

- Song 14 and Prayer
- Opening Comments (3 min. or less)

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD

- **“The Kingdom of the Heavens Has Drawn Near”:** (10 min.)
[Play the video *Introduction to Matthew.*]
Mt 3:1, 2—John the Baptist proclaimed that the future Ruler of the heavenly Kingdom would soon appear (*nwtsty* study notes)
Mt 3:4—John the Baptist lived a simple life, completely devoted to doing God’s will (*nwtsty* media)
- **Digging for Spiritual Gems:** (8 min.)
Mt 1:3—Why might five women have been included in Matthew’s otherwise all-male genealogy of Jesus? (*nwtsty* study note)

Mt 3:11—How do we know that baptism involves complete immersion? (*nwtsty* study note)

What has this week’s Bible reading taught you about Jehovah?

What other spiritual gems have you discovered in this week’s Bible reading?

- **Bible Reading:** (4 min. or less) Mt 1:1-17

APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

- **Initial Call Video:** (4 min.) Play and discuss the video.
- **First Return Visit:** (3 min. or less) See p. 1.
- **Bible Study:** (6 min. or less) *bhs* 41-42 ¶6-7

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

- Song 72
- **Annual Service Report:** (15 min.) Talk by an elder. After reading the letter from the branch office regarding the annual service report, interview publishers, selected in advance, who had outstanding experiences in the ministry during the past year.
- **Congregation Bible Study:** (30 min.) *jy* chap. 2
- Review Followed by Preview of Next Week (3 min.)
- Song 137 and Prayer

MATTHEW 1-3 | “The Kingdom of the Heavens Has Drawn Near”

3:4


- John’s dress and appearance made it immediately apparent that he lived a simple life, completely devoted to doing God’s will
- John’s unique privilege of being the forerunner of Jesus far exceeded any sacrifices he had made

A simple life helps us to do more in God’s service and results in great satisfaction. We can simplify our life by . . .

- identifying actual needs
- eliminating unnecessary expenses
- preparing a realistic budget
- disposing of things not being used
- paying off debts
- cutting back on excessive secular employment



John’s diet consisted of locusts and wild honey

 A simple life will allow me to pursue my goal of _____

14 *Praising Earth's New King* (Psalm 2:12)

1. A multitude is gathering
 from ev'ry tribe and nation,
 Collected by the Christ and his
 anointed congregation.
God's Kingdom has been brought to birth;
 We pray his will be done on earth.
This hope is a gift of priceless worth,
 Giving joy and consolation.

(CHORUS)

*Praise our God, Jehovah; Praise his Son forever—
 King of all kings and the Lord of lords.
Now unitedly we bow to his rule
 And praise him with one accord.*

2. We praise the Christ, our reigning King,
 with sounds of jubilation.
 This Prince of Peace will be our Judge
 and bring about salvation.
We see the joys that lie ahead:
 An earth released from fear and dread;
The time for our Lord to raise the dead.
 What a time for exultation!

(Chorus)

MATTHEW 1:1-19

1 The book of the history* of Jesus Christ,# son of David,^a son of Abraham:^b

- 2** Abraham became father to Isaac;^c
Isaac became father to Jacob;^d
Jacob became father to Judah^e and his brothers;
- 3** Judah became father to Pe'rez and Ze'rah^f by Ta'mar;
Pe'rez became father to Hez'ron;^g
Hez'ron became father to Ram;^h
- 4** Ram became father to Am·min'a·dab;
Am·min'a·dab became father to Nah'shon;ⁱ
Nah'shon became father to Sal'mon;
- 5** Sal'mon became father to Bo'az by Ra'hab;^j
Bo'az became father to O'bed by Ruth;^k
O'bed became father to Jes'se;^l
- 6** Jes'se became father to David^m the king.
David became father to Sol'o·monⁿ by the wife of U·ri'ah;
- 7** Sol'o·mon became father to Re·ho·bo'am;^o
Re·ho·bo'am became father to A·bi'jah;
A·bi'jah became father to A'sa;^p
- 8** A'sa became father to Je·hosh'a·phat;^q
Je·hosh'a·phat became father to Je·ho'ram;^r
Je·ho'ram became father to Uz·zi'ah;
- 9** Uz·zi'ah became father to Jo'tham;^s
Jo'tham became father to A'haz;^t
A'haz became father to Hez·e·ki'ah;^u

1:1 *Or "genealogy." #Or "the Messiah; the Anointed One."

- 10** Hez·e·ki'ah became father to Ma·nas'seh;^a
 Ma·nas'seh became father to A'mon;^b
 A'mon became father to Jo·si'ah;^c
- 11** Jo·si'ah^d became father to Jec·o·ni'ah^e and to his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon.^f
- 12** After the deportation to Babylon, Jec·o·ni'ah became father to She·al'ti·el; She·al'ti·el became father to Ze·rub'ba·bel;^g
- 13** Ze·rub'ba·bel became father to A·bi'ud;
 A·bi'ud became father to E·li'a·kim;
 E·li'a·kim became father to A'zor;
- 14** A'zor became father to Za'dok;
 Za'dok became father to A'chim;
 A'chim became father to E·li'ud;
- 15** E·li'ud became father to El·e·a'zar;
 El·e·a'zar became father to Mat'than;
 Mat'than became father to Jacob;
- 16** Jacob became father to Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born,^h who is called Christ.ⁱ

17 All the generations, then, from Abraham until David were 14 generations; from David until the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations; from the deportation to Babylon until the Christ, 14 generations.

18 But this is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. During the time his mother Mary was promised in marriage to Joseph, she was found to be pregnant by holy spirit*^j before they were united. **19** However, be-

1:18 *Or "active force."

cause her husband Joseph was righteous and did not want to make her a public spectacle, he intended to divorce her secretly.^a **20** But after he had thought these things over, look! Jehovah's* angel appeared to him in a dream, saying: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take your wife Mary home, for what has been conceived[#] in her is by holy spirit.^b **21** She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus,^{*c} for he will save his people from their sins."^d **22** All of this actually came about to fulfill what was spoken by Jehovah* through his prophet, saying: **23** "Look! The virgin will become pregnant and will give birth to a son, and they will name him Im·man'u·el,"^e which means, when translated, "With Us Is God."^f

24 Then Joseph woke up from his sleep and did as the angel of Jehovah* had directed him, and he took his wife home. **25** But he did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son,^g and he named him Jesus.^h

2 After Jesus had been born in Beth'le·hemⁱ of Ju·de'a in the days of Herod*^j the king, look! astrologers[#] from the East came to Jerusalem, **2** saying: "Where is the one born king of the Jews?^k For we saw his star when we were in the East, and we have come to do obeisance* to him."

3 At hearing this, King Herod was agitated, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** On gathering together all the chief priests and

1:20 *This is the first of 237 places in the Christian Greek Scriptures where the divine name, Jehovah, occurs in the main text of this version. See App. A5. [#]Or "begotten." **1:21** *Corresponds to the Hebrew name Jeshua, or Joshua, which means "Jehovah Is Salvation." **1:22, 24; 2:13** *See App. A5. **2:1** *See Glossary. [#]Or "magi." **2:2** *Or "to bow down."

MATTHEW 1:20-2:14

scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ* was to be born. **5** They said to him: "In Beth'le-hem^a of Jude'a, for this is how it has been written through the prophet: **6** 'And you, O Beth'le-hem of the land of Judah, are by no means the most insignificant city among the governors of Judah, for out of you will come a governing one, who will shepherd my people Israel.'"^b

7 Then Herod secretly summoned the astrologers and carefully ascertained from them the time of the star's appearing. **8** When sending them to Beth'le-hem, he said: "Go make a careful search for the young child, and when you have found him, report back to me so that I too may go and do obeisance to him." **9** After they had heard the king, they went their way, and look! the star they had seen when they were in the East^c went ahead of them until it came to a stop above where the young child was. **10** On seeing the star, they rejoiced with great joy. **11** And when they went into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and falling down, they did obeisance* to him. They also opened their treasures and presented him with gifts—gold and frankincense and myrrh. **12** However, because they were given divine warning in a dream^d not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.

