E., help has been provided for people to understand the text. For instance, Moses, the first leader of the nation of Israel, “undertook to explain” what was written.—Deuteronomy 1:5.

Qualified instructors of the Scriptures were still on hand some ten centuries later. In 455 B.C.E., a large group of Jews, including many children, were gathered together in a public square in the city of Jerusalem. Bible instructors were there “reading aloud from the [same sacred] book.” But they did more. “They helped the people to understand what was being read.”—Nehemiah 8:1-8.

Five centuries later, Jesus Christ was involved in a similar educational work. In fact, he was primarily known among the people as a teacher. (John 13:13) He taught large crowds, as well as individuals. On one occasion, he spoke to a great multitude, giving the famous Sermon on the Mount, and “the crowds were astounded at his way of teaching.” (Matthew 5:1, 2; 7:28) In the spring of 33 C.E., Jesus spoke to two of his disci-

ples while they were walking along the road toward a village near Jerusalem, “fully opening up [“clearly explaining,” footnote] the Scriptures” to them.—Luke 24:13-15, 27, 32.

Disciples of Jesus were also instructors of God’s Word. On one occasion, an official from Ethiopia was reading a certain passage of the Scriptures. A disciple named Philip approached him and asked: “Do you actually know what you are reading?” The Ethiopian replied: “Really, how could I ever do so unless someone guided me?” Philip then explained the meaning of the passage to him.—Acts 8:27-35.

HELP AVAILABLE TODAY

Like teachers and instructors of the Bible in the past, Jehovah’s Witnesses today are engaged in a Bible educational work in 239 lands worldwide. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Week by week, they help well over nine million individuals to understand the Bible. Many of those learners come from non-Christian backgrounds. These study sessions are free and can be held at one’s home or at another convenient location. Some people even enjoy their lessons by phone or video, using a computer or a mobile device.

Please contact any one of Jehovah’s Witnesses for details on how you can benefit from this arrangement. You will discover that, far from being a closed book, the Bible is “beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness,” so that you “may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.”—2 Timothy 3:16, 17. ■

You can download a copy of the Bible or request a Bible study online at our website, www.jw.org



Help on the Web

Would you like to take a self-guided tour of the Bible? To get started, go to the jw.org website. The site offers free information on the Bible in over 700 languages. You may enjoy learning about the following topics:

Questions people often ask

- What is the meaning of life?
- Why do people die?
- What happens when you die?

(Look under [BIBLE TEACHINGS](#) >
[BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED](#))

Personal issues

- What you can do when you are depressed
- Dealing with a chronic illness
- Money problems and debt

(Look under [BIBLE TEACHINGS](#) >
[BIBLE QUESTIONS ANSWERED](#))

Help for the family

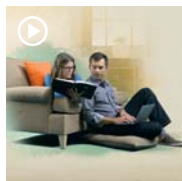
- How to stop arguing
- Raising responsible children
- Inculcating moral values

(Look under [BIBLE TEACHINGS](#) >
[COUPLES & PARENTS](#))

Advice for teenagers

- How to deal with sexual harassment
- What to do when bullied
- How to deal with loneliness

(Look under [BIBLE TEACHINGS](#) > [TEENAGERS](#))



See the video
Why Study the Bible?
at www.jw.org



See the video
What Happens at a Bible Study? at www.jw.org



HYPOCRISY! Will It Ever End?

PANAYIOTA grew up on an island in the Mediterranean. As a teenager, she took a keen interest in politics. Later she served as the secretary for a political party in the village where she lived. She even went from house to house to raise funds for the party. As time passed, though, Panayiota became disillusioned. Nepotism, ambition, friction, and jealousy persisted despite party members calling each other comrade.

Daniel was raised in a staunchly religious family in Ireland. Sadly, however, he has vivid memories of the hypocrisy of the priests who drank heavily, gambled, and stole from the collection plate, all the while preaching to him about burning in hell if he sinned.

Jeffery spent most of his working life in marketing and sales for international ship owners based in the United Kingdom and the United States. He recalls many instances where clients and competitors resorted to fraud when negotiating with government officials. Hypocritically, they were willing to say almost anything in order to secure a contract.

