



The WATCHTOWER

Announcing
**JEHOVAH'S
KINGDOM**

MARCH 15, 1969

Semimonthly

**WHAT INFLUENCES DECISIONS
IN YOUR LIFE?**

LIVING UP TO YOUR DECISIONS

**WHY IT IS WISE TO EXAMINE
YOUR RELIGION**

**ASTRONOMICAL CALCULATIONS
AND THE COUNT OF TIME**

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"YOU ARE MY WITNESSES," SAYS JEHOVAH.—Isa. 43:12

THE PURPOSE OF "THE WATCHTOWER"

Every watchtower has its purpose. It serves as an elevated place for a wide-awake person with sharp vision. It enables him to see far ahead into the distance and tell those below for whom he is a watchman what is drawing near, whether it is a danger against which to prepare or it is something good over which to be glad with strong faith and hope.

Because of having the name "The Watchtower" this magazine justly has to render a similar useful service to the people of all nations. This is an international magazine and makes no racial distinctions, for we are all facing a common world danger; we are all hoping for a common good.

Ever since "The Watchtower" began to be published in July of 1879 it has looked ahead into the future, always striving to aid its readers to advance in knowledge and to gain a clearer picture of the glorious new order of things that is in store for righteous mankind. No, "The Watchtower" is no inspired prophet, but it follows and explains a Book of prophecy the predictions in which have proved to be unerring and unfailing till now. "The Watchtower" is therefore under safe guidance. It may be read with confidence, for its statements may be checked against that prophetic Book.

Among the many nations of today there are hundreds of differing religions. Which one does this magazine present? Not the confused religions of Christendom, but the religion of the oldest sacred Book on earth. Which Book? The Sacred Bible of the Holy Scriptures, written by inspiration in the name of the Creator of heaven and earth, the only living and true God.

The sacred, nonpolitical purpose of "The Watchtower" is accordingly to encourage and promote study of the Holy Bible and to give our many readers the needed unsectarian help to understand that Book of true religion and infallible prophecy. Thus this magazine will be helping them to prove worthy of perfect life and happiness in God's promised new order under His everlasting kingdom of righteousness.



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"They will all be taught by Jehovah."—John 6:45; Isaiah 54:13

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Announcing
**JEHOVAH'S
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WELCOME

To The Lord's Evening Meal

DO YOU believe in the existence of the Creator, the God who made heaven and earth? Do you have respect for his Word, the Holy Bible? Do you appreciate that God 'loved the world so much that he sent his only-begotten Son to earth to lay down his life, so that whoever believes on him might not be destroyed but gain everlasting life'? (John 3:16) If so, then you are most welcome to meet with Jehovah's witnesses at one of their Kingdom Halls on Tuesday evening, April 1, 1969, to commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why do Jehovah's witnesses commemorate the death of the Lord? How do they commemorate it? Why on this date?

Because Jesus' death made possible the salvation of humankind it is most fitting that it be commemorated. Furthermore, *by Jesus' faithfulness to death* he vindicated his Father's name, clearing it from the reproach heaped upon it by Satan the Devil, who taunted that he could turn all men away from God. And it is also most fitting that we commemorate his death in view of what it cost Jesus to accomplish these things. He left heavenly glory and

"took a slave's form and came to be in the likeness of men." He then "humbled himself and became obedient as far as . . . death on a torture stake."—Phil. 2:7, 8; Job chapters 1 and 2; Prov. 27:11.

Surely such a noble, unselfish course, resulting in such great benefit to humankind and honor to his heavenly Father, deserves to be commemorated. More than that, Jesus Christ gave explicit instructions that his followers should memorialize his death, telling them, "Keep doing this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) This being the only festival or celebration that Christians are commanded to observe, surely none of Christ's followers would want to slight it!

How should the death of our Lord be commemorated? More than one Bible writer gives us the details. On this occasion there will be fine instruction and admonition as to the meaning of Christ's death and the example he set for his followers. There will also be fervent prayers to Jehovah God and the singing of appropriate songs of praise. And there will be on hand unleavened bread and pure red wine. Why unleavened bread? Because unleavened

bread was used when Jesus instituted the memorial of his death. Most fittingly it pictures Jesus' sinless body, just as the pure red wine is a fitting symbol of his blood.—1 Cor. 5:7, 8; 11:23-25; John chapters 13 to 17; Matt. 26:26-30.

Among other things, the speaker of the evening will make clear who are to partake of the emblematic bread and wine. These are the ones who not only are Christians, dedicated to the doing of God's will, but have been begotten by God's holy spirit to a heavenly hope and so have the witness of the spirit that they are the sons of God. All such are in the covenant for a kingdom that Jesus made with his followers, even as he indicated on the night he instituted his evening meal. (Luke 22:28-30; Rom. 8:14-17) Furthermore, these, to partake worthily, must be living up to their dedication vow, both as regards faithfully fulfilling their preaching commission and as regards their own personal conduct.—1 Cor. 11:27-34; 2 Cor. 5:20, 21.

Last year 2,493,519 attended this celebration of the Lord's supper in association with Jehovah's witnesses, but only 10,619 partook of the emblems. Why did all these attend even though they did not partake? Why should you attend? For more than one good reason. You should attend so as to comply with the Bible's command not to forsake assembling together with the people of God. (Heb. 10:23-25) Moreover, on this occasion there will be a rehearsal of what Jehovah has done for mankind and in particular of what Jesus Christ accomplished by his coming to earth. Highlighted also will be the fine instructions he gave and the fine example he set for his followers. So by your attending you will benefit greatly in a spiritual way.

But you may ask, Why should this celebration of our Lord's death take place on April 1 this year, and that all over the

earth on the same date? Because that is Nisan 14, according to the Jewish calendar, on which date Jesus instituted the celebration of his death. That date calls to mind the night 1,545 years earlier when the nation of Israel was set free from Egyptian bondage at the time of the death of all of Egypt's firstborn. That deliverance certainly deserved being memorialized, and so Jehovah God commanded that it should be. How fitting that Jesus' death, which makes deliverance from bondage to sin and death possible for all humankind, should take place and be memorialized on this same night!—Ex. 13:1-16.

The Christian witnesses of Jehovah are especially interested and concerned that all those with whom they are studying the Bible associate with them on this evening in their Kingdom Halls. If you are one of these persons you are to be commended for being conscious of your spiritual need and making progress in understanding God's Word and purposes. Attending on this occasion will increase your appreciation of what Jehovah God and Jesus Christ have done for you, and you will also find it a happy occasion. In fact, all who have ever studied the Bible with one of the Witnesses or who enjoy reading their Bible literature are urged to attend. Fulfillment of Bible prophecy indicates we are living in the "last days" and that opportunities to demonstrate where we stand in the matter of pure worship are running out.—2 Tim. 3:1-5; Rev. 18:4.

So, welcome to the celebration of the Lord's evening meal at one of the Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's witnesses on Tuesday evening, April 1, 1969. Come and increase your appreciation of what Jehovah God and Jesus Christ have done. Learn also about what they are now doing and will yet do for humankind. Yes, come and learn how you can gain God's approval and everlasting life.—John 17:3.

WHY IT IS WISE TO EXAMINE YOUR RELIGION

WE HAVE good reason to think seriously about our standing with God. Why? Because the evidence proves that God will soon destroy the wicked and establish his righteous new system. So we need to ask: "Am I worshiping God in the way that he approves?"

It is not any man, but God, who is the judge of what pleases him. And to get God's viewpoint, we need to go to the Bible. There he plainly tells us the course to follow if we want to gain eternal life. (Prov. 3:1, 2) If we take to heart what he says and apply it in our lives, it will result in marvelous blessings for us, both now and in the ages to come.

DOES GOD APPROVE OF ALL RELIGION?

When we examine what the Bible says on this matter, what do we find? Does it teach that the hundreds of millions of persons who practice religion in so many different ways are all pleasing to God? Does it show that all religion is good?

To enable us to know how he views the matter, God had this plain statement recorded in his Word: "Broad and spacious is the road leading off into destruction, and many are the ones going in through it; whereas narrow is the gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are the ones finding it." (Matt. 7:13, 14) How clearly those words answer our questions! They show that many people are not worshiping God in a way that pleases him. Only a few are on the road leading to life.



PRACTICES DISAPPROVED BY GOD

Probably you find yourself readily agreeing with the fact that much religion is not approved by God. No doubt there are many things done in the name of religion that you do not approve. For example, if you look around in the churches and observe persons who live immoral lives but who make a pretense at being righteous, you know that something is wrong. (2 Tim. 3:4, 5) And when you read in the newspaper that some clergymen are publicly approving of sex relations between unmarried persons and that they are saying that homosexuality is all right under certain conditions, you are well aware that this is not what God says.

You may remember that God destroyed the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. And why? Because they practiced such things! The Bible says: "So too Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them, after they in the same manner as the foregoing ones had committed fornication ex-

cessively and gone out after flesh for unnatural use, are placed before us as a warning example by undergoing the judicial punishment of everlasting fire." (Jude 7) So you know that God is not going to approve of a religion that tells people it is all right to act like that.

IMPORTANCE OF RIGHT DOCTRINE

However, you have no doubt heard people say: "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you lead a clean moral life and deal kindly with your neighbors." But is that all there is to worshiping God in an acceptable way? These things are necessary, but God requires more. Doctrines are also involved. The Bible informs us that "the true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth."—John 4:23.