13 After they had departed, look! Jehovah's* angel appeared to Joseph in a dream,^e saying: "Get up, take the young child and his mother and flee to Egypt, and stay there until I give you word, for Herod is about to search for the young child to kill him." **14** So Joseph got up and

2:4 *Or "the Messiah; the Anointed One." 2:11 *Or "bowed down."

MATTHEW 2:15-3:13

by night took along the young child and the child's mother and went into Egypt. **15** He stayed there until the death of Herod. This fulfilled what was spoken by Jehovah* through his prophet, saying: "Out of Egypt I called my son."^a

16 Then Herod, seeing that he had been outwitted by the astrologers, flew into a great rage, and he sent out and had all the boys in Beth'le-hem and in all its districts killed, from two years of age and under, according to the time that he had carefully ascertained from the astrologers.^b

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, who said: **18** "A voice was heard in Ra'mah, weeping and much wailing. It was Rachel^c weeping for her children, and she was unwilling to take comfort, because they are no more."^d

19 When Herod had died, look! Jehovah's* angel appeared in a dream^e to Joseph in Egypt

20 and said: "Get up, take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the life* of the young child are dead."

21 So he got up and took the young child and the child's mother and entered into the land of Israel. **22** But hearing that Arche-la'us ruled Ju-de'a instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Moreover, being given divine warning in a dream,^f he withdrew into the territory of Gal'i-lee.^g **23** And he came and settled in a city named Naz'a-reth,^h in order to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets: "He will be called a Naz-a-rene'."ⁱ

3 In those days John^j the Baptist came preaching^k in the wilderness of Ju-de'a, **2** saying:

2:15, 19; 3:3 *See App. A5. 2:20 *Or "soul." 2:23 *Probably from the Hebrew expression "sprout."

“Repent, for the Kingdom of the heavens has drawn near.”^a

3 This, in fact, is the one spoken of through Isaiah the prophet^b in these words: “A voice of one calling out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of Jehovah!* Make his roads straight.’”^c

4 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair and had a leather belt around his waist.^d His food was locusts and wild honey.^e **5** Then the people of Jerusalem and all Ju-de’a and all the country around the Jordan were going out to him,^f **6** and they were baptized* by him in the Jordan River,^g openly confessing their sins.

7 When he caught sight of many of the Pharisees and Sadducees^h coming to the baptism, he said to them: “You offspring of vipers,ⁱ who has warned you to flee from the coming wrath?^j

8 Therefore, produce fruit that befits repentance. **9** Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’^k For I say to you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones. **10** The ax is already lying at the root of the trees. Every tree, then, that does not produce fine fruit is to be cut down and thrown into the fire.^l **11** I, for my part, baptize you with water because of your repentance,^m but the one coming after me is stronger than I am, whose sandals I am not worthy to take off.ⁿ That one will baptize you with holy spirit^o and with fire.^p **12** His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will clean up his threshing floor completely and will gather his wheat into the storehouse, but the chaff he will burn up with fire^q that cannot be put out.”

13 Then Jesus came from Gal’i-lee to the Jordan to John,

3:6 *Or “dipped; immersed.”

in order to be baptized by him.^a

14 But the latter tried to prevent him, saying: "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you, and are you coming to me?"

15 Jesus replied to him: "Let it be this time, for in that way it is suitable for us to carry out all that is righteous." Then he quit preventing him. **16** After being baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water; and look! the heavens were opened up,^b and he saw God's spirit descending like a dove and coming upon him.^c **17** Look! Also, a voice from the heavens^d said: "This is my Son,^e the beloved, whom I have approved."^f

4 Then Jesus was led by the spirit up into the wilderness to be tempted^g by the Devil.^h **2** After he had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights, he felt hungry. **3** And the Tempterⁱ approached and said to him: "If you are a son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread." **4** But he answered: "It is written: 'Man must live, not on bread alone, but on every word that comes from Jehovah's* mouth.'"^j

5 Then the Devil took him along into the holy city,^k and he stationed him on the battlement* of the temple^l **6** and said to him: "If you are a son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written: 'He will give his angels a command concerning you,' and, 'They will carry you on their hands, so that you may not strike your foot against a stone.'"^m **7** Jesus said to him: "Again it is written: 'You must not put Jehovah* your God to the test.'"ⁿ

8 Again the Devil took him along to an unusually high mountain and showed him all the

4:4, 7, 10 *See App. A5. 4:5 *Or "parapet; highest point."

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew was working as a tax collector in Capernaum when he was invited by Jesus to become a disciple.

Later, after the Passover of 31 C.E., he was also chosen as one of the twelve apostles.

Matthew personally witnessed most of Jesus' three and a half year ministry. And around the year 41 C.E. he was the first to write an account of Jesus' life and teachings. His account would eventually become one of the four Bible books along with Mark, Luke and John, known as the Gospels.

The Book of Matthew focuses on the time period between 2 B.C.E. and 33 C.E.

It includes events just before Jesus' birth, and ends with Jesus' command to "go make disciples".

Did you know? Although Matthew is the first book of the Christian Greek Scriptures there is evidence that it was originally written in Hebrew. Sometime later, Matthew himself may have translated his Gospel into Greek.

The book has been divided into 28 chapters. In the first 18 chapters, much of the content is arranged by subject focussing on the teachings found in Jesus' public discourses.

Starting in Chapter 19, however, Matthew turns his attention to the last days of Jesus' ministry and, generally, relates the events in the order they happened.

About 40% of Matthews' Gospel is unique, describing events and details not found in the other three Gospels.

It begins with Abraham, and lists the family line of Jesus through his adoptive father Joseph, proving that Jesus is the legal heir of King David.

It provides a thorough account of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and it also includes many of Jesus' illustrations such as the wheat and the weeds, the pearl of high value and the dragnet.

Matthew's account greatly emphasises that the theme of Jesus' teaching was the "Kingdom of the Heavens".

To help readers identify Jesus as the promised Messiah, this book includes numerous direct quotes and references from many books in the Hebrew Scriptures. No wonder Matthew has been described as a “bridge” between the Hebrew and Christian Greek Scriptures.

As you enjoy your study of Matthew note how the Gospel establishes Jesus’ legal right to David’s throne; emphasises Christ’s teachings; and highlights God’s Kingdom.

GOOD NEWS ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



Jesus invites Matthew to be his follower.

Writer: Matthew

Place Written: Israel

Writing Completed: c. 41 C.E.

Time Covered: 2 B.C.E.–33 C.E.

Noteworthy Facts:

- Evidence indicates that Matthew originally wrote his Gospel in Hebrew just eight years after Jesus' death; he may personally have translated it into Greek.
- It has been estimated that Matthew's Gospel contains about a hundred references to the Hebrew Scriptures. Some 40 of these are actual quotations.
- Matthew's account of Jesus' life was likely written primarily with the Jewish audience in mind.
- Matthew had been a tax collector, which may explain why he was explicit in his mention of money, figures, and values. (17:27; 26:15; 27:3)
- Matthew alone mentions Jesus' repeated insistence that mercy is required in addition to sacrifice. (9:9-13; 12:7; 18:21-35)
- Matthew uses the term "Kingdom" more than 50 times.
- In the first 18 chapters, Matthew highlights the Kingdom theme, leading him to depart from a chronological arrangement. However, the last ten chapters (19 to 28) generally follow a chronological sequence.
- Over 40 percent of Matthew's Gospel account is not found in any other Gospel. This includes at least ten illustrations: the weeds in the field (13:24-30), the hidden treasure (13:44), the pearl of high value (13:45, 46), the dragnet (13:47-50), the unmerciful slave (18:23-35), the workers

and the denarius (20:1-16), the father and two children (21:28-32), the marriage of the king's son (22:1-14), the ten virgins (25:1-13), and the talents (25:14-30).

