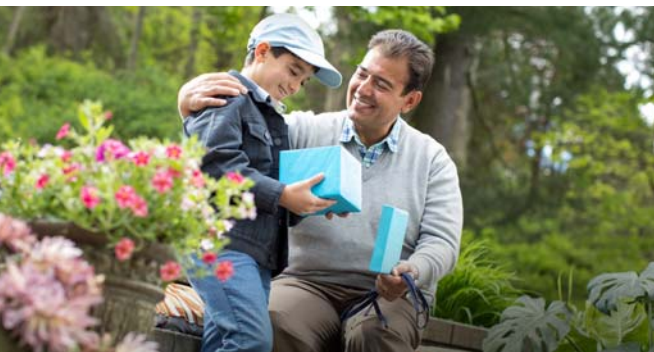


# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



What Is the  
Best Gift of All?



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Who is the greatest gift-giver in the universe?

*“Every good gift and every perfect present is from above, coming down from the Father of the celestial lights.”—James 1:17.*

This issue of *The Watchtower* helps us to appreciate one gift from God that is the best of all.

## WHAT IS THE BEST GIFT OF ALL?

- 3 “It Was the Best Gift I Had Ever Received”
- 4 The Quest for the Best Gift
- 6 What Is the Best Gift of All?

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

### 8 WHAT DID JESUS REALLY LOOK LIKE?

### 10 A PROPER VIEW OF MISTAKES

### 12 THE BIBLE—WHY SO MANY?

### 15 OUR READERS ASK . . .

Is Christmas for Christians?

### 16 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?



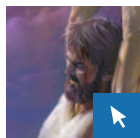
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### Do Jehovah's Witnesses Believe in Jesus?

(Look under ABOUT US > FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

THE **WATCHTOWER**  
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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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

# “It Was the Best Gift I Had Ever Received”

That is how one 13-year-old girl felt when she received a pet dog as a gift. A successful businesswoman said that a computer her father gave her when she was in high school was a gift that changed her life. And a newlywed husband felt that his wife’s handmade first-anniversary card was the best gift he had ever received.

Each year, many people spend time and effort searching for that “best” gift for a friend or a relative on a special occasion. And most would love to hear a response like those mentioned at the outset. What about you? Would you like to be able to give or receive gifts that are truly appreciated?

That prospect can be very appealing, not only because of the effect a gift can have on the receiver but also because of the way it can make the giver feel. After all, the Bible says: “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.” (Acts 20:35) Of course, the happiness gained from giving may be enhanced if the gift is highly valued by the receiver.

How, then, can you make your gift-giving a source of true happiness for you and for the receiver? And if giving the “best” gift is not possible, what can you do so that your gift will be truly appreciated?





# The Quest for the Best Gift

Coming up with what might be considered the ideal gift for someone is not an easy task. After all, the value of the gift will be determined by the receiver. And what one recipient considers best might not be so for another.

For instance, a teenager may feel that the latest electronic gadget would be a perfect gift. An adult, on the other hand, may deeply treasure receiving a gift of sentimental value, such as a family heirloom. In some cultures, the preferred gift for young and old alike is money, allowing the receiver to use it for whatever he or she wants.

Despite the challenge, many thoughtful individuals continue in their quest for a gift most suitable for someone special. While finding such a gift may not always be possible, keeping in mind certain factors would likely increase the chances for success. Let us consider four that can contribute to satisfaction on the part of the receiver.

**The recipient's desires.** A man in Belfast, Northern Ireland, called a racing bike he received

when he was 10 or 11 years old the best present ever. Why? "Because I really wanted it," he explained. That remark reveals that a person's desire has much to do with whether he will cherish a gift or not. So think about the person to whom you intend to give a gift. Try to identify what he may value, because a person's values often influence his desires. For example, grandparents often *value* spending time with family. They may *desire* to see their children and grandchildren as frequently as possible. A family vacation including the grandparents would likely be more appreciated than any other gift for them.