If our worship is to be acceptable to God, it must be firmly rooted in God's Word of truth. Jesus reproved those persons who claimed to serve God but who relied heavily on the traditions of men in preference to God's Word. He applied to them God's own words from Isaiah 29:13, saying: "It is in vain that they keep worshiping me, because they teach commands of men as doctrines." (Matt. 15:9) Since we do not want our worship to be in vain, it is important for each one of us to examine his religion.

We need to examine, not only what we personally believe, but also what is taught by any religious organization with which we may be associated. Are its teachings in full harmony with God's Word, or are they based on the traditions of men? If we are lovers of the truth, there is nothing to fear from such an examination. It should be the sincere desire of every one of us to learn what God's will is for us, and then to do it.—John 8:32.

The mere fact that church members may have the Bible or that it is occasion-

ally read to them from the pulpit does not of itself prove that all the things they are taught are in the Bible. It is good to have the Bible; each and every person should. But we must also know what it says and believe it. If a religion really accepts the Bible as God's Word, it is not going to use certain parts of it and reject other parts. "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight." (2 Tim. 3:16) Since this is so, the religion that is approved by God must agree in all its details with the Bible.

SINCERITY ALONE NOT ENOUGH

The man who wants to please God must be sincere. But sincerity alone does not make one's religion approved in God's eyes. The apostle Paul was moved by God's spirit to write concerning certain ones in his day: "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God; but not according to accurate knowledge; for, because of not knowing the righteousness of God but seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God."—Rom. 10:2, 3.

As a result, their sincerity was misdirected. Their problem was that they were looking in the wrong direction for instruction. They held onto the Jewish religious system, which had rejected God's Son and so was itself rejected by God.—Acts 2:36, 40; Prov. 14:12.

What, then, of the religions that take the name of Christ and profess to accept him as their Lord? Does their preaching in his name guarantee that they meet with God's approval? In view of the scriptures already considered, perhaps you have concluded that it does not. If so, then on this matter you agree with Jesus Christ, the one whom God has appointed as heavenly judge; because he warns us, saying: "Not everyone saying to me, 'Lord, Lord,'

will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name . . . ?' And yet then I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness."—Matt. 7:21-23.

DOING GOD'S WILL NECESSARY

Knowledge of the Bible and of God's will is essential for God's approval. But, as Jesus said, it is the *doing* of that will that counts. One must have works that are consistent with what one has learned. "Faith without works is dead," the Bible says. (Jas. 2:26) To please God, then, one's religion must be in full harmony with the Bible and be applied in every activity of life.—Luke 6:46-49.

Jesus said that you could recognize whether a man practices the true religion by his "fruits," that is, the things he does. (Matt. 7:20) In the same way, we can recognize a religion by the kind of people it produces. True religion ought to produce better persons—better husbands and fathers, better wives and mothers. It should produce persons who are honest, who stand out among others because they do what is right. Is that not what you would expect of a religion that truly draws one close to God? God looks for these *things* too, and they determine whether a religion is approved of God or not.

Certainly you do not want to be classed with those who are refused entry into the kingdom of God because of failure to do God's will. It will be to your benefit, then, to get well acquainted with the Bible. Follow the course of those ancient Bereans whom God's Word approves because they

"received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures daily as to whether these things were so."—Acts 17:11.

TESTS TO ENDURE

As you examine God's Word, you will learn that your love for God will be put to the test. This test may come from close friends or relatives, perhaps members of your own household, who will not approve of your examining the Scriptures. As Jesus explained: "Indeed, a man's enemies will be persons of his own household." (Matt. 10:36, 37; 1 Pet. 4:4) These persons may oppose you in all sincerity,

because they do not know the marvelous truths found in the Bible. So, rather than forsaking the worship that you have learned is correct, perhaps you can help these misguided opposers to understand the wonderful Bible truths.

On occasion the opposition may come from persons who have no love for God. If this should occur, remember, having God's approval is far more important than having the approval of men. It is God, not man, who will give you eternal life if you love Him above everyone and everything else.—Matt. 22:37-39.

Always look to God for his help and guidance. Keep on praying, as did the psalmist: "O Jehovah, hear my prayer . . . Teach me to do your will, for you are my God." (Ps. 143:1, 10) If you sincerely want to know and practice the religion that he approves, he will answer your prayer. And he will bring you into association with those who really do "worship the Father with spirit and truth."—John 4:23; Matt. 7:7, 8.

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

- Make Your Advancement Manifest by Responding to God's Word.
- Why Is Your Ministry Successful?
- Conquering the Fears of Our Day.
- "Classical" Historians—How Dependable?

WHAT shall I do? Each one of us, time after time, has found himself faced with this question when making a decision. Decisions have been an essential part of man's life from the time of creation. How different things would be today if Adam had made the right decision—the decision to continue worshiping Jehovah God instead of being influenced to eat of the tree's fruit in disobedience to Jehovah's command. None of us have a decision to make that affects the entire human family, as was true of Adam and Christ Jesus; but individually we do have decisions to make that affect our everyday living, the lives of our loved ones and associates, and our eternal welfare.—Gen. 2: 16, 17; Rom. 14:13.

² While making decisions is an inevitable part of life, some are so small that we hardly recognize them as decisions, such as what we will have for breakfast, or what clothing we will wear that day. Other decisions are a joy to make. For example, our decision to attend a Christian assembly; or our decision to take a vacation, and selecting the places we will visit and the things we will see.

³ From time to time we are faced with more difficult decisions, weighty ones that have considerable bearing on our lives. Sometimes a decision determines our circumstances for the rest of our life. These

1. What part do decisions play in our lives?
2. With what variety of decisions are we faced?
3. What are some weighty decisions that a Christian may face, and why must they be made with care?

What INFLUENCES

Decisions in Your Life



**"Listen to counsel
and accept discipline,
in order that
you may become wise
in your future."**

—Prov. 19:20.

decisions require much thought and consideration. At times the matter weighs on our minds to the point that we cannot sleep, or we wake up during the night pondering the decision. Some of these decisions might be: What type of employment shall I pursue to provide the necessities of life? Should I marry or remain single? Should I continue as a good publisher of the Kingdom message, or do my circumstances permit me to pioneer? Shall I forgive my adulterous mate and continue the marriage, or get a divorce? What shall I do?

⁴ In making decisions, whether they involve an emergency or not, whether they are large or small, it is vital that we follow the Christian's standard, the Bible. Otherwise we will most certainly be influenced by our own fleshly tendencies of selfishness, fear, pride and jealousy. Or we may allow others with the same tenden-

4. Why should God's Word influence all our decisions?

cies to influence us in the decisions we make. Never should we be influenced to make decisions based on emotions, or what appears at the moment to be the easy way, the path of least resistance.

⁵ This matter of how we can be influenced is better understood if we remember Job's words to Jehovah: "Out of clay you have made me." (Job 10:9) Just like literal clay that can be molded and shaped, we can be impressed and influenced by close contact with other people. Solomon recognized this when he said, "He that is walking with wise persons will become wise, but he that is having dealings with the stupid ones will fare badly." (Prov. 13:20) How important it is then that we choose carefully our associations so that their influence on our decisions is for good.

WORLD PERMEATED BY UNWHOLESOME INFLUENCE

⁶ When we look closely at the prevailing spirit of this world we see how vital it is that we avoid its influence. How accurately the apostle Paul describes the world of mankind today when he foretells that "men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection, not open to any agreement, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness, betrayers, headstrong, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." (2 Tim. 3: 2-4) Whoever we are and wherever we live, do we not see these godless qualities in the people about us? How then can we avoid the ungodly influence of the worldly people among whom we live? Paul's an-

swer is simple and to the point. He says, "From these turn away." (2 Tim. 3:5) In other words, though they may be our neighbors, they should not be our associates. Do not let them influence your thinking, your actions, your decisions. —1 Cor. 15:33.

⁷ As Christians we should ask ourselves, "Am I complying with this good counsel that Paul gave Timothy?" Let us look into a few aspects of this Scriptural counsel. The scripture reads, "Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." Today the attitude of the majority of people is, "Let's live now! Let's eat, drink and be merry, and worry about tomorrow when tomorrow comes." The majority think in terms of pleasure and ease, being materially well fixed. They live for this world. They want what they want now, believing it is now or never. They have no hope for the future. Their thinking is so influenced by Satan, the god of this system of things, that without realizing it they are his slaves. They give their lives to getting what they want in this system while it lasts.—2 Cor. 4:4.

⁸ Have you ever driven an automobile out on a muddy road and got stuck? If you have, then you will remember that the more you spun the wheels to get out the deeper you got in. Many today are allowing themselves to be led down the bottomless road of materialism in which they get bogged down more and more deeply until they are hopelessly stuck. Soon there are so many monthly payments that they have to have two jobs to meet them, or have other members of the family working who could be spending this time in preaching the good news of God's king-

5. How are Job 10:9 and Proverbs 13:20 applicable to Christians?

6. What is the prevailing spirit of worldly people, and how can we avoid their influence?

7. What outlook toward the future do many people have, and why?

8. What does materialism lead to, and how did Jesus reason on it?

dom. When this happens, the materialistic world about us is influencing our decisions, influencing us to forget Jesus' words, "Even when a person has an abundance his life does not result from the things he possesses." (Luke 12:15) If we feel that our happiness depends on the things we possess, then it is time to remember the words recorded in Proverbs 16:20, "Happy is he that is trusting in Jehovah," not in the things he possesses.