MATTHEW

Study Notes

Matthew: The Greek name rendered “Matthew” is probably a shortened form of the Hebrew name rendered “Mattithiah” ([1Ch 15:18](#)), meaning “Gift of Jehovah.”

1:1

book of the history: Matthew’s opening words in Greek, *Bi'blōs ge·ne·se·os* (form of *ge·ne·sis*), could also be rendered “historical record” or “record of the genealogy.” The Greek word *ge·ne·sis* literally means “origin; birth; line of descent.” It is used in the *Septuagint* to render the Hebrew term *toh·le·dhohth'*, which has a similar meaning and is usually rendered “history” in the book of Genesis.—[Ge 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2.](#)

history of Jesus Christ: Matthew traces the line through David’s son Solomon. By contrast, Luke traces the line through Nathan. ([Mt 1:6, 7; Lu 3:31](#)) Matthew traces Jesus’ legal right to the throne of David from Solomon through Joseph, who was legally Jesus’ father. Luke evidently follows the ancestry of Mary, tracing Jesus’ natural descent from David.

Christ: This title is derived from the Greek word *Khri-stos'* and is equivalent to the title “Messiah” (from Hebrew *Ma-shi'ach*), both meaning “Anointed One.” In Bible times, rulers were ceremonially anointed with oil.

son: In this genealogy, “son” may refer to an immediate son, a grandson, or a descendant.

son of David: Indicates that Jesus is the heir of the Kingdom covenant that is to be fulfilled by someone in David’s line.

son of Abraham: With the Jewish audience in mind, Matthew begins tracing Jesus’ legal descent by highlighting that Jesus is the lawful offspring, or heir of God’s promise to Abraham, through whom all nations of the earth can obtain a blessing.

1:2

father: In the expression **became father to** (lit., “generated; brought forth”), “father” can refer to an immediate father, a grandfather, or a more remote male ancestor.—[Mt 1:8, 11](#).

1:3

Tamar: The first of five women listed in Matthew’s

genealogy of the Messiah. The other four are Rahab and Ruth, both non-Israelite women ([vs. 5](#)); Bath-sheba, “the wife of Uriah” ([vs. 6](#)); and Mary ([vs. 16](#)). These women are likely included in an otherwise all-male genealogy because there is something outstanding in the way each one came to be an ancestress of Jesus.

1:6

David the king: Although several kings are mentioned in this genealogy, David is the only one identified by the title “king.” Israel’s royal dynasty was referred to as “the house of David.” ([1Ki 12:19, 20](#)) By calling Jesus “son of David” in [verse 1](#), Matthew emphasizes the Kingdom theme and identifies Jesus as the heir of the kingship promised in the Davidic covenant.—[2Sa 7:11-16](#).

the wife of Uriah: That is, Bath-sheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David’s foreign warriors.—[2Sa](#)

[11:3; 23:8, 39](#).

1:8

Jehoram became father to Uzziah: “Father” is here used in the sense of “forefather,” as is often done in genealogical lists. As shown at [1Ch 3:11, 12](#), three wicked kings (Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah) in the Davidic line are omitted between Jehoram and Uzziah (also called Azariah).

1:11

father: Used here in the sense of “grandfather,” since Josiah was actually the father of Jehoiakim, who in turn was the father of **Jeconiah**, also called Jehoiachin and Coniah.—[2Ki 24:6](#); [1Ch 3:15-17](#); [Es 2:6](#); [Jer 22:24](#).

1:12

Shealtiel became father to Zerubbabel: Although Shealtiel in many instances is called the father of Zerubbabel ([Ezr 3:2, 8](#); [5:2](#); [Ne 12:1](#); [Hag 1:1, 12, 14](#); [2:2, 23](#); [Lu 3:27](#)), Pedaiah, Shealtiel’s brother, is once so identified. ([1Ch 3:19](#)) Zerubbabel was likely the natural son of Pedaiah, but he was evidently legally reckoned as the son of Shealtiel.

1:16

Joseph: Matthew’s account does not use the expression “became father to” (see [study note on Mt 1:2](#)) in describing Joseph’s relationship to Jesus. It simply says that Joseph was **the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born**. The Greek pronoun rendered “whom” is feminine and can refer only to Mary. So Matthew’s genealogy highlights that while Jesus is not the physical son of Joseph, he is his adoptive son and therefore a legal heir of David. Luke’s genealogy highlights that Jesus through his mother, Mary, is the natural heir of David.

Christ: See [study note on Mt 1:1](#) and [Glossary](#).

1:18

promised in marriage: Among the Hebrews, to be “promised in marriage,” or engaged, was a binding arrangement. An engaged couple was viewed as already married, although the man and the woman did not begin living together as husband and wife until the wedding formalities were completed.

spirit: The first occurrence of the Greek word *pneu'ma* in the Christian Greek Scriptures. It refers here to

God’s active force.—See [Glossary](#).

1:19

husband . . . divorce: Since engaged people were viewed as married, Joseph could rightly be referred to as

Mary’s husband and Mary as Joseph’s wife. ([Mt 1:20](#)) A divorce was required to dissolve the engagement.

1:20

look!: The Greek word *i·dou'*, here rendered “look!,” is often used to focus attention on what follows, encouraging the reader to visualize the scene or to take note of a detail in a narrative. It is also used to add emphasis or to introduce something new or surprising. In the Christian

Greek Scriptures, the term occurs most frequently in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and in the book of Revelation. A corresponding expression is often used in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Jehovah's: This is the first of 237 places in the Christian Greek Scriptures where the divine name, Jehovah, occurs in the main text of this version.—See [App. C](#).

Jehovah's angel: This expression occurs many times in the Hebrew Scriptures, starting at [Ge 16:7](#). When it occurs in early copies of the *Septuagint*, the Greek word *ag'ge·los* (angel; messenger) is followed by the divine name written in Hebrew characters. That is how the expression is handled at [Zec 3:5, 6](#) in a copy of the *Septuagint* found in Nahal Hever, Israel, dated between 50 B.C.E. and 50 C.E. (See [App. C](#).) A number of Bible translations retain the divine name when rendering the expression “Jehovah's angel” in this verse.—See [App. A5](#) and [App. C](#).

son of David: To prepare Joseph for what he was about to hear, the angel called him “son of David,”

reminding him of the promise in the Davidic covenant.—See [study notes on Mt 1:1, 6](#).

conceived: Or “begotten.” Lit., “generated; brought forth.” The same Greek word is rendered “was born” in [verse 16](#); the active form is rendered “became father to” in

verses 2-16.—See study note on Mt 1:2.

1:21

Jesus: Corresponds to the Hebrew name Jeshua or Joshua, a shortened form of Jehoshua, meaning “Jehovah Is Salvation.”

1:22

to fulfill what was spoken by Jehovah through his prophet: This and similar expressions occur many times in Matthew’s Gospel, apparently to emphasize to the Jewish audience Jesus’ role as the promised Messiah.— Mt 2:15, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9.

Jehovah: The quotation that immediately follows in verse 23 is taken from Isa 7:14, where Jehovah is said to be the one giving the sign. (See App. C.) This is Matthew’s first quote from the Hebrew Scriptures.

1:23

virgin: Matthew here quotes from the *Septuagint* version of Isa 7:14, which uses *par·the'nos*, “one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse,” to render the Hebrew word ‘*al·mah*’, a broader term that may mean “virgin” or simply “a young woman.” Under inspiration, Matthew applies the Greek term for “virgin” to the mother of Jesus.

Immanuel: A Hebrew name occurring at [Isa 7:14; 8:8, 10](#). Immanuel is one of the prophetic title-names by which Messiah would be identified.

1:24

Jehovah: See [study note on Mt 1:20](#) and [App. C](#).

1:25

did not have sexual relations with: Lit., “did not know.” In Biblical Greek, the verb “to know” can be used as a euphemism for sexual relations; the same is true of Biblical Hebrew at [Ge 4:1](#), and so forth.