Regrettably, these are not isolated cases. Hypocrisy is all too common today in nearly every area of human activity—political, religious, and

commercial. Appropriately, the English word “hypocrite” comes from a Greek root that denotes a speaker or a stage actor, often donning a mask. In time, the term came to mean anyone who was putting on an act to deceive others or to advance certain selfish goals.

Hypocrisy can arouse strong emotions in those affected by it, including bitterness, anger, and resentment. In frustration, the victims may say: “Hypocrisy! Will it ever end?” Thankfully, God’s Word gives us reasons to believe that it will.

HOW GOD AND HIS SON VIEW HYPOCRISY

According to the Bible, hypocrisy got its start, not among humans, but with an unseen spirit creature. Early in human history, Satan the Devil used a serpent as a mask and portrayed himself as a benefactor in order to mislead the first woman, Eve. (Genesis 3:1-5) Since then, many humans have similarly made themselves out to be something they were not, and they have done this to deceive others and to achieve selfish aims.

When the ancient nation of Israel fell into the trap of false worship and spiritual hypocrisy, God repeatedly warned them of the consequences. Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah God de-

clared: “This people approaches me with their mouth and they honor me with their lips, but their heart is far removed from me.” (Isaiah 29:13) When the nation failed to turn around, God allowed foreign powers to destroy Israel’s religious center—Jerusalem and its temple—first by the Babylonians in 607 B.C.E. and ultimately by the Roman armies in 70 C.E. Clearly, God does not tolerate hypocrisy indefinitely.

On the other hand, God and His Son, Jesus, greatly value humans who are honest and sincere. For example, early in Jesus’ ministry, a man named Nathanael approached him. Upon seeing him, Jesus exclaimed: “See, truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” (John 1:47) Nathanael, also known as Bartholomew, became one of Jesus’ 12 apostles.—Luke 6:13-16.

Jesus spent time with his followers, and he taught them God’s way of thinking. Hypocrisy was to have no place among them. As a warning, Jesus strongly condemned the hypocritical practices of the religious leaders of that time. Consider some of their ways.

They practiced “righteousness” with showy display. Jesus told his audience: “Take care not to practice your righteousness in front of men to be noticed by them . . . as the hypocrites do.” He also told them to make gifts of mercy “in secret,” or discreetly. They should pray in private, not just to be seen by others. Then their worship would be genuine and would be appreciated by his Father.—Matthew 6:1-6.

They were quick to criticize. Jesus said: “Hypocrite! First remove the rafter from your own eye, and then you will see clearly how to remove the straw from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:5) By drawing attention to the faults of others while having greater faults himself, an individual is making himself appear to be something he is not. For, in reality, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”—Romans 3:23.

They harbored impure motives. On one occasion, disciples of the Pharisees and party followers of

Herod approached Jesus with a tax question. Using flattery, they said to Jesus: “Teacher, we know you are truthful and teach the way of God in truth.” Then they set a trap by asking the question: “Is it lawful to pay head tax to Caesar or not?” Jesus replied: “Why do you put me to the test, hypocrites?” Jesus rightly called them hypocrites because they were not really seeking an answer to their question but were trying to “trap him in his speech.”—Matthew 22:15-22.

When the Christian congregation was established at Pentecost 33 C.E., an environment was created in which truth and honesty flourished. True Christians worked hard to eradicate hypocritical tendencies from their personality. For example, Peter, one of the 12 apostles, encouraged fellow Christians to practice “obedience

True Christians practice “love out of a clean heart and out of a good conscience and out of faith without hypocrisy.”—1 TIMOTHY 1:5

to the truth with unhypocritical brotherly affection.” (1 Peter 1:22) The apostle Paul exhorted his coworkers to practice “love out of a clean heart and out of a good conscience and out of faith without hypocrisy.”—1 Timothy 1:5.

THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD

The teachings of Jesus and the apostles, as found in the Bible, are just as powerful today as they were in the first century. Regarding this, the apostle Paul wrote: “The word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints from the marrow, and is able to discern thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) Coming to know the Bible’s teachings and endeavoring to live in harmony with them has helped many to turn from



“I saw real love and genuine interest for fellow man being displayed.”—PANAYIOTA



“I couldn’t live with allowing fellow Christians to believe I was something that I was not.”—DANIEL



“I could no longer be the slick, fast-talking salesman. . . . My conscience had been affected.”—JEFFERY

hypocrisy and to pursue sincerity and honesty. Consider the experience of the three individuals mentioned at the outset.