Jesus further asked, "What benefit will it be to a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26) He could have one of all the things the world has to offer, but what benefit is it if he has no life with which to enjoy them? Yes, spending one's life in the pursuit of material things is well compared to the spinning wheels of an immobile car—it is a life of frustration devoid of true satisfaction or progress.

⁹ The influence of the unbelievers is being felt and seen in other ways. Paul said, "Critical times hard to deal with will be here." (2 Tim. 3:1) All of us have found the group influence encountered at our place of work, in school and from our neighbors to be particularly "hard to deal with." No doubt many of us have felt as did one Christian who said it took him at least an hour after getting home from work to free his mind from the unwholesome influence of the worldly people with whom he worked.

9. Name some of the sources of wrong influence. How was one Christian affected?



The pursuit of material things is a life of frustration—like the spinning wheels of a car stuck in the mud

¹⁰ The whole world is going in the way of destruction, but Christians cannot afford to turn and follow it in its mad race toward rebellion, hate and finally death.

They cannot slow down, take time out to travel side roads, or follow others who do not know where they are going. Yet, this is exactly what Christians would be doing if they participated in office parties and company conventions or outings where, because of their association,

they could be induced to let down their moral guard. At our place of employment have we been influenced by fellow workers to join in competitive sporting groups or leagues that rob us of our time for Bible study and for preaching the good news of God's kingdom? This is unnecessary worldly association that can influence us to make wrong decisions and can easily lead to acts of immorality. The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society has in its files records of just such cases.

¹¹ Young or old, none of us are exempt from the unwholesome influence of this world. Those of school age are surrounded with it, and their lot is by no means an easy one, with the gross immorality among youth today, cheating on exams, stealing, widespread use of dope and rebelliousness against parental and other authority. The natural desire of youth is to be accepted as one of the group. To be accepted as one of the crowd today would mean lowering

10. Wrong association could have what influence?

11. (a) What influences do Christian school students need to guard against? (b) Standing firm for what is right may draw what reaction from other youths?

your standards, being influenced to think and act without regard for Bible principles. When you stand up for what is right and conduct yourself as a Christian, fellow students will often be cutting and at times vicious in voicing their disapproval. They may call you a "square," a "religious bug," and many other even more unkind things. Because you will not let the barrier down, you are not invited to various functions in school and in the neighborhood and are more or less left alone. Be thankful for this, for it is actually a protection for you. Wisely continue to stick to what is right. Keep in mind Exodus 23:2, which says, "You must not follow after the crowd for evil ends." You know the evil that is being practiced. Do not let it or those who practice it influence your decisions. Do you want to be a minister of God's Word? Then take the right course!

¹² The influence and spirit of this world is to get ahead, to make a name for oneself. Many schools now have student counselors who encourage one to pursue higher education after high school, to pursue a career with a future in this system of things. Do not be influenced by them. Do not let them "brainwash" you with the Devil's propaganda to get ahead, to make something of yourself in this world. This world has very little time left! Any "future" this world offers is no future! Wisely, then, let God's Word influence you in selecting a course that will result in your protection and blessing. Make pioneer service, the full-time ministry, with the possibility of Bethel or missionary service your goal. This is a life that offers an everlasting future!

12. How does the world view higher education, and how should we reason on this?

DECISIONS CHRISTIANS FACE

¹³ Now that we have discussed the influences that we must guard against in making decisions, let us turn our attention to some of the decisions we must make and to those things that will influence our decisions for good. It is vital that we build a pattern of making right decisions in our everyday life. Some of the decisions we face each day may seem small and unimportant, having little to do with our receiving everlasting life. But does not God's Word counsel, "The person faithful in what is least is faithful also in much"? (Luke 16:10) If we can be influenced to disregard Bible principles in making small, everyday decisions, then what assurance do we have that, when we are faced with the necessity of making a decision affecting our everlasting welfare, we will suddenly reverse the trend and decide in harmony with Bible principles?

¹⁴ Then there are vital decisions that may arise very unexpectedly. Suppose we were involved in an accident and were faced with the decision of whether to submit to blood transfusion either for ourselves or for one of our family. Are we convinced in our heart that we could undergo and withstand the pressure from doctors and unbelieving friends and relatives? Are we prepared to take a firm, unshakable stand because of our knowing what God's Word says, although death may face us? Many of our Christian brothers and sisters have already been faced with this sobering decision.

¹⁵ There is also the matter of neutrality. More and more the emotional tide of nationalism is increasing its demands toward

13. Why should we never be careless in making small decisions?

14. (a) What issue could arise that would demand an on-the-spot decision? (b) What should we consider now?

15. The influence of nationalism poses what question to us all, and how real is this issue?

the dedicated servants of the one sovereign ruler, Jehovah God. Are you prepared to defend your decision to remain neutral as to the political affairs of this system even though it means imprisonment or death as it has for Christians in some countries? These are decisions that could face every Christian in the future and would without question affect their everlasting welfare.

¹⁶ Is there doubt in our minds that under these trying circumstances we might not have the strength and determination to make a wise and Scriptural decision? Only by a careful study of God's Word *now*, discerning the Scriptural principles involved, can we be sure of making right decisions when such emergencies arise. The Bible is the accumulative wisdom of Jehovah and sets before us a perfect source of influence and example in the one who always made right decisions, Christ Jesus. Recorded in it also are the encouraging examples of how the early Christians met the problems of their day and were able to resist the influence of the opposers of Jehovah God. They were able to make right decisions for pure worship because they, like Christ Jesus, had studied God's law and requirements *ahead* of time. When problems arose and decisions had to be made, they knew what to do and had the faith and courage to do it with the help of Jehovah's spirit. —Luke 4:1-12.

¹⁷ Today we are faced with basically the same problems as the early Christians were—family problems, questions of neutrality, the blood issue and devoting our time to God's work of helping other people understand his written Word. The so-

lutions therefore are the same, for God's Word never changes, and its principles remain the same now as then. If we have taken in a complete and accurate knowledge of Jehovah's will as found in the Bible, and have analyzed it carefully, making decisions in advance on what we will do under varying circumstances that may come upon us, we are safeguarding our faith against the faith-destroying influences that confront us. This is what Jehovah is telling us when he says, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, in order that you may become wise in your future."—Prov. 19:20; Mark 1:17-21; John 18:36; Acts 15:28, 29.

RIGHT INFLUENCES FOR DECISIONS

¹⁸ Usually we have time to ponder and consider the situation carefully before making weighty decisions. So when faced with such a weighty decision, take time to isolate in your mind the Scriptural principles that govern the matter involved. Apply them to your circumstances. Ask yourself, "What would Christ Jesus have done under the same conditions?" This question will help you to view the situation free from beclouding emotion, and often it makes the answer quite apparent. By reasoning this way you are allowing God's Word and the faithful example of his Son to influence your decisions.

¹⁹ Jehovah's organization as directed by his "faithful and discreet slave" class should influence our every decision also. How may we avail ourselves of this good influence? By doing personal research in the Bible publications of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society on whatever subject our decision concerns. This always proves to be a real aid in making clear to

16. What assures us of making the right decision when emergencies arise?

17. (a) How are our problems today much like those of the early Christians, and why is this so encouraging? (b) How does preparing for decisions in advance ensure right influence?

18. What are the first steps we should follow in making decisions?

19. How can Jehovah's organization assist us to make decisions?

us the Bible principles involved and their application to our lives.

²⁰ Another source of counsel and help that we can turn to is our mature Christian brothers. The overseer and other appointed servants in the congregation are Jehovah's provision to aid us in our worship of him. Although we do have the responsibility of making the final decision, they can help us to discern the principles involved and give us the encouragement we need to hold to these principles. Their influence is good.—Gal. 6:5.

²¹ It is also essential that we go to Jehovah God in prayer asking his blessing and direction on the decision that we have to make. Paul admonishes us, "By prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:6, 7) While the Bible gives us Jehovah's mind on matters and the guidance we need, not in every case can we find a direct "yes" or "no" answer, and at times when we have a clear-cut answer to our problem we are in need of strength beyond what we have to follow through properly. This is a time for prayer. Jehovah is interested in each one of us and invites us to petition him in prayer. By our so doing, we are assured, "the peace of God will guard our hearts and our mental powers." Yes, through prayer we can

invoke the influence of Jehovah God to aid us in making the right decision and, while we do this, do not forget to search God's Word. His answer very likely will be there.

²² These are perilous days in which each one of us faces many decisions, difficult decisions that involve our dedicated relationship to Jehovah and our everlasting future. Whether young or old, guard yourself from unnecessary association with worldly people. Do not let this world and its spirit influence you to the extent that it will affect your decisions to do Jehovah's will. Keep in mind what John wrote: "Everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world . . . the world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever."—1 John 2:15-17.

²³ When faced with the need to make a decision, be influenced by God's Word, study it carefully so that you will know the principles involved, carefully consider what he has counseled us on that subject through his organization, go to your mature brothers for their help and influence, seek the influence of Jehovah himself through prayer, and at all times consider your dedicated relationship with Jehovah God. This is what should influence your decisions in life!