2:1

Bethlehem of Judea: Since there was another Bethlehem, in the territory of Zebulun ([Jos 19:10, 15](#)), the town in Judah (Judea) was often referred to as “Bethlehem in Judah” ([Jg 17:7-9; 19:1, 2, 18](#)). The earlier name of this town was evidently Ephrath, or Ephrathah, explaining why [Mic 5:2](#) says that the Messiah would come from “Bethlehem Ephrathah.”—[Ge 35:19; 48:7](#).

Herod: Refers to Herod the Great.—See [Glossary](#).

astrologers: Greek *ma'goi* (plural of *ma'gos*), most likely

referring to experts in astrology and other occult practices condemned in the Holy Scriptures. ([De 18:10-12](#)) The Bible does not indicate the number. The same Greek term is rendered “sorcerer” at [Ac 13:6, 8](#) and is used in the *Septuagint* as an equivalent for the Hebrew and Aramaic words rendered “conjurer” at [Da 2:2, 10](#).

2:2

star: Most probably not a real star or a conjunction of planets. Only the astrologers “saw” the star.

when we were in the East: The Greek word rendered “East” literally means “rising.” In this context, the expression evidently refers to the location of the astrologers when they saw the star, though some have understood it to mean that the astrologers saw the star on the eastern sky or as it was “rising,” or appearing.

do obeisance: Or “bow down.” When the Greek verb *pro-sky-ne'o* is used to refer to the worship of a god or a deity, it is rendered “to worship.” In this context, however, the astrologers were asking for “the one born *king* of the Jews.” So it is clear that it refers to obeisance or homage to a human king, not a god. A similar usage is found at [Mr 15:18, 19](#), ftn., where the term is used of the soldiers who mockingly bowed down to Jesus, calling him “King of the Jews.”—See also [Mt 18:26](#).

2:4

chief priests: The Greek term is rendered “high priest” when it is singular and refers to the chief representative of the people before God. Here the plural refers to principal men of the priesthood, including former high priests and, possibly, the heads of the 24 priestly divisions.

scribes: This term originally referred to copyists of the Scriptures, but during Jesus’ time, it referred to those who were experts in the Law and teachers of it.

the Christ: Here the title “Christ” is preceded by the definite article in Greek, evidently as a way of emphasizing Jesus’ office as the Messiah.

2:5

Bethlehem: From the Hebrew name meaning “House of Bread.” Bethlehem was David’s hometown and was sometimes called “David’s city.”—[Lu 2:4, 11](#); [Joh 7:42](#).

2:6

by no means the most insignificant: The prophecy at [Mic 5:2](#) here quoted shows that Bethlehem, although insignificant in population (called a village at [Joh 7:42](#)) and governing power, would become very significant because the greatest **governing one** would come from there to **shepherd** God’s people Israel.

2:8

do obeisance to him: Or “honor him; pay him homage.” Here Herod is claiming that he wants to perform an act of respect to a human king, not to worship a god.—For further information on the Greek word, see [study note on Mt 2:2](#).

2:11

house: The reference to a house shows that the astrologers did not visit Jesus when he was a newborn baby in a manger.

the young child: Jesus is here not referred to as “an infant,” as he is at [Lu 2:12, 16](#).

did obeisance: Or “bowed down.” The term often denotes respect to a human, such as a king, not worship.—

See [study notes on Mt 2:2; 18:26](#).

gifts: When presenting Jesus at the temple 40 days after his birth ([Lu 2:22-24; Lev 12:6-8](#)), Joseph and Mary were poor, indicating that these gifts were given sometime after that occasion. The gifts may have been timely, useful for financing the family’s stay in Egypt.

frankincense: See [Glossary](#).

myrrh: See [Glossary](#).

2:13

look!: See [study note on Mt 1:20](#).

Jehovah's angel: See [study note on Mt 1:20](#) and [App. C](#).

Egypt: At this time, Egypt was a Roman province and home to a large Jewish population. Bethlehem was about 9 km (6 mi) SSW of Jerusalem, so Joseph and Mary could travel SW to Egypt without passing through Jerusalem, where Herod issues his murderous edict.

2:14

went into Egypt: From Bethlehem to Egypt was probably a distance of at least 120 km (75 mi).

2:15

death of Herod: Herod died likely in the year 1 B.C.E.

fulfilled what was spoken by Jehovah through his prophet: See [study note on Mt 1:22](#).

Jehovah: The quote that follows is taken from [Ho 11:1](#), and the context ([Ho 11:1-11](#)) clearly shows that this is a

statement made by Jehovah God.—See [App. C](#).

2:16

had all the boys . . . killed: Historians have recorded other similar acts of violence committed by Herod the Great. He murdered at least 45 supporters of one rival. Suspicion led him to cause the murder of his wife Mariamne (I), three sons, his wife's brother, her grandfather (Hyrchanus), several who had been his best friends, and many others. To minimize the rejoicing that was sure to accompany his own death, he is said to have ordered that the principal men of the Jews be killed when he himself died.

2:18

Ramah: A city in the territory of Benjamin, N of Jerusalem. It appears that when Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 B.C.E., the Jews taken captive were assembled at Ramah before being moved to Babylon. Some scholars have concluded that such an assembling of Jews (perhaps accompanied by the slaughtering of some there) was referred to at [Jer 31:15](#), quoted here.

Rachel: Mentioned as a symbol of all mothers in Israel. In Jeremiah's prophecy, Rachel, whose tomb was near Bethlehem, figuratively weeps over her sons taken into exile to the land of the enemy. Jeremiah's prophecy also

contains the comforting promise of a return from enemy territory. ([Jer 31:16](#)) Matthew's inspired application of this prophecy has been understood to refer to a return from death, man's enemy, by means of a resurrection.

2:19

Jehovah's angel: See [study note on Mt 1:20](#) and [App. C](#).

2:20

life: This is the first occurrence of the Greek word *psy·khe'*, rendered "soul" in some Bible translations. Here it refers to a person's life. The expression **seeking the life of** someone can also be rendered "seeking [wanting] to kill" someone.—[Ex 4:19](#), ftn; see Glossary, "[Soul](#)."

2:22

Archelaus: A cruel ruler who, like his father, Herod the Great, was unpopular with the Jews. In quelling a riot, he had 3,000 slain within the temple grounds. Joseph was warned by God about the danger when returning from Egypt, so he settled his family in Nazareth of Galilee, outside Archelaus' jurisdiction.

2:23

Nazareth: Probably meaning "Sprout-Town." Nazareth was the town in Lower Galilee where Jesus lived most

of his earthly life.

prophets: “He will be called a Nazarene”: Evidently referring to the book written by the prophet Isaiah ([Isa 11:1](#)), in which the promised Messiah is referred to as ‘a sprout [Hebrew, *ne'tser*] out of the roots of Jesse.’ Since Matthew speaks of “prophets” in plural, he may also have been referring to Jeremiah, who wrote about “a righteous sprout” as an offshoot of David ([Jer 23:5; 33:15](#)), and to Zechariah, who describes a king-priest “whose name is Sprout” ([Zec 3:8; 6:12, 13](#)). The term “Nazarene” became an epithet applied to Jesus and later to his followers.

3:1

John: The English equivalent of the Hebrew name Jehohanan or Johanan, meaning “Jehovah Has Shown Favor; Jehovah Has Been Gracious.”

the Baptist: Or “the Immerser; the Dipper”; referred to as “the Baptizer” at [Mr 1:4; 6:14, 24](#). Evidently used as a sort of surname, indicating that baptizing by immersing in water was distinctive of John. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote of “John, surnamed the Baptist.”

preaching: The Greek word basically means “to make proclamation as a public messenger.” It stresses the *manner* of the proclamation: usually an open, public

declaration rather than a sermon to a group.

wilderness of Judea: The generally uninhabited, barren eastern slope of the Judean mountains stretching down—a drop of some 1,200 m (3,900 ft)—toward the western bank of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. John begins his ministry in a section of this region N of the Dead Sea.