Panayiota experienced a turning point in her life when she accepted an invitation to attend meetings at a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses. She did not see any outward display of righteousness to impress others. She says: “There I saw real love and genuine interest for fellow man being displayed, something I had not seen all the years that I had been active in politics.”

Panayiota started to study the Bible and progressed to the point of baptism. That was 30 years ago. She now says: “I found true meaning in life, not when I was going from house to house promoting the political party, but when I began

preaching about God’s Kingdom—the only way we can have a just world.”

Daniel made good progress in the Christian congregation and was given certain responsibilities. A few years later, he made an error in judgment and his conscience started to trouble him. “With memories of the hypocrisy I had seen in the church years before,” he said, “I felt no alternative but to give up my privileges of service. I couldn’t live with allowing fellow Christians to believe I was something that I was not.”

Happily, after a period of readjustment, Daniel felt he could resume his privileges of service with a good conscience, and he gladly accepted responsibilities in the congregation once again. This refreshing honesty is typical of those who serve God without hypocrisy. They learn to “remove the rafter” from their own eye before offering to “remove the straw” from their brother’s eye.

Jeffery, who spent his life in the business world, said: “As I progressed in Bible knowledge, I realized that I could no longer be the slick, fast-talking salesman who was prepared to say anything to get the contract. My conscience had been affected by Bible verses such as Proverbs 11:1, which tells us that ‘dishonest scales are detestable to Jehovah.’” Yes, unlike those who posed the tax question to Jesus, Jeffery learned to act without hidden motives in his dealings with both fellow Christians and nonbelievers.

The millions of Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide are endeavoring to apply what they have learned from the Bible. They are making tireless efforts to “put on the new personality that was created according to God’s will in true righteousness and loyalty.” (Ephesians 4:24) We encourage you to find out who Jehovah’s Witnesses are, what they believe, and how they can help you to learn about the new world of God’s promise. There “righteousness is to dwell” and hypocrisy will be no more.—2 Peter 3:13. ■



A CROWDED STREET IN JERUSALEM
AT PENTECOST 33 C.E.

Did Jews really come “from every nation under heaven” to Jerusalem at Pentecost 33 C.E.?

In addition to the Bible account at Acts 2:5-11, the contemporary Jewish writer Philo provided an account that describes the crowd of people who came to Jerusalem at Pentecost 33 C.E.

About travelers to Jerusalem, Philo wrote: “Countless multitudes from countless cities come, some over land, others over sea, from east and west and north and south, at every feast.” He also quoted from a letter sent by Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, to the Roman Emperor Caligula. In it, Agrippa stated concerning Jerusalem: “The Holy City . . . is the capital not of the single country of Judaea but of most other countries also, because of the colonies which it has sent out from time to time to the neighbouring lands.”

Agrippa listed areas in which Jewish colonies had been established, including faraway places in Mesopotamia, North Africa, Asia Minor, Greece, and islands of the Mediterranean. “Although this list makes no specific mention of journeys to Jerusalem,” says scholar Joachim Jeremias, “the idea is implicit, since it was obligatory for all adult Jews to make the pilgrimage there.”—Deuteronomy 16:16. ■

How were the thousands who came to Jerusalem for the Jewish festivals accommodated?

Three festivals were held yearly in Jerusalem—Passover, Pentecost, and the Festival of Booths. In the first century, hundreds of thousands traveled to Jerusalem for such occasions from all over Israel and from every other land where Jews lived. (Luke 2: 41, 42; Acts 2:1, 5-11) All these pilgrims had to find somewhere to stay.

Some would spend the night with friends; others at inns or lodging houses. Many camped in tents within or around the city walls. During his last stay in Jerusalem, Jesus lodged in the nearby city of Bethany.—Matthew 21:17.