A key to being aware of a person's desires is to be a good listener. The Bible encourages us to "be quick to listen, slow to speak." (James 1:19) As you engage in everyday conversation with your friends or relatives, listen closely for clues that indicate their likes and dislikes. Then you may be in a better position to give a gift that they will enjoy.

**The recipient's needs.** A recipient may highly cherish even the simplest gift if it fills a particular need. But how can you know what someone else might need?

It may seem that the easiest way to find out is to ask what the person needs—or, for that matter, wants. However, for many gift-givers, this takes away part of the joy of giving, as they much prefer to surprise the receiver with just the right gift. Furthermore, while some people may talk freely about their likes or dislikes, often they can be rather private regarding their needs.

Therefore, be observant and take special note of the person's circumstances. Is he or she young, old, single, married, divorced, widowed, employed, or retired? Then give thought to what gifts may address a need the person has.

To gain insight into the needs of the intended recipient of your gift, consult with others who have been in similar circumstances. They may be able to tell you about special needs that are not widely known by others. With such input, you may now be able to give a gift that fills a need that others would not think of.

**The timing.** The Bible states: "A word spoken at the right time—how good it is!" (Proverbs 15:23) This scripture shows that the timing of our words can make a big difference. It is similar with our actions. Just as words spoken at the right time can be very pleasing to the hearer, a gift given at the right time or on the appropriate occasion can contribute greatly to the receiver's happiness.

A friend is getting married. A youth is soon to graduate from school. A married couple is expecting a baby. These are but a few of the many occasions for which gifts are often given. Some find it practical to keep a list of such special events that will take place in the coming year. In

this way they can plan ahead for the gift that would be best for each occasion.\*

Of course, you need not limit gift-giving to special occasions. The joy of giving can be experienced at any time. However, a word of caution might be in order. For example, if a man were to give a woman a gift when there is no apparent reason for doing so, she might conclude that the gift was an indication of his interest in getting to know her better. Unless that is the true and appropriate intention, such a gift may lead to misunderstandings or complications. This underscores the need to consider another important factor—the giver's motives.

**The giver's motives.** As the previous example shows, it is good to consider whether the recipient might misinterpret the giver's motives. On the other hand, *the giver* would do well to examine his or her own motives. While most people would like to think that their motives for gift-giving are honorable, many give gifts during certain times of the year because they feel pressured to do so. Still others give in hopes of receiving preferential treatment or something in return.

What can you do to ensure that your gift-giving is done with good motives? The Bible says: "Let everything you do be done with love." (1 Corinthians 16:14) If your giving is motivated by genuine love and concern for the recipients, your gifts will likely be received with joy and you will experience the greater happiness that comes from true generosity. When you give from the heart, you also make our heavenly Father rejoice. The apostle Paul commended the Christians in ancient Corinth when they generously and happily

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\* Many people also give gifts during birthday and holiday celebrations. However, these occasions often involve practices that are in conflict with what the Bible teaches. See the article "Our Readers Ask—Is Christmas for Christians?" in this magazine.

supported relief work for their fellow Christians in Judea. “God loves a cheerful giver,” Paul told them.—2 Corinthians 9:7.

Giving attention to the factors we have discussed can contribute greatly toward your giving

gifts that make others happy. These factors—and more—have played a part in God’s arrangement for mankind to receive the greatest gift of all. We invite you to consider what this grand gift is by reading the next article.

## What Is the Best Gift of All?

“Every good gift and every perfect present is from above, coming down from the Father of the celestial lights.” (James 1:17) That scripture, of course, refers to the generosity of our heavenly Father, Jehovah God. Yet, of the many gifts that God has given mankind, there is one that is greater than all the rest. What is it? Jesus’ well-known words, recorded at John 3:16, tell us: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”

The gift of God’s only-begotten Son—that would certainly be the greatest gift that any one of us could ever receive, for thereby we can be freed from the bondage to sin, old age, and death. (Psalm 51:5; John 8:34) Try as we may, on our own there is nothing we can do to be released from that bondage. However, in his great love, God provided what is needed to bring about that release. By giving his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the ransom, Jehovah God gave obedient mankind the prospect of life everlasting. But what exactly is the ransom? Why is it necessary? And how can we benefit from it?