20. What provision does Jehovah make through the congregation for influencing right decisions?

21. Why is prayer essential in making decisions?

22. From what unwholesome influences must we guard ourselves, and why?

23. What should influence decisions in your life?

My son, my law do not forget, and my commandments may your heart observe, because length of days and years of life and peace will be added to you. May loving-kindness and trueness themselves not leave you. Tie them about your throat. Write them upon the tablet of your heart, and so find favor and good insight in the eyes of God and of earthling man. Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight.—Prov. 3:1-6.

Living Up to Your Decisions

THE most important decision that any human creature can make is to dedicate his life to Jehovah God and symbolize that decision by being baptized in water as Christ Jesus set the example. Once this all-important decision is made, living up to that decision is essential for sharing in the vindication of Jehovah's name, and for the peace of mind, joy and satisfaction that it brings to the one making such a decision. The hundreds of thousands of dedicated witnesses of Jehovah today in all parts of the earth strongly recommend that those who know about Jehovah God, understand the ransom sacrifice of Christ Jesus, and appreciate the workings of his holy spirit, make this important decision as soon as possible. Living up to this decision will guide and affect for good every other decision necessary to life.

² A second very important decision that all human creatures are faced with is the decision as to whether to marry or to remain in a single state. If one has decided to marry, then the way he lives up to that decision can greatly affect his relationship to Jehovah. If one's decision is to remain single, then how he lives up to that decision can greatly affect his service to Jehovah. His living up to these decisions is an integral part of living up to his decision to do Jehovah's will.

³ If you are a husband or wife, have problems arisen in your marriage that have affected your service to Jehovah?

1. Why is living up to one's decision of dedication so essential, and what effect will this have on other decisions in one's life?

2, 3. What other decision are all people faced with, and of what importance is living up to it?

If you are one who decided to remain single, are you firm in your decision, or do you find a conflict in your mind that affects your worship of Jehovah? Since fulfilling this decision to marry or to remain single holds such an important place in living up to one's dedication to Jehovah, we will give it Scriptural consideration in the following paragraphs.

LIVING UP TO YOUR MARRIAGE DECISION

⁴ Are you married? A decision to marry is honorable and pleasing to Jehovah. But marriage is not just a decision—it is a life of togetherness, it is a living up to that decision. Living up to this decision means recognizing and fulfilling the responsibilities that go along with marriage. The saying that “marriages are made in heaven” is not a Scriptural thought, but it is true that marriage is an arrangement instituted by our heavenly Father Jehovah God. This can be seen by the introduction of Eve to Adam for the purpose of marriage. “Jehovah God proceeded to build the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman and to bring her to the man.”—Gen. 2:22.

⁵ The vow in the marriage ceremony that is recommended by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society for the man may be worded like this: “I take you to be my wedded wife, to love and to cherish in accordance with the divine law as set

4. (a) Define marriage. (b) What do we learn from the first marriage?

5. (a) What form of vow is recommended for the man in the marriage ceremony? (b) What vow is recommended for the woman? (c) What do we learn from these vows, and with what Scriptural principle is this in harmony?

forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian husbands, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God's marital arrangement." The vow made by the prospective wife states: "I take you to be my wedded husband, to love and to cherish and deeply respect, in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian wives, for as long as we both shall live together on earth according to God's marital arrangement." Clearly, then, marriage is not to be selfishly viewed in terms of what can be had from the other mate in the way of gratification, pleasure, money or security; but, rather, what one can contribute to the happiness and pleasure of the other. In other words, the marriage vows are to give, not to take, in harmony with the Bible principle, "There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

⁶ The marriage vow involves certain responsibilities that the man and woman must live up to in this newly formed marriage yoke. As an example, it is the man, the head of the family organization, that is primarily to work, earning money to provide the necessary things in food, clothing and shelter for his wife. The head of the house must fully recognize that these responsibilities are part of living up to the marriage vow to love and cherish his wife. The same principle applies to the woman. Before she ever entered the marriage agreement she knew there would be certain wifely responsibilities that it would be necessary to live up to. It is a Scriptural thought that when a man and woman get married they leave their father and mother and have their own home. When Jehovah God instituted marriage he said, "That is why a man will leave his father and his mother and he must stick

to his wife." (Gen. 2:24) So with the home comes cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing, shopping, washing dishes and many other household duties. These responsibilities involve the carrying out of her personal vow to love, cherish and deeply respect her husband.—1 Tim. 5:8.

⁷ These are necessary responsibilities that are required of a husband and a wife in order to contribute to the peace, happiness and unity of the marriage union. But it is good to note that these responsibilities can be taken care of separately. The man can go to work and earn money to provide the necessary things for his wife while the wife remains at home cleaning, cooking, performing her household responsibilities. And this is good, for this leaves time for the things that must be done together in the marriage relationship.—Prov. 31:10-27.

⁸ There is more to married life than working and providing the necessary things for each other in a material way. There are married couples who have plenty of food to eat, money to spend for essentials and relaxation, a comfortable home in which to live and friends with whom to associate, who find themselves unhappy and just tolerating each other, hoping that something will change their unhappy state or waiting for it to work out after Armageddon. What has happened between this husband and wife who vowed to love, cherish and deeply respect their mates for the rest of their lives? They are not living and acting together as "one flesh"! It is as simple as that!

⁹ The Creator's purpose in the marriage arrangement was to have the man and the woman become so harmonious that their thinking and conduct would be as

8. (a) Are material things alone the key to a happy marriage? (b) When problems arise, what is often the cause?

9, 10. (a) What does becoming "one flesh" mean? (b) How can a husband be head while remaining "one flesh" with his wife? Illustrate your answer.

6, 7. What responsibilities does each marriage mate have, and how may these be cared for?

one, for he said, "They must become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24) This "one flesh" does not rule out the man as being the head of the family as clearly set out at Ephesians 5:22, 23: "Let wives be in subjection to their husbands as to the Lord, because a husband is head of his wife." It does, however, preclude the husband from making the final decisions that involve both parties before talking matters over with the other and considering them together. To illustrate, we might take the matter of their yearly vacation. Year after year he may decide where they are going to go and what they are going to do, and he may be successful in talking his wife into his choice for their vacation. The wife may go along for the sake of subjection and keeping peace in the family, and she may seemingly enjoy herself. But does she? Could she be thinking, "I am going just to keep peace," or, "I can hardly wait until this vacation is over"?

¹⁰ When a husband insists on having his own way, always talking his wife into what he wants, not giving any consideration to her feelings, what happens? The submissive mate may give in, it is true, to keep family peace, but over a period of time these irritations keep building up until they cause a strain in their relationship because of not doing things unselfishly, out of love. How much better it would be to talk over matters they share in common. Then the husband may make the final decision for their mutual benefit, carefully taking into consideration the feelings and desires of his wife. As to the example of where they will spend their vacation, perhaps each has a different choice. The loving and considerate husband may decide to go one place this year for vacation, and then next year go where the other would like to go. This way both mates can be fully satisfied and be able to find enjoyment during their time of

relaxation. So, being "one flesh," as Jehovah God purposed married couples to be, means doing things in complete harmony and to the full satisfaction of both mates.

¹¹ An intimate, personal matter between marriage partners that contributes much to their happiness and satisfaction is their sexual relationship. This is one of the purposes of marriage, for Paul said: "Now I say to the unmarried persons and the widows, it is well for them that they remain even as I am. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to be inflamed with passion." (1 Cor. 7:8, 9) So marriage serves as a safeguard and protection from wrongdoing, as Paul warned: "Because of prevalence of fornication, let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband."—1 Cor. 7:2.

¹² Paul stated the principle that should govern the intimate relationship of husband and wife when he said: "Let the husband render to his wife her due; but let the wife also do likewise to her husband. The wife does not exercise authority over her own body, but her husband does; likewise, also, the husband does not exercise authority over his own body, but his wife does." (1 Cor. 7:3, 4) Marriage partners should not selfishly do as it individually suits them or satisfies them, but should be pleasing and satisfying to each other. They should not deprive each other of the marriage due unless both parties agree to refrain for a period of time in the interest of spiritual matters. Paul wrote: "Do not be depriving each other of it, except by mutual consent for an appointed time, that you may devote time to prayer and may come together again, that Satan may not keep tempting you for

11. According to 1 Corinthians 7:8, 9, what is one purpose of marriage, and why?

12. (a) What is the Scriptural principle that governs the intimate relationship of the marriage partners?

(b) What is the only exception to this?

your lack of self-regulation.”—1 Cor. 7:5.

¹³ Reports indicate that the lack, or excess, of sexual relations between married couples is responsible for many unhappy conditions and a great amount of trouble in the marriage. So the question comes up, “What is due the marriage partner?” Reflect back on what Paul said, that the husband should render his wife her due and let the wife also do likewise to her husband. That which is due the marriage partner is what would be necessary to satisfy one’s passionate desire. This may vary greatly in different individuals. But the result should be that neither one would look on someone else of the opposite sex with a passionate desire. Each should be satisfied within the marriage union, for, as Jesus said, “I say to you that everyone that keeps on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”—Matt. 5:28.