3:2

Repent: The Greek word used here could literally be rendered “to change one’s mind,” signifying a change in thinking, attitude, or purpose. In this context, “repent” refers to a person’s relationship with God.—See [study notes on Mt 3:8, 11](#) and Glossary, “[Repentance](#).”

Kingdom: First occurrence of the Greek word *ba·si·lei'a*, which refers to a royal government as well as to the territory and peoples under the rule of a king. Of the 162 occurrences of this Greek word in the Christian Greek Scriptures, 55 can be found in Matthew’s account and most of them refer to God’s heavenly rule. Matthew uses the term so frequently that his Gospel might be called the Kingdom Gospel.—See Glossary, “[God’s Kingdom](#).”

Kingdom of the heavens: This expression occurs some 30 times and only in the Gospel of Matthew. In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, the parallel phrase “the Kingdom of God” is used, indicating that “the Kingdom of God” is based in

and rules from the spiritual heavens.—[Mt 21:43](#); [Mr 1:15](#); [Lu 4:43](#); [Da 2:44](#); [2Ti 4:18](#).

has drawn near: Here in the sense that the future Ruler of the heavenly Kingdom was about to appear.

3:3

Jehovah: In this quote from [Isa 40:3](#), the divine name, represented by four Hebrew consonants (transliterated *YHWH*), occurs in the original Hebrew text. (See [App. C](#).) Matthew applies this prophecy to what John the Baptist did in preparing the way for Jesus. In John's Gospel, John the Baptist applies this prophecy to himself.—[Joh 1:23](#).

Make his roads straight: May allude to the custom of ancient rulers to have men prepare the way before the royal chariot by removing large stones and even building causeways and leveling hills.

3:4

clothed with camel's hair: John's garment of woven camel's hair and his **leather belt** are reminiscent of the dress of the prophet Elijah.—[2Ki 1:8](#); [Joh 1:21](#).

locusts: Rich in protein, these insects are designated by the Law as clean for food.—[Le 11:21, 22](#).

wild honey: That is, honey from natural beehives found in the wilderness, not from beehives kept by people. Eating locusts and wild honey was not unusual for people living in the wilderness.

3:6

baptized: Or “immersed; dipped.”—See [study note on Mt 3:11](#).

openly confessing their sins: Refers to people who admitted publicly or acknowledged openly their sins against the Law covenant.

3:7

Pharisees: See [Glossary](#).

Sadducees: See [Glossary](#).

You offspring of vipers: So called because their wickedness and deadly spiritual harm was like poison to unsuspecting people.

3:8

fruit that befits repentance: Refers to evidence and actions that would indicate a change of mind or attitude on the part of those listening to John.—[Lu 3:8; Ac 26:20](#); see [study notes on Mt 3:2, 11](#) and Glossary, “[Repentance](#).”

3:11

baptize you: Or “immerse you.” The Greek word *ba·pti'zo* means “to dip; to plunge.” Other Biblical references indicate that baptism involves complete immersion. On one occasion, John was baptizing at a location in the Jordan Valley near Salim “because there was a great quantity of water there.” ([Joh 3:23](#)) When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, they both “went down into the water.” ([Ac 8:38](#)) The same Greek word is used in the *Septuagint* at [2Ki 5:14](#) when describing that Naaman “plunged into the Jordan seven times.”

repentance: Lit., “change of mind.”—See [study notes on Mt 3:2, 8](#) and [Glossary](#).

stronger: Signifies having “more authority.”

sandals: To remove and carry another’s sandals or to untie another’s sandal laces ([Mr 1:7; Lu 3:16; Joh 1:27](#))

was considered a menial task that was often done by a slave.

baptize . . . with holy spirit and with fire: Refers to anointing with holy spirit and destroying by fire. The baptism with holy spirit began at Pentecost 33 C.E. The baptism with fire occurred in 70 C.E. when the Roman

armies destroyed Jerusalem and burned its temple.

3:12

winnowing shovel: Probably made of wood and used for tossing threshed grain into the air so that the wind would blow the straw and chaff away.

chaff: The thin protective covering or husk on the kernels of cereal grains, such as barley and wheat. The chaff was often gathered and burned to prevent it from blowing into the piles of grain and contaminating them. John uses the winnowing process to illustrate how the Messiah would separate symbolic wheat from chaff.

fire that cannot be put out: Indicates that the complete end of the Jewish system of things was due.

3:15

to carry out all that is righteous: Jesus was not baptized in symbol of repentance, for he was sinless and had kept God's righteous laws faultlessly; nor did his baptism symbolize dedication, for he was already a member of a dedicated nation. His baptism was a symbol of his presenting himself to do Jehovah's righteous will in connection with his role as the Messiah, including offering himself as a ransom. Jesus acted in harmony with the prophecy concerning him at [Ps 40:7, 8](#) and explained at

[Heb 10:5-9.](#)

3:16

look!: See [study note on Mt 1:20.](#)

the heavens: Can refer to the physical heavens, the sky, or the spiritual heavens.

the heavens were opened up: God evidently caused Jesus to perceive and understand heavenly matters, which may well have included the memory of his prehuman life in heaven.

3:17

Look!: See [study note on Mt 1:20.](#)

a voice from the heavens: The first of three instances in the Gospel accounts where Jehovah is reported as speaking audibly to humans.—See [study notes on Mt 17:5; Joh 12:28.](#)

my Son: Refers to Jesus as God’s spiritual Son, now begotten by means of holy spirit.

have approved: The Greek verb means “to be well-pleased with; to regard favorably; to take delight in.”

- Song 14 and Prayer
- Opening Comments (3 min. or less)

TREASURES FROM GOD’S WORD

- **“The Kingdom of the Heavens Has Drawn Near”:** (10 min.)
[Play the video *Introduction to Matthew.*]
Mt 3:1, 2—John the Baptist proclaimed that the future Ruler of the heavenly Kingdom would soon appear (*nwtsty* study notes)
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What has this week’s Bible reading taught you about Jehovah?

What other spiritual gems have you discovered in this week’s Bible reading?

- **Bible Reading:** (4 min. or less) Mt 1:1-17

APPLY YOURSELF TO THE FIELD MINISTRY

- **Initial Call Video:** (4 min.) Play and discuss the video.
- **First Return Visit:** (3 min. or less) See p. 1.
- **Bible Study:** (6 min. or less) *bhs* 41-42 ¶6-7

LIVING AS CHRISTIANS

- Song 72
- **Annual Service Report:** (15 min.) Talk by an elder. After reading the letter from the branch office regarding the annual service report, interview publishers, selected in advance, who had outstanding experiences in the ministry during the past year.
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- Review Followed by Preview of Next Week (3 min.)
- Song 137 and Prayer

MATTHEW 1-3 | “The Kingdom of the Heavens Has Drawn Near”

3:4


- John’s dress and appearance made it immediately apparent that he lived a simple life, completely devoted to doing God’s will
- John’s unique privilege of being the forerunner of Jesus far exceeded any sacrifices he had made

A simple life helps us to do more in God’s service and results in great satisfaction. We can simplify our life by . . .

- identifying actual needs
- eliminating unnecessary expenses
- preparing a realistic budget
- disposing of things not being used
- paying off debts
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John’s diet consisted of locusts and wild honey

 A simple life will allow me to pursue my goal of _____



Our Christian Life and Ministry

MEETING WORKBOOK

Sample Conversations

Witnessing near Monrovia, Liberia

●○○ INITIAL CALL

Question: Is the Bible still relevant today?

Scripture: 2Ti 3:16

Link: What is the Bible's message?



○●○ FIRST RETURN VISIT

Question: What is the Bible's message?

Scripture: Mt 6:10

Link: What will God's Kingdom do?



○○● SECOND RETURN VISIT

Question: What will God's Kingdom do?

Scripture: Da 2:44

Link: How will this affect the earth?