A ransom is a price paid to buy back something forfeited or to bring about release from bondage. The Bible explains that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were created sinless, with the prospect of enjoying life forever on a paradise earth along with the offspring they would later produce. (Genesis 1:26-28) Sadly, they forfeited

all of that by choosing to disobey God—thus becoming sinners. What was the result? The Bible answers: “Through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because they had all sinned.” (Romans 5:12) Instead of passing on perfect life to his offspring, Adam passed on sin and its consequence, death.

In the case of a ransom, what is paid must be equal to what was lost. When Adam deliberately disobeyed God, he sinned, and the result was the loss of a perfect human life—Adam’s life. According to the Bible, that caused Adam’s offspring to become enslaved to sin and death. Hence, it took the surrendering of another perfect human life—Jesus’ life—given as a sacrifice to make release from bondage possible. (Romans 5:19; Ephesians 1:7) It is only because God lovingly paid this ransom that mankind has the prospect of enjoying what Adam and Eve lost—life forever on a paradise earth.—Revelation 21:3-5.

In view of what it accomplishes, there is no doubt that God’s gift of the ransom, which makes everlasting life possible, is the greatest gift of all. To appreciate what a “perfect present” it is, let us see how, in surpassing ways, it satisfies the factors that help us to make gifts worthwhile, as discussed in the preceding article.

**Satisfies our desire.** We humans have a strong innate desire to keep on living. (Ecclesiastes 3:11) Although on our own we are unable to satisfy that

desire, the ransom makes it possible for us to do so. The Bible says: “For the wages sin pays is death, but the gift God gives is everlasting life by Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Romans 6:23.

**Fills our need.** Humans could not provide the ransom. The Bible explains: “The ransom price for their life is so precious that it is always beyond their reach.” (Psalm 49:8) Therefore, we were in desperate need of divine assistance in order to be released from bondage to sin and death. But “through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus,” God has provided just what is needed.—Romans 3:23, 24.

**Is perfectly timed.** The Bible tells us: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) Because it was given “while we were yet sinners,” the ransom provides assurance of the depth of God’s love for us despite our sinful state. And it gives us much to look forward to, even though we have to endure the consequences of sin.

**Reveals a motive noble and selfless.** The Bible points out what moved God to offer his Son as the ransom: “By this the love of God was revealed

in our case, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might gain life through him. The love is in this respect, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us.”—1 John 4:9, 10.

How can you show that you appreciate the greatest gift of all? Recall that Jesus’ words at John 3:16 point out that only those “exercising faith” in him will be saved. Faith, according to the Bible, is “the assured expectation of what is hoped for.” (Hebrews 11:1) To have that assurance, accurate knowledge is essential. For this reason, we urge you to take time to learn about Jehovah God, the Giver of this “perfect present,” and to find out what you must do to enjoy the everlasting life that Jesus’ ransom sacrifice has made possible for you.

You can learn all of this by examining the Scriptural information available online at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org). Jehovah’s Witnesses are happy to help you. We are confident that as you learn about and benefit from this greatest gift, you will be moved to exclaim: “Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”—Romans 7:25. ■



God's gift of the ransom, which makes everlasting life possible, is the best gift of all

# What Did Jesus *Really* Look Like?

No one has a photograph of Jesus. He never posed for a portrait or a sculpture. Still, he has appeared in the works of countless artists throughout the centuries.

Of course, those artists did not know what Jesus really looked like. Prevailing culture, religious beliefs, and the wishes of their patrons often dictated how the artists portrayed Jesus. Even so, their imagery could influence, even blur, people's view of Jesus and his teachings.

Some artists depicted Jesus as a frail weakling with long hair and a thin beard or emphasized a look of melancholy. In other presentations, Jesus appears supernatural, adorned with a halo, or distant from those around him. Do such portrayals correctly characterize Jesus? How can we find out? One way is to examine statements in the Bible that can shed some light on what he might have looked like. They can also help us to have the correct view of him.