¹⁴ A Christian husband should not be harsh or demanding in this matter. This would surely cause unhappiness and could lead to separation. Remember the joy experienced when both the man and his wife entered wedlock. Why not work to preserve that feeling? Why should a God-fearing husband follow the ways of some worldly men who thoughtlessly dominate their wives and subject them to cruel and harsh mistreatment or, perhaps, even expect them to indulge in sexual perversions? The unselfish and loving husband should always cherish the health and happiness of his wife. So he should not expect his due to be beyond her physical strength and well-being. Just as passion can be cultivated, so it can be controlled, and if the

Christian husband finds that he is asking for more than his wife can reasonably give, then it would be good to cultivate self-control. One way of doing this is by keeping the mind more on spiritual matters. Keeping busy in the ministry, personal Bible study, meeting preparation and participation, along with other congregational responsibilities, will contribute to self-control.—Song of Sol. chapter 4.

¹⁵ An unselfish and loving wife will always be very anxious to give the proper due to her husband, and to do the things that will make him happy and draw him closer to her. Paul said that the husband has charge over his wife; so even though she may not get the satisfaction, or need the satisfaction to the extent of her husband, yet her foremost thoughts should be the satisfaction of his passionate desires. Her delight and satisfaction will come in satisfying her husband.

¹⁶ The overriding principle is that each has vowed to give, not to take. Living up to this mutual decision is very important in the intimate relationship of a husband and wife. It is a matter that should be freely talked over by both the husband and the wife so as to be in complete agreement regarding this God-given right. In all this they will be accomplishing God’s will in their marriage and so living up to their decision of dedication to him.

LIVING UP TO YOUR DECISION OF SINGLENESSE

¹⁷ Many dedicated Christian men and women have made the decision to remain single for a period of time. They have made this decision so that they may have greater freedom to serve Jehovah and may be able to serve him more fully without distraction. Some have decided to remain

13. (a) What is often a source of unhappiness in the marriage relationship? (b) What is the marriage “due,” and why is this so important?

14. (a) What attitude should the Christian husband take toward the marriage due? (b) Under what circumstances would the Christian husband especially need to cultivate self-control, and how is this done?

15. How should the Christian wife view what is due her husband?

16. What is the basis for a successful sexual relationship in the marriage union?

17. For what reasons have many decided to remain single?

single through the final troubled years of this old system until after Armageddon. Others have made the decision to remain single for a period of years so that they may enjoy the pioneer work, Bethel service or the missionary field. Some make this decision simply because they recognize they are still young and wish to grow to spiritual and mental maturity before considering the decision to marry.—1 Cor. 7:32-35.

¹⁸ Have you made this decision? If so, it is very important that you live up to it. Your joy and happiness in Jehovah's service as a single person depends greatly on your continuing to be single-minded, not torn in your thinking. As Paul said, one must be 'settled in heart, having no necessity,' in order to find joy while serving Jehovah in the single state.—1 Cor. 7:37.

¹⁹ But how can you live up to your decision to remain single? Once a person "has made this decision in his own heart, to keep his own virginity," then care must be exercised to keep himself mentally and physically in line with this decision so as not to become unsettled in his heart. (1 Cor. 7:37) The importance of this could be illustrated this way: If you had decided to go on a diet to lose weight, would it be reasonable for you to surround yourself at each meal with rich, fattening foods that were not included in your diet? Would it not be reasonable just to have the food before you that was recommended for that meal so that you would not lose the joy of that food by looking at other food that you should not at that time have? The same would be true with the single person who had decided to remain so. If he had made this decision for a certain time period, then within that time he reasonably would refrain from trying to be with *one of the opposite sex*. He would cer-

tainly not be dating or allowing himself continual association of this kind, as this would create desire that he is trying to keep subdued.

²⁰ It is a true statement that whatever a person is interested in, this he will talk about. Are you interested in remaining single? Then in your conversations with others do not be discussing the opposite sex at great length, deliberately talking about things that are contrary to your decision. Since your associates will often determine the subject of your conversations, choose as your close associates those who have the same desire and outlook as you—those who have made the same decision.

²¹ One's thinking plays a big part in living up to one's decision. It would not be wise for one to allow one's mind to dwell upon the rights that come with the married state if his decision had been to forgo this for some time in the interests of Jehovah's service. It would also be important to be satisfied with your decision for the time you had made it, otherwise constantly talking about it or thinking about it in your mind would not be living up to your desire for singleness.

²² A single life in Jehovah's service should be a full and busy life. Keep your life full with Jehovah. Be willing to take on extra assignments in his service. Do not allow for idle time. When home by yourself fill that time with prayer, personal study and constructive meditation. You are never alone, as your best associates, Jehovah God and Christ Jesus, are always with you. Make good friends so that when you have time for recreation you may do things with these friends.

18. Why is living up to your decision of singleness important?

19. How may one live up to this decision? Illustrate.

20. What part does one's conversation play in living up to one's decision?

21. In our thinking, in what two ways can we live up to our decision?

22. How can the single person prevent loneliness?

This, too, will contribute to keeping your life full and satisfying.

²³ It is encouraging to keep before you those who chose a single course in Jehovah's service and were successful in it. The apostle Paul was a fine example of living up to the decision of singleness for those brothers who have made this decision. For our sisters who have decided upon this course, Jephthah's daughter is an outstanding example of living up to her decision. She lived at a time when a woman's success in life was measured by her fruitfulness in having a family. Yet she faithfully lived up to her decision to remain single, in harmony with her father's promise, for the sake of Jehovah's service. —1 Cor. 7:8; Judg. 11:36-40.

23. Give Scriptural examples of serving Jehovah successfully in the single state.

²⁴ For those who are married, and for those who have decided to remain single, the advice of Paul is fitting when he says: "Are you bound to a wife? Stop seeking a release. Are you loosed from a wife? Stop seeking a wife." (1 Cor. 7:27) You who are married, live up to your decision to love, cherish and deeply respect, and do not envy those who are single. You who have decided to remain single, remember this decision in your conduct, your conversation, your thinking and your associates, and do not envy those who are married. Rather, let each one be enjoying his own gift from God by living up to his decision. In so doing, you will be applying the Word of God in your life, and so living up to that most important of all decisions — your dedication to do Jehovah's will. —1 Cor. 7:7.

24. Living up to your decision means what?

PATIENCE PRODUCES RESULTS

THERE are times in the lives of Jehovah's witnesses when they need to exercise much patience in order to convince others of their sincerity in wanting to help them, but the rewards make it worth it. Here is an experience of one of Jehovah's witnesses that proves the inestimable value of patience:

"In 1961 we were baptized as Jehovah's witnesses. Our next-door neighbor who opposed the Witnesses was furious at us for taking this step. She told us that, though we were good neighbors, she wanted no part of our religion. Our attempts to get her to change her mind proved to be in vain. So we decided to pursue the course suggested by the Watch Tower Society. We would just offer her magazines that contained articles that we thought she would enjoy reading.

"This worked fine, for she accepted them and read the articles we suggested. This continued for about a year, and then she began to let her six-year-old daughter visit us.

"To entertain the tot, we would use the book *From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained* and explain the illustrations therein. Naturally, when she went home she told her mother what she was learning about Jehovah

God, the paradise in Eden, Adam and Eve, and so forth. About two weeks later her mother telephoned me.

"She asked me if I was conducting a Bible study with her daughter, Jo Ann. I replied, No, but that I was merely explaining the meaning of the pictures in one of our books. I got the *Paradise* book and demonstrated what I was doing. She then said, 'Jo Ann is enjoying this so much that I was wondering if you could find time to study the Bible with her.'

"A study was started with both of her children. Shortly, my neighbor called me again and said: 'I really appreciate what you are doing for our children. They are learning so much from the Bible.' She continued: 'You know, I have been trying to make up my mind for months now to ask you to study with me too, but I just did not have the courage. I have been watching you all these past six years and how faithful you have been for so long. I figured that there must be something to it. Do you think you could find time to study with me too?' Overjoyed, I answered that I would be glad to do so."

Declared Righteous

DECLARED righteous! How? Can such a thing be possible, when all of Adam's descendants, every one of them, have been unrighteous, imperfect and with a tendency toward wrongdoing? If honest, each one of us must frankly admit as did the psalmist David: "With error I was brought forth with birth pains, and in sin my mother conceived me."—Ps. 51:5.

According to the Bible, "sin" and "unrighteousness" are synonymous. (1 John 5:17) Thus the inheritance of sin from our first human parents on down to this day has labeled us all "unrighteous." And the undeniable evidence of this inherent sinfulness or unrighteousness is the fact that men continue to die. (Rom. 5:12; 6:23) Further, they are unable to relieve themselves of this fatal disability, for the psalmist again writes, under inspiration: "Not one of them can by any means redeem even a brother, nor give to God a ransom for him."—Ps. 49:7.

Yet the Bible shows that the unrighteous can be declared righteous! How is this possible? On what basis can there be a declaring of imperfect creatures righteous? Can Jehovah God, the great Judge, do this and still remain righteous himself?

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD

Let us take note of God's "means of saving" sinful humans from the death-dealing effects of inherited sin. (Luke 2:30) He sent forth his Son, born of a woman, it is true, but not tainted with the imperfect reproductive seed of Adam, for "holy spirit" and "power of the Most High" impregnated Mary with perfect seed. (Luke 1:35)

Therefore the one born of her came to be "undefiled, separated from the sinners." (Heb. 7:26) When he was grown to manhood he qualified as having that 'body prepared by God' for sacrifice on behalf of unrighteous men.—Heb. 10:5.