A number of structures containing many bath basins have been found near the temple. These buildings are thought to have been hostels where pilgrims could stay and cleanse themselves before entering the temple. An inscription found in one of these buildings indicates that Theodotus, a priest and leader of the local synagogue, “built the synagogue for the reading of Torah and . . . furthermore, the hostel, and the rooms, and the water installation for lodging needy strangers.” ■



RUINS OF A RITUAL BATH
FOUND IN JERUSALEM

Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com

Was Peter the First Pope?

“Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., has been elected as Supreme Pontiff, the 265th successor of Peter.”—*VATICAN INFORMATION SERVICE*, VATICAN CITY, MARCH 13, 2013.

“The bishop of Rome has the right of primacy above the universal Church, since he is the successor of Saint Peter, who received such prerogative from Jesus Christ.”—*THE PRIMACY OF THE BISHOP OF ROME DURING THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES*, 1903, BY VINCENT ERMONI.

“If, then, anyone shall say . . . that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in this primacy; let him be anathema [that is, be declared a heretic].”—*THE FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL*, JULY 18, 1870.

TO MILLIONS of Catholics around the world, the 1870 decree of the first Vatican Council is a dogma of the church, a binding teaching. However, the question must be asked, Is it a *Scriptural* teaching? In addition, is Pope Francis really a successor of the apostle Peter? And was Peter the first pope?

“UPON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”

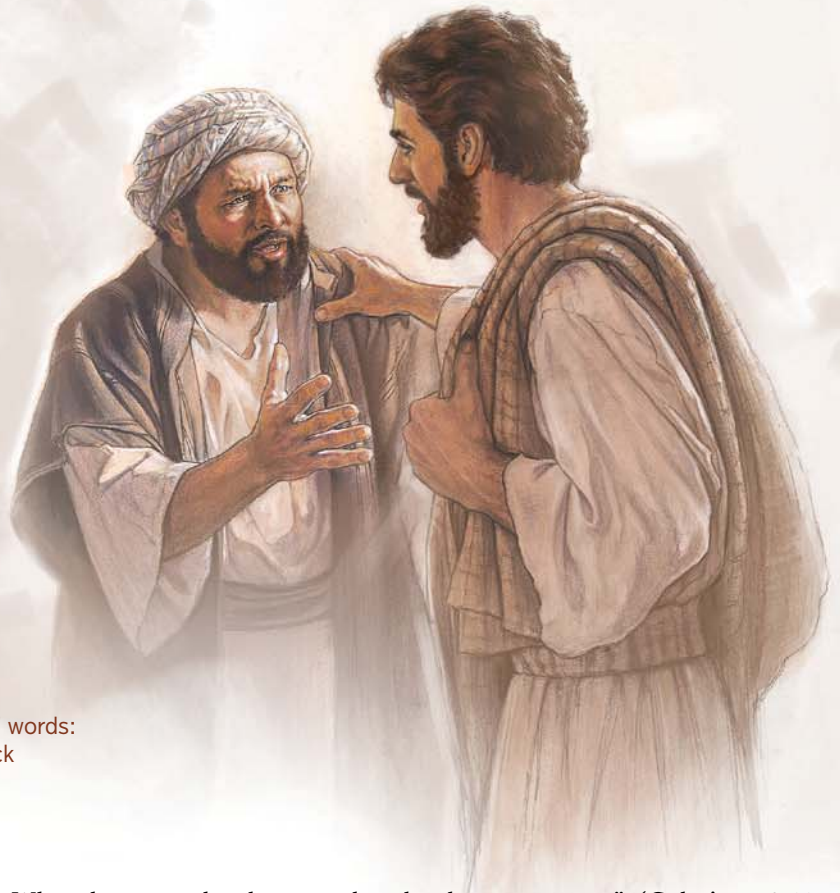
The 1870 Vatican Council’s decree was based primarily on its interpretation of Matthew 16:16-19 and John 21:15-17. The conversations between Jesus and Peter that we read in these passages as well as other Bible accounts show that the apostle Peter had an important role in the history of early Christianity. In fact, the first time they met, Jesus predicted that Peter would display rocklike qualities in his life. (John 1:42) But did Christ give Peter primacy?