## **“YOU PREPARED A BODY FOR ME”**

Those are words that Jesus uttered in prayer apparently at the time of his baptism. (Hebrews 10:5; Matthew 3:13-17) What did that body look like? Some 30 years earlier, the angel Gabriel had revealed to Mary: “You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, . . . God’s Son.” (Luke 1:31, 35) Thus, Jesus was a perfect man, as was Adam at his creation. (Luke 3:38; 1 Corinthians 15:45) Jesus must have been a well-formed man, and he probably had features similar to those of his Jewish mother, Mary.

Jesus wore a beard, as was customary among Jews in contrast to Romans. Such beards were a symbol of dignity and respectability; they were not long and unkempt. Jesus undoubtedly attended to or trimmed his beard and had his hair neatly clipped. Only those set aside as Nazirites, such as Samson, did not cut their hair.—Numbers 6:5; Judges 13:5.

For the better part of 30 years, Jesus was a carpenter, working without the benefit of modern power tools. (Mark 6:3) He, therefore, must have had a sturdy build. Early in his ministry, he single-handedly “drove all those with the sheep and cattle out of the temple, and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.” (John 2:14-17) It takes a strong and powerful man to perform that feat. Jesus used the body that God had prepared for him to fulfill his God-given commission: “I must also declare the good news of the Kingdom of God to other cities, because for this I was sent.” (Luke 4:43) It took extraordinary stamina to travel throughout Palestine on foot and declare this message.

## **“COME TO ME, . . . AND I WILL REFRESH YOU”**

Jesus’ warm countenance and appealing demeanor must have made this invitation particularly attractive to those “toiling and loaded down.” (Matthew 11:28-30) His warmth and kindness underscored his promise of refreshment





for those willing to learn from him. Even young ones wanted to be close to Jesus, for the Bible says: “He took the children into his arms.”—Mark 10:13-16.

Though Jesus did experience agony before his death, he was not a melancholic individual. For example, he contributed to festivities at a marriage feast in Cana by changing water into fine wine. (John 2:1-11) At other gatherings he taught never-to-be-forgotten lessons.—Matthew 9:9-13; John 12:1-8.

Above all, Jesus’ preaching put the joyful prospect of everlasting life within the reach of his listeners. (John 11:25, 26; 17:3) When 70 of his disciples reported their preaching experiences, he became “overjoyed” and exclaimed: “Rejoice because your names have been written in the heavens.”—Luke 10:20, 21.

#### **“YOU, THOUGH, ARE NOT TO BE THAT WAY”**

Religious leaders of Jesus’ day contrived ways to draw attention to themselves and underscore

their authority. (Numbers 15:38-40; Matthew 23:5-7) Unlike them, Jesus instructed his apostles not to “lord it over” others. (Luke 22:25, 26) In fact, Jesus warned: “Beware of the scribes who want to walk around in robes and want greetings in the marketplaces.”—Mark 12:38.

By contrast, Jesus blended in with the crowd, unrecognized on occasion. (John 7:10, 11) Even among his 11 faithful apostles, he did not stand out physically. The betrayer Judas resorted to a kiss, “an agreed sign,” to identify Jesus to the mob.—Mark 14:44, 45.

So while many details are unknown, it is evident that Jesus did not look the way he has often been portrayed. More important than what he *really* looked like, however, is how we view him now.

#### **“IN A LITTLE WHILE THE WORLD WILL SEE ME NO MORE”**

Within the day that he uttered those words, Jesus was dead and buried. (John 14:19) He gave his life as “a ransom in exchange for many.” (Matthew 20:28) On the third day, God resurrected him “in the spirit” and “allowed him to become manifest” to some of his disciples. (1 Peter 3:18; Acts 10:40) How did Jesus look when he appeared to his disciples then? Apparently quite different from his original appearance, for even his closest associates did not immediately recognize him. Mary Magdalene took him for a gardener; and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, for a stranger.—Luke 24:13-18; John 20:1, 14, 15.