Starting this month, the midweek meeting will no longer feature three different sample presentations. Instead, the *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook* will have sample conversations consisting of an opening question, a scripture, and a linking question to pave the way for a return visit. Only one sample conversation video will be played per week. Each publisher can decide which publication from our Teaching Toolbox to use and when to introduce it—whether on an initial call or a return visit. In addition, the workbook will contain ideas for two follow-up conversations. This approach will help us focus on our goal of teaching “all those who [are] rightly disposed for everlasting life.”—Ac 13:48.

Student Assignments: Unless the instructions indicate otherwise, students should demonstrate the sample conversations.

WE HAVE FOUND THE MESSIAH!

⁴ Many years before Jesus was born, Jehovah promised in the Bible that he would send the Messiah, or Christ. The word “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew language, and the word “Christ” comes from the Greek. Both of these titles mean that God would choose the promised Messiah and give him a special position. The Messiah will make all of God’s promises come true. Jesus can also help you right now. But before Jesus was born, many people wondered, ‘Who will be the Messiah?’

⁵ Jesus’ disciples had no doubt that he was the promised Messiah. (John 1:41) For example, Simon Peter said to Jesus: “You are the Christ.” (Matthew 16:16) How can we be sure that Jesus is the Messiah?

⁶ Long before Jesus was born, God’s prophets wrote down many details that would help people find the Messiah. How would this help? Suppose you were asked to go to a busy bus station to pick up a person you had never met. If someone gave you a good description of that person, you would be able to find him. In the same way, Jehovah used his prophets to tell us about what the Messiah would do and what would happen to him. The fulfillment of all those prophecies helps sincere people to know that Jesus is the Messiah.

4. What do the words “Messiah” and “Christ” mean?

5. Did Jesus’ disciples believe that he was the Messiah?

6. How did Jehovah help sincere people to identify the Messiah?



⁷ Here are two of those prophecies. First, 700 years before Jesus was born, Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in the small town of Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) And that's where Jesus was born! (Matthew 2:1, 3-9) Second, Daniel prophesied that the Messiah would appear in the year 29 C.E. (Daniel 9:25) These are just two of the many prophecies that clearly prove that Jesus is the promised Messiah.—See Endnote 13.

⁸ Jehovah has made it very clear that Jesus is the Messiah. God promised to give John the Baptizer a sign so that he would know who the Messiah was. When Jesus went to John to get baptized in the Jordan River in the year 29 C.E., John saw that sign. The Bible tells us what happened: “After being baptized, Jesus immediately came up from the water; and look! the heavens were opened up, and he saw God’s spirit descending like a dove and coming upon him. Look! Also, a voice from the heavens said: ‘This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.’” (Matthew 3:16, 17) When John saw and heard this sign, he knew that Jesus was the Messiah. (John 1:32-34) On that day, when Jehovah poured out his spirit

7. What are two prophecies that prove that Jesus is the Messiah?

8, 9. What happened at Jesus’ baptism that proves he is the Messiah?

72 *Making Known the Kingdom Truth* (Acts 20:20, 21)

1. There was a time we did not know
 The way a Christian ought to go.
 Then Jehovah sent the light,
 His Kingdom truth so clear and bright.
Our Father's will we then could see
 To serve the grand Theocracy,
 To declare Jehovah's fame,
 And help to glorify his holy name.
We witness now to all we meet,
 From door to door and on the street.
We take the time to help them see;
 We teach the truth that sets us free.
And as we strive in ev'ry land
 Jehovah's worship to expand,
May we serve our God as one
 Until Jehovah says the work is done.

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2

JESUS IS HONORED BEFORE HIS BIRTH

LUKE 1:34-56

- MARY VISITS HER RELATIVE ELIZABETH

After the angel Gabriel tells the young woman Mary that she will bear a son who will be named Jesus and who will rule as King forever, Mary asks: “How is this to be, since I am not having sexual relations with a man?”—Luke 1:34.

“Holy spirit will come upon you,” Gabriel answers, “and power of the Most High will overshadow you. And for that reason the one who is born will be called holy, God’s Son.”—Luke 1:35.

Perhaps to help Mary accept his message, Gabriel adds: “Look! Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son, in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her, the so-called barren woman; for no declaration will be impossible for God.”—Luke 1:36, 37.

Mary accepts what Gabriel has said, as we see

from her response. “Look! Jehovah’s slave girl!” she exclaims. “May it happen to me according to your declaration.”—Luke 1:38.

Once Gabriel leaves, Mary prepares to visit Elizabeth, who lives with her husband, Zechariah, near Jerusalem in the Judean hillside. From Mary’s home up in Nazareth, this is a trip that might take three or four days.

Mary finally arrives at Zechariah’s house. As she enters, she greets her relative Elizabeth. At that, Elizabeth is filled with holy spirit, and she says to Mary: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruitage of your womb! So how is it that this privilege is mine, to have the mother of my Lord come to me? For look! as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.”—Luke 1:42-44.

Mary then responds with heartfelt gratitude: “My soul magnifies Jehovah, and my spirit cannot keep from being overjoyed at God my Savior, because he has looked upon the low position of his slave girl. For look! from now on all generations will declare

me happy, because the powerful One has done great deeds for me.” We can note that despite the favor she is shown, Mary directs all honor to God. “Holy is his name,” she says, “and for generation after generation his mercy is upon those who fear him.” —Luke 1:46-50.

In inspired prophetic words, Mary continues to praise God, saying: “He has acted mightily with his arm; he has scattered those who are haughty in the intention of their hearts. He has brought down powerful men from thrones and has exalted lowly ones; he has fully satisfied hungry ones with good things and has sent away empty-handed those who had wealth. He has come to the aid of Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, just as he spoke to our forefathers, to Abraham and to his offspring, forever.”—Luke 1:51-55.

For about three months, Mary stays with Elizabeth, likely being of assistance during these final weeks of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. How fine it is that these two faithful women, both carrying a child with God’s help, can be together during this time in their lives!

And take note of the honor that Jesus was paid even before he was born. Elizabeth called him “my Lord,” and the child in her womb “leaped for joy” when Mary first appeared. That is so different from how others later treat Mary and her yet-to-be-born child, as we shall see.

- ◇ What does Gabriel say that helps Mary to understand how she will become pregnant?
- ◇ How is Jesus honored before he is born?
- ◇ For how long does Mary stay with Elizabeth, and why does she do so?



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- ◇ For how long does Mary stay with Elizabeth, and why does she do so?

137 Faithful Women, Christian Sisters

(Romans 16:2)

1. Sarah and Esther, Mary, Ruth, and others—
All these were capable women, loyal wives.
Godly devotion was foremost in their lives.
They were faithful women, ones we know by name.
There were others favored by Jehovah;
Nameless in the record, their faith was just the same.
2. Goodness and courage, loyal love and kindness—
Lovable qualities in all humankind,
Virtues these excellent women bring to mind.
They were fine examples we appreciate.
In the same way now our Christian sisters
Show a faithful spirit we all can imitate.
3. Mothers and daughters, sisters, wives, and widows,
Willingly laboring, glad to do your part.
Modest your bearing, submissive is your heart,
Having God's approval, may you never fear.
Christian sisters, may Jehovah keep you
Firm in your conviction, your prize is drawing near.

NOVEMBER 2017

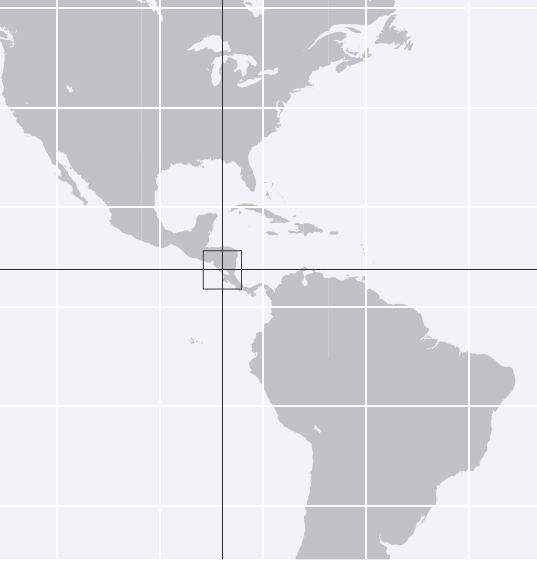
THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
DECEMBER 25, 2017–
JANUARY 28, 2018

LARGE
PRINT
EDITION



COVER IMAGE:

NICARAGUA

Two Christian sisters share the Bible's message with a merchant in the town of Tipitapa

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Make a Joyful Sound!