At Matthew 16:17, 18, we find Jesus’ words to Pe-

ter: “I say to you, you are Peter [whose name means “A Piece of Rock”], and upon this rock I will build my church.”* Was Jesus saying that his “church,” or congregation, would be built upon Peter, a man? Was Peter to be the head of all other followers of Jesus? How did the other apostles present at that conversation understand Jesus’ words? The Gospels reveal that later, on a number of occasions, they argued about who was the greatest among them. (Matthew 20:20-27; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 22:24-26) If Jesus had already given Peter primacy, or superiority, could there have been any question as to who was the greatest among the apostles?

How did Peter himself understand Jesus’ words? Growing up an Israelite, Peter would have been familiar with various Hebrew prophecies speaking of a “stone” or a “cornerstone.” (Isaiah

* All Biblical quotations in this article are from the Catholic *New American Bible*, the version used in the official Vatican website.



How are we to understand Jesus' words:
 "You are Peter, and upon this rock
 I will build my church"?

8:13, 14; 28:16; Zechariah 3:9) When he quoted one of them in a letter to his fellow believers, Peter explained that the prophesied "cornerstone" was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Peter used the Greek term *pe'tra* (the same word found in Jesus' statement at Matthew 16:18) for Christ alone. —1 Peter 2:4-8.

The apostle Paul was another faithful follower of Jesus. Did Paul believe that Jesus had given Peter primacy? Acknowledging Peter's position in the early Christian congregation, Paul wrote that Peter was among those "reputed to be pillars." For Paul, there was more than just one 'pillar.' (Galatians 2:9) Moreover, if Peter had been appointed by Jesus as the head of the congregation, how could he simply be *reputed*, that is to say, supposed or thought by his fellow believers, to be a pillar?

When writing regarding certain inconsistencies in the way Peter treated people, Paul respectfully but frankly stated: "I opposed him to his face

because he clearly was wrong." (Galatians 2:11-14) Paul did not think that Christ had built his church, or congregation, upon Peter or any other imperfect man. On the contrary, he believed that the congregation was built on Jesus Christ as the foundation. For Paul, "the rock was the Christ." —1 Corinthians 3:9-11; 10:4.

"YOU ARE PETER . . ."

So how are we to understand the words: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church"? To understand an excerpt correctly, we need to read its context. What were Jesus and Peter speaking about? Jesus had just asked his disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" Without hesitation, Peter answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." With that, Jesus commended Peter and then added that he would build his "church," or congregation, on an even more solid "rock," the one in whom Peter

The Evolution of Papal Primacy

32 C.E.: Jesus foretells he will build his church, or congregation, upon himself; no primacy conferred on the apostle Peter

55-64: The apostles Paul and Peter write various letters with the underlying thought that Jesus is the only foundation of the Christian congregation

254-257: Stephen, bishop of Rome, advances the idea that he has primacy over other bishops as the successor of Peter; but other bishops, such as Firmilian of Caesarea and Cyprian of Carthage, reject Stephen's claim

296-304: First known inscription attesting the use of the title "papa," or "pope," with reference to the bishop of Rome

5th century: Another bishop of Rome, Leo I, uses Matthew 16:18 to affirm his primacy over other bishops

6th century: Increasing use of *papa* (pope) as a title for the Roman bishop; however, non-Roman bishops continue to apply the term to themselves until the ninth century

1075: Gregory VII declares that "pope" is an exclusive title for the bishop of Rome; his *Dictatus Papae* (Papal Dictates) makes the papacy "appear as a replacement for Christ," according to one historian

- ▼ **1870:** The First Vatican Council decrees that "the Roman pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is true Vicar of Christ, and Head of the whole Church"

had just expressed faith—Jesus himself.—Matthew 16:15-18.

Consistent with this, many of the "Church Fathers" wrote that the rock of Matthew 16:18 is Christ. For example, Augustine in the fifth century wrote: "The Lord said: 'On this rock-mass I will build my Church,' because Peter had told him: 'You are the Christ the Son of the living God.' It is therefore on this rock-mass, that you confessed, that I will build my Church." Augustine repeatedly stated that "the Rock (*Petra*) was Christ."

Augustine and others would be considered heretics if judged according to current Catholic doctrine. In fact, according to Swiss theologian Ulrich Luz, the consensus of opinion on this subject among Bible scholars today would have been condemned by the 1870 Vatican Council as heresy.