At the time of his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was a perfect, righteous man. He presented himself willingly to enter upon a sacrificial course marked out for him by his heavenly Father. As he came up out of the water God's holy spirit came upon him, and by marvelous signs God acknowledged him to be his Son—not in the sense that he was God's human Son at the time of his birth, but now in the sense that he was "born again," "born from the spirit." (John 3:3-6) Thereafter Jesus was on his way back to the heavenly life he had enjoyed prior to his being sent forth to the earth.

Actually perfect in his human organism, Jesus held on to that perfection by reason of his integrity maintained under brutal test. "He learned obedience from the

things he suffered," that is, he continued obedient to God even when openly exposed to hateful persecution by Satan and his agents. (Heb. 5:7-9) So God made the Chief Agent of salvation "perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) Not one flaw showed up. Jesus stood firmly righteous before God *on his own merit*—the only human ever to do so.

Those sufferings culminated in Jesus' shameful but undeserved death on the torture stake. Thereafter God raised him out of death, enabling Jesus to resume life as a spirit creature and to go his way back to heaven, there to present the merit of his sacrifice as an offering in behalf of sinful humankind. This act of God, resurrecting Jesus to life in the spirit, constituted a 'declaring of Jesus righteous in the spirit.' (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 3:18) It was, in effect, a declaration by the heavenly Father that, despite all the contrary appearances, this Son who had undergone slander, reproaches and a cruel death, had fully accomplished the Father's will. That sacrificial death of the Son provided the basis for God to declare righteous those who would exercise faith in Christ. (Gal. 2:16) His willingly going into death would serve to cancel out the condemnation of death that had come upon the human family through Adam's disobedience.

THE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

However, God purposed to select a limited number from among humankind and adopt them into his family of spiritual sons, forming "the congregation of the first-born who have been enrolled in the heavens"—a congregation organized under its Head, Christ Jesus. (Heb. 12:23) Theirs is the prospect of life in the heavens as spirit creatures. But first they must prove faithful until death in a service that God assigns them while they are still alive in the flesh. That service is of a priestly

nature—the ministry of reconciliation, whereby they must seek to aid men to get reconciled to God.—2 Cor. 5:18, 19.

In order to qualify these ministers of reconciliation for their service, and that they might be "born from the spirit," becoming sons of God, they must first have a right standing before God in the flesh, even as did Jesus when he presented himself for baptism. How could they attain this? Only by God's applying the merit of Jesus' sacrifice in their behalf immediately, forgiving them all their sins, and, by judicial act on his part in imputing human perfection to them, declaring them righteous. And, of course, God takes this action only with respect to those whom he calls to be members of "the congregation of the first-born" and who demonstrate faith in the ransom sacrifice of Christ Jesus. As the apostle Paul explains it: "It is as a free gift that they are being declared righteous by [God's] undeserved kindness through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus."—Rom. 3:24.

Keep in mind that these are declared righteous in the flesh in order that they might be in line for adoption into the family of God's spirit sons in heaven. Their being declared righteous does not result in actual fleshly perfection, but they are accounted by God as being perfect humans; the righteousness is imputed to them. Thus God makes them acceptable for sacrifice to himself. So God now makes them his spiritual sons. As such, they must serve him, even to the extent of yielding up human life and all future prospects of life as humans. In a very real sense they follow closely in the steps of their Leader, Christ Jesus.—1 Pet. 2:21.

We have seen that after his loyal course even until death in the flesh Jesus Christ was "made alive in the spirit," "declared righteous in spirit," given *immortality and incorruption*. (1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:16;

1 Cor. 15:42, 45) In the same way his spirit-begotten followers who prove themselves loyal until death are "declared righteous in spirit" by being resurrected as spirit creatures, and they, too, are made sharers in the divine nature. (2 Pet. 1:4) Then their righteousness is no longer an imputed righteousness, a righteousness derived from someone else's merit, but it is actual. (1 John 3:2) They are rewarded with incorruption, immortality.

"RIGHTEOUSNESS" IN PRE-CHRISTIAN TIMES

But what about those humans who worshiped God and were inclined toward righteousness in pre-Christian times? How did God view them? They were tainted with inherited sin. Adam had lost righteousness for himself and his offspring, and the time was still in the future when Christ Jesus would "shed light upon life and incorruption through the good news." (2 Tim. 1:10) How, then, could the holy God have dealings with those pre-Christian worshipers? Because of their faith.

It was because of their faith in God's promises, which faith was manifested by works, that men and women such as Abraham and Rahab were 'counted righteous' by God. (Rom. 4:3; Jas. 2:25) They were not given over to wickedness like the worldly people around them. They "walked with the true God," even as did Noah and many others. (Gen. 6:9) They were not, however, in line for adoption as prospective spirit sons of God. They looked forward to the time when God by resurrection would restore them to life on earth. God could and did deal with them and bless them because of their faith in his word of promise.

"RIGHTEOUSNESS" OF MODERN

"GREAT CROWD"

Today there is "a great crowd, which no man [is] able to number," of God's

worshippers on earth, in addition to the remaining ones of the 144,000 who are called to the heavens. In vision the apostle John beheld them and heard them described as those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev. 7:4, 9-17) They take positive action toward demonstrating their faith in the shed blood of Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God. They are spoken of prophetically by Christ Jesus as "the righteous ones," because God also counts their faith to them for righteousness.—Matt. 25:37.

But that "great crowd" of Revelation, chapter 7, are not at this time declared righteous with a view to being accepted as God's sons. Rather, the white robes in their case represent a temporary standing before God—one that will tide them safely through Armageddon's judgment execution upon a wicked world and bring them into Christ's thousand-year reign of peace. Under that new system of things they will be trained in righteousness and uplifted toward perfection in the flesh. Under that peaceful reign, too, multitudes will be restored to life on earth from their graves, including the loyal, pre-Christian worshipers of Jehovah God. But will any of such ever be declared righteous?

Yes, but that acceptance of them by Jehovah as his human sons, as part of his universal family, must await the close of the thousand-year reign of Christ. By that time Christ Jesus through his heavenly government will have uplifted obedient humankind to fleshly perfection, to the condition of human perfection enjoyed by Adam at the time God applied the test of obedience to him. Then is the time when Christ "hands over the kingdom to his God and Father" and when the Father determines who are worthy of living forever in happiness on earth. (1 Cor. 15:24-26) That determination, as in Ad-

am's case, will also be made on the basis of a test—a test that is referred to in the words written at Revelation 20:7-10.

Those then holding fast to the clean worship of Jehovah will be "declared righteous." They will actually receive "the glorious freedom of the children of God," earthly children. They will be declared righteous, not in the spirit, but in the flesh. They will then have, not an imputed righteousness, but actual human perfection and the prospect of living everlastingly on earth under God's fatherly protection.—Rom. 8:18-21; Rev. 21:3, 4.

JEHOVAH RIGHTEOUS IN ALL HIS ACTS

Jehovah never violates his own principles of righteousness. He does not condone or excuse sin. He is too pure and holy to look with complacency on anything unrighteous. (Hab. 1:13) All of those who become his sons in heaven or on earth must be holy just as he is holy. (1 Pet. 1:15, 16) And he has lovingly provided the way whereby his terms of justice can be satisfied while at the same time humans can be rescued from the condemnation of death into which disobedient Adam plunged them.

The vital basis upon which his provision rests is the ransom sacrifice of his own dear Son, Christ Jesus. That ransom, having been once paid, brought release from the condemnation of death to Adam's offspring. Of course, those released must first have exercised faith in God's provision of the ransom. While still in the

flesh those of Christ's followers who are called to be eventually with him in the heavens are given the benefit of an early release from sin's condemnation so that they may be given a "new birth" and so come into union with Christ Jesus as his spiritual brothers.

All others of mankind who will gain everlasting life on earth under the rule of Christ's kingdom must await the outcome of that test that God will apply at the close of Christ's thousand-year reign. Those who remain loyal and obedient to God through that test will be declared righteous in the flesh. They will then be earthly sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Thus we have seen that Jehovah is the one who alone can 'declare righteous.' And in doing so he proves himself righteous in all his acts. As the apostle Paul explains the matter: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and it is as a free gift that they are being declared righteous by his undeserved kindness through the release by the ransom paid by Christ Jesus. God set him forth as an offering for propitiation through faith in his blood. This was in order to exhibit his own righteousness, because he was forgiving the sins that occurred in the past while God was exercising forbearance; so as to exhibit his own righteousness in this present season, that he might be righteous even when declaring righteous the man that has faith in Jesus."—Rom. 3:23-26.

"Not Very Scientific"

Noting how evolutionists assert theory to be fact without evidence, the book *The Biblical Flood and the Ice Epoch*, on page 240, states: "Darwin presented his hunches about heredity as scientific findings; they were not very scientific. . . . If he is considered a propagandist rather than an educator or scientist, then his assertiveness and almost messianic self-assurance becomes understandable. With his self-assured attitude, he considered verification unnecessary. And without verification, other academic figures promoted Darwin's ideas vigorously."

Astronomical Calculations

and the count of time

HISTORIANS generally have a preference for their own calculated chronologies over the chronology of the Bible. In this attitude they claim support from ancient astronomical calculations—some of them on tablets uncovered by the archaeologist's spade. One historian even declares that "astronomical confirmation can convert a relative chronology, one that merely establishes the sequence of events, into an absolute chronology, a system of dates related to our [modern] calendar."¹

How accurate is this claim? Of course, the celestial bodies were provided by the Creator to serve as a timekeeper for men upon earth. At Genesis 1:14 we can read: "Let luminaries come to be in the expanse of the heavens to make a division between the day and the night; and they must serve as signs and for seasons and for days and years." However, the efforts of men to relate ancient astronomical data to human events of the past involves a number of factors that allow for error—error in calculation and in interpretation.