For Jehovah's people, singing has always been an integral part of worship. However, some may feel uncomfortable singing in public. How can we overcome the fear of using our voice to sing praises to Jehovah? This article gives us good reasons to sing out joyfully and offers some suggestions for improving our singing voice.

16 WEEK OF JANUARY 1-7

Are You Taking Refuge in Jehovah?

28 WEEK OF JANUARY 8-14

Imitate Jehovah's Justice and Mercy

We can learn valuable lessons from the arrangement of the cities of refuge in ancient Israel. In the first article, look for ways that sinners can take refuge in Jehovah today. In the second article, see how Jehovah's example helps us to forgive others, respect life, and act justly.

8

Jehovah Is Our Refuge

(Psalm 91)

1. Jehovah is our refuge,
Our God in whom we trust.
His shadow is our shelter;
Remain in it we must.
His faithful ones he will defend,
On this we know we can depend.
Jehovah is a stronghold,
Ever faithful, loyal, and just.
2. Though thousands will have fallen
And many at our side,
The righteous and the meek ones
Will never be denied.
So in our hearts we need not fear;
Calamity will not come near.
From danger he will shield us,
For beneath God's wings we'll reside.
3. He'll keep us and protect us
From snares along our way,
From terrors in the nighttime,
And arrows by the day.
Yes, there will be no cause for dread,
No place where we will fear to tread.
Jehovah is our refuge,
Ever guarding us on our way.

(See also Ps. 97:10; 121:3, 5; Isa. 52:12.)



SONGS:
8, 54

**WHAT DOES
THE ARRANGEMENT
OF CITIES OF
REFUGE TEACH YOU
ABOUT . . .**

the role of the
elders in helping
a person recover
from a serious sin?

the need to take
decisive action
to benefit from
God's mercy?

the completeness
of Jehovah's
forgiveness?

Are You Taking Refuge in Jehovah?

“Jehovah is redeeming the life of his servants; none of those taking refuge in him will be found guilty.”—PS. 34:22.

“MISERABLE man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24) Many of God's faithful servants have echoed those words of the apostle Paul. We all suffer from inherited sin, and when our actions do not reflect our keen desire to please Jehovah, we may feel miserable. Some

1. Because of sin, what feelings are common among God's faithful servants?

Christians who have committed a serious sin have even felt that they are beyond God's forgiveness.

² Nevertheless, the Scriptures assure us that those who take refuge in Jehovah do not need to feel overwhelmed by guilt. (Read Psalm 34:22.) What does taking refuge in Jehovah involve? What steps must we take in order to receive Jehovah's mercy and forgiveness? We learn the answers to those questions by considering the arrangement of cities of refuge in ancient Israel. True, that arrangement was instituted under the Law covenant, which was replaced at Pentecost 33 C.E. Remember, though, that the Law came from Jehovah. So from the arrangement of the cities of refuge, we learn Jehovah's view of sin, sinners, and repentance. First, let us get an overview of the purpose and function of these cities.

“SELECT FOR YOURSELVES THE CITIES OF REFUGE”

³ Jehovah took seriously all cases of bloodshed in ancient Israel. Willful murderers were put to death

2. (a) How does Psalm 34:22 indicate that God's servants need not be overwhelmed by guilt? (b) What will this article consider? (See the box “Lessons or Antitypes?”)

3. How did the Israelites handle cases of willful murder?

by the victim's nearest male relative, known as "the avenger of blood." (Num. 35:19) This act atoned for the innocent human blood that had been spilled. Swift execution protected the Promised Land from becoming defiled, for Jehovah commanded: "You must not pollute the land in which you live, for [the shedding of human] blood pollutes the land." —Num. 35:33, 34.

⁴ How, though, did the Israelites handle cases of accidental bloodshed? Although his deed was accidental, an unintentional manslayer was still guilty of shedding innocent blood. (Gen. 9:5) Mercifully, however, he was allowed to flee from the avenger of blood to one of the six cities of refuge. There, he could find protection. The unintentional manslayer had to remain in the city of refuge until the high priest's death.—Num. 35:15, 28.

⁵ Designating these cities as cities of refuge was not a human idea. Jehovah himself commanded Joshua: "Tell the Israelites, 'Select for yourselves the cities of refuge.'" The cities were given "a sacred status." (Josh. 20:1, 2, 7, 8) Since Jehovah was directly involved in setting these cities apart for

4. How were cases of accidental bloodshed handled in Israel?

5. How can the arrangement of the cities of refuge help us to understand Jehovah better?

special use, we might ask: How does this arrangement help us to have a clearer view of Jehovah's mercy? And what does it teach us about how we can take refuge in him today?

“HE MUST . . . PRESENT HIS CASE IN THE HEARING OF THE ELDERS”

⁶ After he accidentally killed someone, a fugitive first had to “present his case in the hearing of the elders” at the gate of the city of refuge to which he had fled. He was to be received hospitably. (Josh. 20:4) Some time later, he was sent back to the elders of the city where the killing had occurred, and those elders judged the case. (Read Numbers 35:24, 25.) Only after they had declared the killing accidental would the fugitive be returned to the city of refuge.

⁷ Why were the elders involved? They were to keep the congregation of Israel clean and to help the unintentional manslayer to benefit from Jehovah's mercy. One Bible scholar wrote that if the fugitive neglected to approach the elders, “it was at his peril.” He added: “His blood was on his own

6, 7. (a) Describe the role of the elders in judging an unintentional manslayer. (See opening picture.) (b) Why was it wise for a fugitive to approach the elders?

head, because he did not make use of the security God had provided for him.” Help was available to the unintentional manslayer, but he had to seek out and accept that help. If he did not seek refuge in one of the cities Jehovah had set aside, the closest rela-

Lessons or Antitypes?

Beginning in the late 19th century, *The Watch Tower* drew attention to the prophetic significance of the cities of refuge. “This feature of the typical Mosaic law strongly foreshadowed the refuge which the sinner may find in Christ,” stated the September 1, 1895, issue. “Seeking refuge in him by faith, there is protection.” A century later, *The Watchtower* identified the antitypical city of refuge as “God’s provision for protecting us from death for violating his commandment about the sanctity of blood.”

However, the March 15, 2015, issue of *The Watch-*

tower explained why our recent publications seldom mention prophetic types and antitypes: “Where the Scriptures teach that an individual, an event, or an object is typical of something else, we accept it as such. Otherwise, we ought to be reluctant to assign an antitypical application to a certain person or account if there is no specific Scriptural basis for doing so.” Because the Scriptures are silent regarding any antitypical significance of the cities of refuge, this article and the next one emphasize instead the *lessons* Christians can learn from this arrangement.

tive of the person he had killed was free to put him to death.

⁸ Today, a Christian guilty of serious sin needs to seek the help of congregation elders to recover. Why is this so important? First, the arrangement for elders to handle cases of serious sin comes from Jehovah, as outlined in his Word. (Jas. 5:14-16) Second, this arrangement fortifies repentant wrongdoers to remain in God's care and to avoid a pattern of sin. (Gal. 6:1; Heb. 12:11) Third, elders are commissioned and trained to reassure repentant sinners, helping to ease their pain and guilt. Jehovah calls these older men "a refuge from the rainstorm." (Isa. 32:1, 2, ftn.) Would you not agree that this arrangement is an expression of God's mercy?