How should we picture Jesus today? Over 60 years after Jesus’ death, the beloved apostle John saw visions of Jesus. John did not see a dying figure on a cross. Rather, he saw the “King of kings and Lord of lords,” the King of God’s Kingdom, who will soon conquer God’s enemies, both demonic and human, and bring everlasting blessings to mankind.—Revelation 19:16; 21:3, 4. ■





# A Proper View of Mistakes

Don and Margaret\* enjoyed the visit of their daughter and her family. For their parting meal together, Margaret, a retired professional cook, prepared macaroni and cheese, a favorite meal of her two grandsons.

With everyone seated, Margaret brought in the main course and placed it in the center of the table. She raised the lid and to her dismay discovered that there was just hot cheese sauce in the bowl! Margaret had forgotten to add the main ingredient, macaroni!#

Regardless of age or experience, we all make mistakes. It could be a thoughtless word or a poorly timed action, or perhaps we simply overlooked something or let it slip our mind. Why do mistakes happen? How can we deal with them? Can they be avoided? A proper view of mistakes will help us answer these questions.

## MISTAKES—OUR VIEW AND GOD’S

When we do something well, we gladly accept the praise and acknowledgment that we feel we deserve. When we make a mistake, even if it is unintentional or unnoticed by others, should we not similarly acknowledge our responsibility? To do so requires humility.

If we think too much of ourselves, we may well try to minimize our mistake, shift the blame, or

even deny that we made it. Such a course of action usually leads to negative consequences. The problem could remain unresolved, and other people could be unjustly blamed. Even if we should succeed in passing over our mistake now, we need to keep in mind that in the long run, “each of us will render an account for himself to God.”—Romans 14:12.

God has a realistic view of mistakes. In the book of Psalms, God is portrayed as “merciful and compassionate”; he “will not always find fault, nor will he stay resentful forever.” He knows the imperfect makeup of humans and understands our inborn frailties, “remembering that we are dust.”—Psalm 103:8, 9, 14.

Furthermore, like a merciful father, God wants us, his children, to view mistakes as he does. (Psalm 130:3) His Word lovingly provides an abundance of counsel and guidance to help us deal with our own mistakes as well as those of others.

## WAYS TO COPE WITH MISTAKES

Often, when mistakes are made, a person spends much time and emotional energy apportioning blame or justifying what was said or done. Instead, when your words offend someone, why not simply apologize, put things right, and keep your friendship intact. Have you done something wrong and caused inconvenience or worse to yourself or somebody else? Rather than berate yourself or accuse others, why not simply

\* Names have been changed.

# Macaroni and cheese is a dish made chiefly of cooked macaroni pasta covered with a cheese sauce.

do your best to correct matters? To insist that the fault lies elsewhere will almost certainly prolong unnecessary tension and allow the problem to intensify. Instead, learn, correct, and move on.

When someone else makes a mistake, however, it is very easy for us to react in a way that shows disapproval. How much better to follow the counsel of Jesus Christ when he said: “All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them.” (Matthew 7:12) When you make a mistake, even a trivial one, no doubt you want others to treat you with compassion or even to overlook your mistake completely. So why not strive to show the same kindness toward others?—Ephesians 4:32.

#### **PRINCIPLES THAT CAN HELP REDUCE MISTAKES**

Mistakes arise from “faulty judgment, inadequate knowledge, or inattention,” explains one dictionary. We have to admit that at one time or another, every person displays one or more of those traits. Nevertheless, mistakes will be fewer if we consider some fundamental principles in the Scriptures.

One such principle is found at Proverbs 18:13, which reads: “When anyone replies to a matter before he hears the facts, it is foolish and humiliating.” Yes, taking a few extra moments to hear things out and consider your response will surely help to prevent you from speaking rashly or reacting impulsively. The knowledge gained by paying close attention is invaluable in averting faulty judgment—and avoiding a mistake.

Another Bible principle says: “If possible, as far as it depends on you, be peaceable with all men.” (Romans 12:18) Do your best to promote a spirit of peace and cooperation. When working with others, be considerate and respectful and

endeavor to commend and encourage them. In such an atmosphere, thoughtless words and actions can easily be forgiven or overlooked, and more serious offenses can be amiably resolved or remedied.