THE POPE—PETER'S SUCCESSOR?

The title "pope" was unknown to the apostle Peter. In fact, until the ninth century, many non-Roman bishops applied the title to themselves. Even so, the term was rarely applied as an official title until the late 11th century. Moreover, no early Christian thought that a primacy supposedly given to Peter had been transmitted to any successors. Hence, German scholar Martin Hengel concluded that there is "no demonstrable historical and theological way to arrive at what later became papal 'primacy.'"

In conclusion: Was Peter the first pope? Did he have any successors? Is the Catholic dogma of papal primacy Scripturally valid? The only correct answer to each question is a simple no. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Jesus unquestionably *did* build his church, his true congregation, upon himself. (Ephesians 2:20) For each one of us, then, the important question is, Have I found that true congregation? ■



What is wrong with Christmas customs?

Christmas has long been described as a traditional Christian festival to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Many of the customs used in this celebration, however, make us wonder how they came to be associated with Jesus' birth in the first place.

For one thing, there is the myth of Santa Claus. The modern-day jolly, white-bearded, rosy-cheeked, red-suited Santa is known to have been a successful Christmas advertisement created for a North American beverage company in 1931. During the 1950's, some Brazilians tried to replace Santa Claus with a native legendary figure—Grandpa Indian. The result? Santa Claus not only defeated Grandpa Indian but even “defeated the child Jesus and became the official representative of the feast of December 25,” says Professor Carlos E. Fantinati. But are myths such as Santa Claus the only problem with Christmas? For the answer, let us go back to early Christianity.

“During the first two centuries of Christianity there was strong opposition to recognizing birthdays of martyrs or, for that matter, of Jesus,” states the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Why? Christians viewed birthday celebrations as a pagan custom, something to be avoided altogether. In fact, no mention of the date of Jesus' birth can be found in the Bible.

In the fourth century C.E., despite the stand taken by the early Christians against the custom of celebrating birthdays, the Catholic Church instituted Christmas. The church wanted to strengthen its position by removing one of the main obstacles in its way—the popularity of the pagan Roman religions and their winter solstice festivals. Each year, from December 17 through January 1, “most Romans feasted, gamed, reveled, paraded, and joined in other festivities as they paid homage to their deities,” says *Christmas in America*, by



Penne L. Restad. And on December 25, the Romans celebrated the birth of the Invincible Sun. Instituting Christmas on that day, the church cajoled many Romans into celebrating the birth of Jesus instead of the birth of the sun. Romans “were still able to enjoy the trappings of these midwinter festivals,” says *Santa Claus, a Biography*, by Gerry Bowler. In reality, they “continued to mark the new days with old ways.”

Clearly, then, the main problem with Christmas celebrations lies in their unsavory origins. In his book *The Battle for Christmas*, Stephen Nissenbaum refers to Christmas as “nothing but a pagan festival covered with a Christian veneer.” Christmas, therefore, dishonors God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Is this just a trivial matter? The Bible asks: “What fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14) Like the trunk of a tree that has grown crooked, Christmas is so twisted that it “cannot be made straight.”—Ecclesiastes 1:15. ■



WHY DOES GOD WANT US TO KNOW THE TRUTH? READ JOHN 17:3



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Can we know the truth about God?

God has communicated with mankind. He used his holy spirit, or active force, to put his thoughts into the minds of Bible writers. (2 Peter 1:20, 21) We can come to know the truth about God by reading the Bible.—**Read John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16.**

In the Bible, God reveals many things about himself. He makes known why he created human life, what he will do for mankind, and how he wants us to live. (Acts 17:24-27) Jehovah God wants us to know the truth about him.—**Read 1 Timothy 2:3, 4.**

Why does God welcome lovers of truth?

Jehovah is the God of truth, and he sent his Son, Jesus, to teach mankind the truth. Therefore, lovers of truth are attracted to Jesus. (John 18:37) God wants such people as his worshippers.—**Read John 4:23, 24.**

Satan the Devil has prevented many people from knowing God by spreading teachings about God that are not true. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4) People who do not love what is good are attracted to such false teachings. (Romans 1:25) But millions of sincere people are finding the truth about God by studying the Bible.—**Read Acts 17:11.**

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