⁹ Many of God's servants have discovered the relief that comes from seeking and receiving help from the elders. A brother named Daniel, for example, committed a serious sin, but for several months he hesitated to approach the elders. "After so much time had gone by," he admits, "I thought that there wasn't anything the elders could do for me anymore. Still, I was always looking over my shoulder, waiting for the consequences of my actions. And

8, 9. Why should a Christian guilty of serious sin approach the elders for help?

when I prayed to Jehovah, I felt that I had to preface everything with an apology for what I had done.” Finally, Daniel sought the help of the elders. Looking back, he says: “Sure, I was scared to approach them. But afterward, it seemed as if someone had lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. Now, I feel that I can approach Jehovah without anything being in the way.” Today, Daniel has a clean conscience, and he was recently appointed as a ministerial servant.

“HE MUST FLEE TO ONE OF THESE CITIES”

¹⁰ An unintentional manslayer had to take action to receive mercy. He had to *flee* to the nearest city of refuge. (Read Joshua 20:4.) We cannot imagine the fugitive being indifferent; his life depended on his reaching that city as soon as possible and remaining there! This meant sacrifice on his part. He had to leave behind his previous employment, the comforts of home, and the freedom to travel—until the death of the high priest.* (Num. 35:25) But such inconveniences were worth the effort. If he were to

* According to Jewish reference works, the unintentional manslayer’s immediate family evidently joined him in the city of refuge.

10. To receive mercy, what decisive action did an unintentional manslayer have to take?

leave the city, the fugitive would show a callous indifference toward the lifeblood he had shed, and his own life would be in danger.

¹¹ To benefit from God's mercy, repentant wrongdoers today must likewise take action. We must completely abandon the sinful course, fleeing not only from serious sin but also from the lesser sins that often lead to gross wrongdoing. Under inspiration, the apostle Paul described the actions of repentant Christians in Corinth. He wrote: "What a great earnestness your being saddened in a godly way produced in you, yes, clearing of yourselves, yes, indignation, yes, fear, yes, earnest desire, yes, zeal, yes, righting of the wrong!" (2 Cor. 7:10, 11) Earnest actions to abandon a sinful course show Jehovah that we are not complacent, that we have not presumed on his mercy.

¹² What might a Christian need to give up in order to continue to receive divine mercy? He must be prepared to give up even what is dear to him if it would put him in danger of falling into sin. (Matt. 18:8, 9) If certain friends influence you to do things

11. What actions of a repentant Christian show that he has not taken God's mercy for granted?

12. A Christian may need to give up what in order to continue to receive divine mercy?

that displease Jehovah, will you cut off association with them? If you struggle to be moderate in your use of alcoholic beverages, are you willing to steer clear of situations that might tempt you to over-drink? If you battle sexually immoral desires, are you avoiding any movies, websites, or activities that may trigger unclean thoughts? Remember, any sacrifice we make to keep our integrity to Jehovah is worth it. Nothing stings more than feeling abandoned by him. At the same time, nothing is more satisfying than feeling his “everlasting loyal love.” —Isa. 54:7, 8.

“THEY WILL SERVE AS A REFUGE FOR YOU”

¹³ Once inside a city of refuge, the fugitive was safe. Regarding those cities, Jehovah said: “They will serve as a refuge for you.” (Josh. 20:2, 3) Jehovah did not require the manslayer to be judged again for the same case; nor was the avenger of blood permitted to enter the city and take the fugitive’s life. The fugitive thus never had to fear reprisal. While in the city, he was safe and secure under Jehovah’s protection. This was not a *prison* of refuge. The city offered him an opportunity to work,

13. Explain why a fugitive could feel safe, secure, and happy within the city of refuge.

Be confident in
Jehovah's forgiveness
(See paragraphs 14-16)



to help others, and to serve Jehovah in peace. Yes, a happy and fulfilling life was possible!

¹⁴ Some of God's people who sinned grievously but who repented have felt "imprisoned" by their guilt, even feeling that Jehovah will forever view them as tainted by gross wrongdoing. If you feel that way, please be assured that when Jehovah forgives you, you can feel secure in his mercy! Daniel, quoted earlier, found this to be true. After the elders had corrected him and helped him to regain a

14. What confidence can a repentant Christian have?

clear conscience, he said: “I felt that I could breathe again. After the matter was handled properly, I didn’t have to feel guilty anymore. Once the sin is gone, it’s gone. As Jehovah said, he takes your burdens away and puts them far away from you. You will never have to see them again.” Once inside the city of refuge, a fugitive no longer needed to look over his shoulder for the avenger of blood. Similarly, once Jehovah has forgiven our sin, we do not need to fear that he is looking for a reason to bring up that sin again or to judge us for it.—Read Psalm 103:8-12.

¹⁵ In fact, we have even greater reason than the Israelites had for confidence in Jehovah’s mercy. After Paul expressed his misery for failing to obey Jehovah perfectly, he exclaimed: “Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25) Yes, despite his struggle with sin and his past wrongdoing—for which he had repented—Paul was confident in God’s forgiveness through Jesus. As our Ransomer, Jesus cleanses our consciences and gives us inner peace. (Heb. 9:13, 14) As our High Priest, “he is able also to save completely those who are approaching God through him, because he is always

15, 16. How can Jesus’ role as Ransomer and High Priest strengthen your confidence in God’s mercy?

alive to plead for them.” (Heb. 7:24, 25) If the role of the high priest reassured the Israelites that their sins would be forgiven, how much more so should the services of our High Priest, Jesus, reassure us that “we may receive mercy and find undeserved kindness to help us at the right time.”—Heb. 4:15, 16.

¹⁶ To take refuge in Jehovah, then, exercise faith in Jesus’ sacrifice. Do not simply acknowledge the ransom’s value in helping vast numbers of people. Rather, have faith that the ransom applies to *you*. (Gal. 2:20, 21) Have faith that the ransom is the basis for forgiving *your* sins. Have faith that the ransom offers *you* the hope of eternal life. Jesus’ sacrifice is Jehovah’s gift to *you*.

¹⁷ The cities of refuge are a reflection of Jehovah’s mercy. Through this arrangement, God not only emphasized the sacredness of life but also illustrated how the elders assist us, what true repentance involves, and why we can be completely confident of Jehovah’s forgiveness. Are you taking refuge in Jehovah? There is no safer place to be! (Ps. 91:1, 2) In the next article, we will see how the cities of refuge can help us to imitate Jehovah’s superlative example of justice and mercy.

17. Why do you want to take refuge in Jehovah?

“This Is the Way”

(Isaiah 30:20, 21)

1. There is a way of peace,
The way you've come to know.
It is the way you learned,
The way of long ago,
The way that Jesus taught you
When his voice you heard.
This is the way of peace,
Found in Jehovah's Word.

(CHORUS)

*This is the way to life; This is the way.
Don't look aside; Not for a moment stray!
God's voice is calling: 'This is the way;
Do not look back, for yes, this is the way.'*

2. There is a way of love,
No need to look around.
God's voice has shown the way
He lets himself be found.
His love is full and good;
His love is warm and true.
This is the way of love;
It touches all we do.

(Chorus)

3. There is a way of life,
 No need to look behind.
Our God has promised us:
 No better way we'll find,
No higher way to peace,
 No finer way to love.
This is the way to life,
 Thanks to our God above.

(Chorus)



A First-Century House

In first-century Israel, construction techniques varied according to the economic circumstances of the builder and the availability of materials. Many small houses were built of sun-dried mud bricks or of rough-hewn stones. Often the interior walls were plastered. The floors were typically of beaten earth, though some were paved. An earthen roof rested on branches, reeds, and rafters, which overlaid wooden beams that were supported by posts. The packed clay was then plastered, making a reasonably waterproof ceiling. Occupants could access the roof by means of stairs or, in poorer homes, an outside ladder. Poor people had very little furniture.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 1:20; Matthew 1:24