Learn to turn the mistake itself into a positive experience. Rather than looking for some excuse for what you said or did, see this as an opportunity to develop positive qualities in yourself. Do you perhaps need to show more patience, kindness, or self-control? What about mildness, peace, and love? (Galatians 5:22, 23) At the very least, you can learn what not to do the next time. Without being irresponsible, try not to take yourself too seriously. A sense of humor can surely help to diffuse tension.

#### **BENEFITING FROM A PROPER VIEW**

Having a proper view of mistakes will help us to cope constructively when they occur. We will be more at peace with ourselves and others. If we endeavor to learn from our mistakes, we will become wiser and more likable. We will neither become overly downhearted nor think badly of ourselves. Appreciating that others are also dealing with their mistakes will draw us closer to them. Most important, we can benefit from learning to imitate God’s love and his willingness to forgive freely.—Colossians 3:13.

Did Margaret’s mistake, mentioned earlier, spoil the family occasion? Not at all. Everyone saw the funny side of it, especially Margaret, and enjoyed the meal—without the macaroni! In later years, the two grandsons retold the story of that unforgettable family meal to their own children and recalled the fond memories they had of their grandparents. After all, it was only a mistake! ■



# THE BIBLE

## Why So Many?

Why are there so many different versions or translations of the Bible today? Do you view new versions as a help or a hindrance to Bible understanding? Learning about their origins can help you to assess them wisely.

First, though, who originally wrote the Bible, and when?

### THE ORIGINAL BIBLE

The Bible is normally divided into two sections. The first section has 39 books containing “sacred pronouncements of God.” (Romans 3:2) God inspired faithful men to write these books over a long period of time—about 1,100 years from 1513 B.C.E. to sometime after 443 B.C.E. They wrote mostly in Hebrew, so we

call this section the **Hebrew Scriptures**, also known as the Old Testament.

The second section has 27 books that are also “the word of God.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13) God inspired faithful disciples of Jesus Christ to write these books over a much shorter time—about 60 years from about 41 C.E. to 98 C.E. They wrote mostly in Greek, so we call this section the **Christian Greek Scriptures**, also known as the New Testament.

Together these 66 inspired books make up the complete Bible—God’s message for mankind. But why were additional translations of the Bible made? Here are three of the basic reasons.

- To allow people to read the Bible in their mother tongue.
- To remove errors made by copyists and thus restore the Bible’s original text.
- To update archaic language.

Consider how these factors were involved in two early translations.



## THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT

About 300 years before Jesus' day, Jewish scholars began to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into another language—Greek. This translation became known as the **Greek Septuagint**. Why was it made? To help the many Jews who by then spoke Greek rather than Hebrew to stay close to their “holy writings.”—2 Timothy 3:15.

The *Septuagint* also helped millions of non-Jewish, Greek-speaking people to get to know what the Bible taught. How? “From the middle of the first century,” says Professor W. F. Howard, “it became the Bible of the Christian Church, whose missionaries went from synagogue to synagogue ‘proving from the scriptures that the Messiah was Jesus.’” (Acts 17:3, 4; 20:20) That was one reason why many Jews soon “lost interest in the Septuagint,” according to Bible scholar F. F. Bruce.

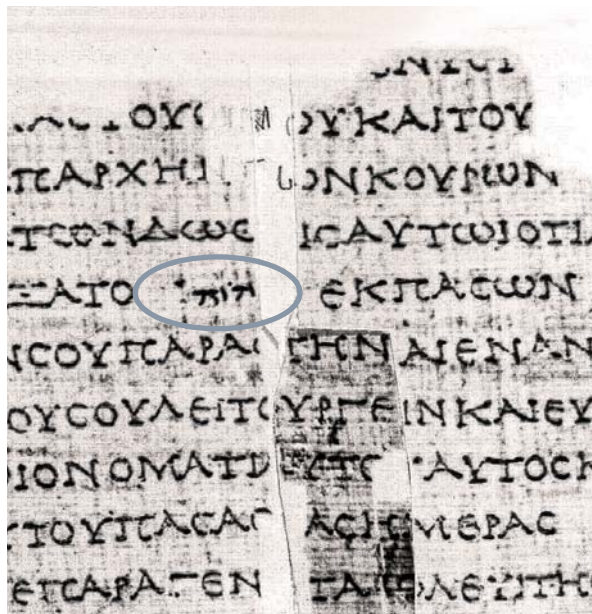
As Jesus' disciples progressively received the books of the Christian Greek Scriptures, they put them together with the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and that came to be the complete Bible that we have today.