At first glance it might seem to be quite simple to determine the date of some specific happening when an ancient cuneiform tablet informs us that the event coincided with some eclipse of the sun or moon. There are, however, partial eclipses and total eclipses, and it is quite important to know which it is in any given connection. Why? Well, according to *The Encyclopæ-*

dia Britannica, any "particular town or city would on the average experience some 40 lunar eclipses and 20 partial solar eclipses in 50 years, [although] only one total solar eclipse in 400 years."² So, the fixing of some specific historical date by means of an eclipse would be open to considerable question unless it was a case of *a definitely stated total solar eclipse visible in a specific area*. Unfortunately, such precise and vital information is rare in ancient sources.

WEAK LINKS IN THE CHAIN

Even as to the area of visibility for any given eclipse there is an element of uncertainty. Earth scientists have long understood that tidal currents in the oceans, coming into contact with sea bottom in shallower areas, may tend slightly to retard the earth's rotation. "A number of scientists," reports a recent scientific work, "have found plausible evidence for the cumulative effect of tidal slowing in ancient records of eclipses. An eclipse is visible over only a small part of the earth's surface. Moreover, the area of visibility can be calculated for eclipses that occurred centuries (or even millennia) in the past. It turns out, however, that modern calculations do not agree with the ancient records. The eclipses seem to have been observed in areas some hundreds of miles to the east of where they should have appeared."³

Here is an example that will reveal the weakness in this method of arriving at precise dates. There is one solar eclipse that is specially relied on by historians in their attempt to relate the chronology of Assyria with that of the Bible. This eclipse is mentioned in an Assyrian eponym (prominent name) list* as taking place in the third month, counting from spring, of the ninth year of King Assur-dan III. Modern historians conclude that it was the eclipse occurring on June 15, 763 B.C.E.⁴ Counting back 90 years (or names, since they calculate a name for each year) on the eponym list, they arrive at 853 B.C.E. as the date for the battle of Qarqar in Shalmaneser's sixth year. They claim that in other records Shalmaneser lists King Ahab of Israel as in the enemy coalition facing Assyria in that battle, and that twelve years later (Shalmaneser's 18th year) he refers to King Jehu of Israel as one of those paying tribute to him.⁵ They then deduce that the year 853 B.C.E. marked the date of Ahab's last year and 841 B.C.E. the start of Jehu's reign.⁶

How sound are those calculations? Since the eponym list did not state the nature of this eclipse, whether partial or total, historians may not be warranted in concluding that it marked the year 763 B.C.E. Indeed, some scholars have preferred to settle for the year 809 B.C.E., during which an eclipse occurred that would have been at least partially visible in Assyria. But on the same basis there were also partial eclipses in the years 817, 857, and so on—each visible in Assyria.⁷ Nevertheless, historians object to any change from the solar eclipse of 763 B.C.E. on the ground that it would 'introduce confusion into Assyrian history.' Assyrian history, however, is already in considerable confusion.[†]

The presence of King Ahab at the battle of Qarqar in the year 853 B.C.E. is quite unlikely. The Bible says nothing of it, and the translation of the Assyrian text on which this idea is based is quite conjectural. Bible chronology places Ahab's death around 919 B.C.E. and the commencement of Jehu's reign about 904 B.C.E. Shalmaneser's mention of Jehu is not necessarily a reference to his first year. It could have been a later year of Jehu's reign. Then, too, we have to keep in mind that the chroniclers of Assyria were given to juggling the years of their campaigns and even crediting their kings with receiving tribute from persons long dead. So there are weak links in the chain of data, including the astronomical data, relied on to synchronize Assyrian chronology and Bible chronology.

LUNAR ECLIPSES

Lunar eclipses, as found in Ptolemy's canon and presumably drawn from data in the cuneiform records, have been used in efforts to substantiate the dates usually given for particular years of the Neo-Babylonian kings. But even though Ptolemy may have been able to calculate accurately the dates of certain eclipses in the past, this does not prove that his transmission of historical data is correct. His relating of eclipses to the reigns of certain kings may not always be based on the facts. Additionally, the frequency of lunar eclipses certainly does not add great strength to this type of confirmation.

For example, a lunar eclipse in 621 B.C.E. (April 22) is used as proof of the correctness of the Ptolemaic date for Nabopolassar's fifth year. However, another eclipse could be cited twenty years earlier in 641 B.C.E. (June 1) to correspond with the date that Bible chronology would indicate for Nabopolassar's fifth year. Be-

* *The Watchtower*, December 15, 1968, p. 758.

† For evidence of this, see *The Watchtower*, December 15, 1968, pp. 757, 758.

sides, this latter eclipse was total, whereas the one in 621 B.C.E. was partial.⁸

Perhaps the date of Herod's death furnishes the best illustration of the uncertainty involved in dating by means of lunar eclipses. The Jewish historian Josephus shows Herod's death to have occurred shortly after a lunar eclipse and not long before the start of the Passover season. Many fix 4 B.C.E. as the date of Herod's death, citing as proof the lunar eclipse on the night of March 12/13 in that year. Due to this reckoning, some modern chronologists place Jesus' birth in 5 B.C.E.

However, W. E. Filmer, writing in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, October 1966, shows the weakness of this reckoning. He points out that eclipses also took place on both January 9 and December 29 of the year 1 B.C.E. and that either of these could fit the requirements of an eclipse not long before Passover. Also he shows that the eclipse of January 9, 1 B.C.E., which was total, would better fit the circumstances than the one in 4 B.C.E., a partial eclipse. Summing up the matter, he says: "Thus, so far as the evidence of lunar eclipse goes, Herod may have died in either of the years 4 or 1 B.C.E., or even in A.D. 1." And either of these latter two dates would harmonize with the date of Jesus' birth as calculated according to the Bible's count of time, namely, the autumn of 2 B.C.E.

Thus it is obvious that eclipses of the moon of themselves are by no means sure pointers to the accuracy of dates in a relative system of chronology.

ASTRONOMICAL "DIARIES"

Not all the texts historians use to date events and periods of ancient history are based on eclipses, however. Astronomical "diaries" have been found. These diaries give the position (in relation to certain stars and constellations) of the moon at its

first and its last visibility on a specific day in Babylon, along with positions of certain planets at these same times. For example, one such entry states that "the moon was one cubit in front of the rear foot of the lion." Modern chronologists point out that such a combination of astronomical positions would not be duplicated in thousands of years. These diaries also contain references to the reigns of certain kings and seem to coincide with Ptolemy's canon.

Strong and incontrovertible though such evidence may appear to be, there are factors that greatly impair its strength. First, the observations made in Babylon may have contained errors. Babylon's astronomers were more concerned about celestial phenomena occurring close to the horizon, at the rising or the setting of the sun or the moon. However, as viewed from Babylon, the horizon is often obscured by sandstorms, as Professor Neugebauer points out. He mentions that Ptolemy himself complained about "the lack of reliable planetary observations [from ancient Babylon]. He [Ptolemy] remarks that the old observations were made with little competence, because they were concerned with appearances and disappearances and with stationary points, phenomena which by their very nature are difficult to observe." —*The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, page 98.

Another factor reducing the strength of testimony from extant astronomical diaries is the date of their writing. The majority of those now known were, in fact, written, not in the time of the Neo-Babylonian or Persian empires, but in the Seleucid period, about 364-312 B.C.E. True, they contain data relating to much earlier periods, and it is assumed that they were copies of earlier documents. However, the accuracy of such copying and the possibility of additions or adjustments certain-

ly reduces the value of this evidence. Actually there is a serious lack of contemporary astronomical texts by which historians might establish the full chronology of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods.

Then, too, as in the case of Ptolemy, even if the astronomical data in the available texts, as now interpreted and understood, is accurate, this does not prove that the *historical data* accompanying the astronomical information is accurate. Just as Ptolemy used the reigns of certain kings (as he understood them) simply as a framework in which to place his astronomical data, so too the writers or copyists of the Seleucid period may have simply inserted in their astronomical texts what was "popular" chronology in their time. That "popular" chronology may well have contained errors.

To illustrate, an ancient astronomer of the second century B.C.E. might state that a certain celestial event took place in the year that, according to our calendar, would be 465 B.C.E. And his statement may prove to be correct when accurate computations are made to verify it. But he may also state that the year in which the celestial event took place was the 'twenty-first year of Xerxes' and be entirely wrong. Simply stated, accuracy in astronomy does not prove accuracy in history.

A DEPENDABLE COUNT OF TIME

On the other hand, the dependability of the Bible's time references is vouchsafed to us by the very characteristics of the Bible itself: its candor and honesty; the fact that everywhere we are made conscious of time as we peruse the various Bible books; the measurement of time by days, by seven-day weeks, by months and by years—a system of counting that is to

be noted from the very outset of the Bible's writing; the prophesied periods of time, so many of which we know to have been fulfilled exactly on time. All of this unites to assure us that the guiding power behind the numerous Bible writers was the One of whom it may be truly said that he is "the One telling from the beginning the finale, and from long ago the things that have not been done."—Isa. 46:10.