## THE LATIN VULGATE

About 300 years after the Bible was completed, religious scholar Jerome produced a Latin translation of the Bible, which eventually came to be the **Latin Vulgate**. Latin translations in various forms already existed, so why was a new one needed? Jerome wanted to correct “wrong renderings, obvious errors, and unwarranted additions and omissions,” says *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

Jerome corrected many of those errors. But in time, church authorities committed the greatest disservice of all! They declared the *Latin Vulgate* to be the only approved translation of the Bible and continued to do so for centuries! Instead of helping ordinary people to understand the Bible, the *Vulgate* made it a closed book because eventually most people knew no Latin at all.

The divine name in a *Septuagint* manuscript fragment from Jesus' day



## GOD'S SACRED NAME IN THE BIBLE

The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* uses God's sacred name Jehovah in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Greek Scriptures. Most modern English Bibles do not. They use “Lord” instead. One reason for doing this, some translators say, is that God's personal name, represented by the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), never appeared in the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. But is that true?

In the mid-20th century, some very old fragments of the *Septuagint* that existed in Jesus' day were found. They contain God's sacred name written in Hebrew characters. It seems that later, copyists removed the divine name and substituted *Ky'ri-os*—the Greek word for “Lord”—in its place. The *New World Translation* restores the divine name to its rightful places in the Scriptures.

A 2,000-year-old Dead Sea Isaiah Scroll.  
It matches closely what is in the Bible today



## HAS THE BIBLE BEEN CORRUPTED?

Bible copyists, of course, made mistakes. But none of those mistakes corrupted the Bible. “No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading.”  
—*Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*.

Jewish copyists made the fewest mistakes. “The Jewish scribes of the early Christian centuries copied and recopied the text of the Hebrew Bible with the utmost fidelity.”  
—*Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*.

For example, a scroll of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls is 1,000 years older than the previously available texts. How does it compare with the text we have today? “Very occasionally, the odd word is added or subtracted.”  
—*The Book. A History of the Bible*.

Mistakes—such as transposed letters, words, or phrases—made by less meticulous copyists are now easily identified and corrected. “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”  
—*The Books and the Parchments*.

“Anxious believers can be enormously reassured by the almost exact similarity between even the earliest of the biblical papyri from Egypt and the text as it has survived during its descent through countless scriptoria and printing shops of Europe.”  
—*The Book. A History of the Bible*.

So, has the Bible been corrupted?  
Emphatically, no!

## NEW TRANSLATIONS MULTIPLY

In the meantime, people continued to make other translations of the Bible—such as the famous Syriac *Peshitta* by about the fifth century C.E. But it was not until the 14th century that renewed efforts were made to give many ordinary people the Scriptures in the vernacular.

In England in the late 14th century, John Wycliffe began the process of breaking free from the clutches of a dead language by producing the Bible in English, a language that people in his land could actually understand. Soon after that, Johannes Gutenberg’s printing methods opened the way for Bible scholars to produce and distribute new versions of the Bible in many different living languages throughout Europe.

When English translations multiplied, critics questioned the need to make different versions in the same language. The 18th-century English cleric John Lewis wrote: “Language grows old and unintelligible, therefore it’s necessary to review old Translations to make them speak the Language in use, and be understood by the living generation.”

Today, Bible scholars are in a better position than ever to review older translations. They have a much clearer understanding of ancient Bible languages, and they have valuable ancient Bible manuscripts that have been found in recent times. These help to establish more accurately the original text of the Bible.

So there is real value in new Bible versions. Of course, there is need for caution regarding some of them.\* But if the revisers have been moved by a genuine love of God in making a new Bible version, their work can be of great benefit to us. ■

\* See the article “How Can You Choose a Good Bible Translation?” in the May 1, 2008, issue of this magazine.



To read the Bible in your language online or on your mobile device, go to [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org). Look under PUBLICATIONS > BIBLE, or scan code

# Is Christmas for Christians?

Millions of people around the world believe that the Christmas tradition is the birthday celebration of Jesus Christ. However, have you ever considered whether first-century Christians, those closest to Jesus, celebrated Christmas? And are you aware of what the Bible has to say about birthdays? Finding answers to these questions can help us determine if Christmas is for Christians.

First, the Bible does not mention birthday celebrations for Jesus or any other faithful worshipper of God. The Scriptures refer to only two individuals who celebrated their birthday. Neither of them was a worshipper of Jehovah, the God of the Bible, and their birthday celebrations were cast in a negative light. (Genesis 40:20; Mark 6:21) According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, the early Christians opposed the “pagan custom of celebrating birthdays.”

On what date was Jesus born?

The Bible does not say exactly when Jesus was born. “The day of Christ’s birth cannot be ascertained from the N[ew] T[estament] or, indeed, from any other source,” states McClintock and Strong’s *Cyclopedia*. Surely, if Jesus wanted his followers to celebrate his birthday, he would have made certain that they knew the date of his birth.

Second, the Bible does not record that Jesus or any one of his disciples celebrated Christmas.

According to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, celebrating Christmas was first mentioned “in the *Chronograph* of Philocalus, a Roman almanac whose source material can be dated to 336 [C.E.]” Clearly, that was well after the completion of the Bible and centuries after Jesus was on earth. Thus, McClintock and Strong note that “the observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of N[ew] T[estament] origin.”\*

*What event did Jesus instruct his disciples to commemorate?*

As the Great Teacher, Jesus gave clear instructions on what he wanted his followers to do, and these are recorded in the Bible. Celebrating Christmas, however, is not one of them. Just as a school-teacher does not want his students to go beyond the instructions given them, Jesus does not want his followers to “go beyond the things that are written” in the Holy Scriptures.—1 Corinthians 4:6.

On the other hand, there is one important event the early Christians were very familiar with—the commemoration, or Memorial, of Jesus’ death. Jesus personally told his disciples when to observe this occasion and showed them how to do it. These specific instructions, as well as the calendar day of his death, are recorded in the Bible.—Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25.

As we have seen, Christmas is a birthday celebration, and early Christians did not follow that pagan custom. Furthermore, the Bible does not mention that Jesus or anyone else celebrated Christmas. In light of these facts, millions of Christians the world over have concluded that Christmas is *not* for them. ■

\* For more information on the origins of most Christmas traditions, see the article “Our Readers Ask . . . What Are the Facts About Christmas?” in *The Watchtower* of December 1, 2014, available online at [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org).

## What is Armageddon?

Some people believe . . .

that it will be a global destruction by nuclear weapons or environmental ruin.

**What do you think?**

### What the Bible says

Armageddon is the symbolic place of “the war of the great day of God the Almighty,” his war against the wicked.  
—Revelation 16:14, 16.

### What else can we learn from the Bible?

- ▶ God fights the war of Armageddon, not to ruin the earth, but to save it from ruin by humankind.—Revelation 11:18.
- ▶ The war of Armageddon will end all wars.  
—Psalm 46:8, 9.

## Is it possible to survive the war of Armageddon?

### What would you say?

- ▶ Yes   ▶ No   ▶ Maybe

### What the Bible says

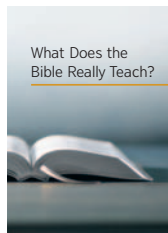
“A great crowd” of people from all nations will survive “the great tribulation,” which will end with the war of Armageddon.  
—Revelation 7:9, 14.

### What else can we learn from the Bible?

- ▶ God wants as many as possible to survive Armageddon. He destroys the wicked only as a last resort.  
—Ezekiel 18:32.
- ▶ The Bible explains how to survive Armageddon.—Zephaniah 2:3.



An unnumbered  
“great crowd” of people  
from all nations will  
survive Armageddon



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