Did not the Bible long in advance foretell the seventy years during which Judea would lie desolate and her inhabitants would languish in Babylonian exile? In due time, the decree of Cyrus the Persian conqueror offered the faithful worshipers of Jehovah release and reinstatement in their own land. They were back in Jerusalem exactly on time.—Jer. 25:11, 12; Dan. 9:2.

The reader who will take the time to read the Bible passages at 1 Kings 6:1 and at Luke 3:1, 2 cannot but be impressed by the meticulous manner of referring to important historical dates. Sufficient data is offered so that the student may pin down the exact time of the event. The Bible writers themselves credit the factuality of their information to the Divine Author who merely used them as writing instruments. Surely, then, we can look to this same Source for accurate chronological data—data that is much more dependable than the speculations and conjectures of human historians!

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THROUGHOUT the world Jehovah's witnesses are conducting well over 970,000 weekly Bible studies with interested persons in their homes. Are you one of those studying the Bible with the Witnesses? If you are, then quite likely at each study session you are learning points of Bible truth that are quite new to you. Perhaps you wonder how the Witnesses get to have so much informative material to offer freely to all those who are interested. Well, one of the provisions for their education in the Bible is their conventions.

Perhaps you have heard of these conventions, but have you ever attended one? If not, an unforgettable experience awaits you. Have you considered going? We urge you to do so. Indeed, please consider this as a cordial invitation to you and your family. Many of such assemblies are scheduled for principal cities around the world starting in July.

Up till now your acquaintance with the Witnesses has no doubt been limited to a few persons, perhaps just one. Here is an opportunity to get acquainted with a multitude of them and observe firsthand just how they measure up to Jesus Christ's rule that his followers 'would have love among themselves.' (John 13:35) You can discover for yourself that they come from all walks of life, from many different nationalities. You can see them, not alone as preachers and teachers of the Bible message, but also as those who keenly realize their own need to keep strong spiritually.

WHY NOT
MAKE IT

Your First

ASSEMBLY?

MAKE IT YOUR FIRST

So why not make the attending of an international assembly of Jehovah's witnesses in 1969 one of your goals? With planning and a little helpful counsel from the Witness who studies with you, you can make it. There is always the "first" of anything.

When you agreed to have a weekly study with one of Jehovah's witnesses, that was probably the first time you ever got down to a careful consideration of the Bible. Did you regret it? No, rather, you are glad you made the decision.

Did you know that each year a multitude of persons who have never studied with the Witnesses attend these larger conventions? But you are better acquainted. Perhaps you have accompanied one of the Witnesses in the house-to-house ministry to see how they do it. You may even have progressed sufficiently in Bible knowledge so that you are now contemplating baptism. But whether this is the case or you have merely been thinking about it thus far, you would particularly enjoy the talk on baptism, a feature at every large assembly of the Witnesses. This is a good reason to make this year's your first assembly.

It is truly amazing how newly-interested ones demonstrate their appreciation of Bible truth. This past year in Burma there was one group of such persons who walked four days over lofty, mountainous country just to get to their first assembly! There was also a young couple in Alaska who traveled over a thousand miles to attend their first assembly last summer. Their

efforts were well repaid. They returned home spiritually refreshed.

WHAT TO ANTICIPATE

Perhaps you are wondering what actually takes place at one of these larger assemblies. Let's take a look at the activities of one day as noted in a typical program. At nine o'clock in the morning the first brief session opens with song, followed by a fifteen-minute discussion of the Bible text for that day as set out in the *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*. Then, after prayer for Jehovah's blessing on the field ministry, many of those in attendance move out to share in the house-to-house visits, spreading the Kingdom message and distributing invitations to the assembly. Some who have never shared in this service go along as observers with experienced Witnesses. As time permits they may also see some of the historic sites and other places of interest in the vicinity of the convention city.

After the midday meal the conventioners again assemble. Some delightful, real-life experiences are recounted by Witnesses from various parts of the earth, and then follow the afternoon sessions. These may include short Bible lectures, interesting demonstrations having to do with the ministry of Jehovah's witnesses, and perhaps a fascinating Bible drama enacted by Witnesses dressed in appropriate costume.

Next, there is an adjournment for some two hours, offering opportunity to go and enjoy a meal with other friendly delegates at the assembly's well-organized cafeteria. Here there is time to chat and get acquainted with other Witnesses, young and old, from various parts of the country. Then the evening sessions continue until about 9 p.m. Throughout the entire day the program is marked by variety and a wealth of information that grips the attention of the audience. And every part

of the program brings to view new slants on Bible information—things you may never have thought about before.

HOW IT CAN BE DONE

For a list of locations of international assemblies planned for 1969, please refer to page 63 of *The Watchtower*, issue of January 15, 1969. It may be that the location you select will allow your visiting some relatives or friends or of combining convention plans with a brief vacation. Should you choose to attend the New York convention, there is an added attraction. On Saturday and Sunday just prior to the opening of that assembly, namely, July 5 and 6, the Watchtower Society's factory will be open for those who would like to tour it and observe it in full operation. For those who cannot come early and take advantage of these two days, the mornings of Wednesday through Saturday of the convention week will provide opportunities for such a tour.

The Witness with whom you are studying can offer helpful suggestions as to your planning. He no doubt has attended assemblies before and knows what must be taken into account. You may have to arrange time off from your regular job. You may have to set aside some money each week for the expenses of the trip. How you will travel—by car, train, bus or plane—is another matter for consideration. It may be that special chartered facilities will be arranged by the local congregation of Jehovah's witnesses.

A problem that doubtless looms largest in your mind is that of accommodations at the convention city. Do not let that trouble you unduly. Each convention organization will have a special department through which you will be able to secure accommodations in advance—for the whole family if they will all be attending.

And these accommodations will be within whatever price range you feel will fit your budget.

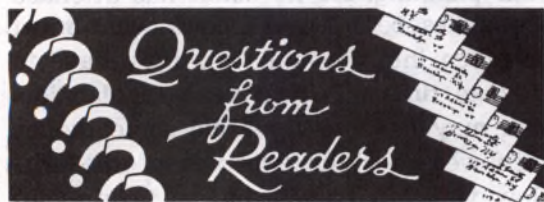
Meals during the assembly will be no problem. At each convention location a cafeteria will be set up, providing nourishing meals at nominal cost. It is, in fact, common to see entire families eating together at the convention cafeteria. Meal-times on such occasions are fine opportunities to make new acquaintances and hear many unique experiences.

MAKING UP YOUR MIND

Of course, the first step is to make up your mind to attend. It is no casual matter. It is not something to be determined lightly one way or the other. Your decision could have far-reaching effects on yourself and your loved ones. Any one of Jehovah's witnesses can tell you from personal experience that his first assembly marked a turning point in his life—a turn toward a happier and fuller life of asso-

ciation and service with Jehovah's genuine worshipers. Your future and that of your family, your survival through the end of this wicked system of things now so near, may well hinge upon how strong a faith you can build in just a short time. Being present to listen and learn at the assembly of Jehovah's people can contribute much toward such faith-strengthening.

Think of Jehovah's provision for his typical people, the Israelites. From time to time he called them into general assembly in order to fortify them against the evil influences of the pagan people around them. Today, too, Jehovah provides for his modern-day people to assemble and be armed against the snares and schemes of Satan, the god of this present wicked system of things. So plan to attend a 1969 international assembly of your choice and get a foretaste of the joy, the unity and the contentment that will be Jehovah's gift to obedient humans in his imminent new order. Make it your first assembly.



- Why was it a sin for King David to take a census, as reported at 2 Samuel chapter 24? —M. C., U.S.A.

We must frankly say that we do not know with certainty, for the Bible does not tell us precisely wherein this was a sin. Yet, giving some thought to this occurrence makes it clear that Jehovah was in no way unjust or cruel in his handling of it.

The account says: "The anger of Jehovah came to be hot against Israel, when one incited David against them, saying: 'Go, take a count of Israel and Judah.' So the king said to Joab the chief of the military forces who was with

him: '... register the people, and I shall certainly know the number of the people.' But Joab said to the king: 'May Jehovah your God even add to the people a hundred times as many as they are while the very eyes of my lord the king are seeing it. But as for my lord the king, why has he found delight in this thing?' Finally the king's word prevailed upon Joab... And David's heart began to beat him after he had so numbered the people. Consequently David said to Jehovah: 'I have sinned very much in what I have done.'—2 Sam. 24: 1-10.

Taking a census or registration of the people was not something prohibited in Israel. Not long after the exodus from Egypt, God spoke to Moses about taking "the sum of the sons of Israel as a census of them." This listed all males who were eligible for military duty, and a head tax was taken for the service of the tabernacle. (Ex. 30:11-16; Num. 1:1-3) Another census was taken shortly before Israel entered the Promised Land.—Num. 26:1-4.

Realizing this, commentators have offered various possible reasons for Jehovah's viewing David's census taking as a sin. Some have thought that David erred in not collecting the head tax as God said should be done at such times. Others have felt that the king was showing weakness in trying to find out how large his military force was, instead of depending on God for victory no matter what its size. Yet others say that David might have given in to human pride, wanting to be able to boast over Israel's importance and glory.

But, as noted, we simply do not know why David's census was a sin. What he did was definitely wrong, for it was Satan who "proceeded to stand up against Israel and to incite David to number Israel." (1 Chron. 21:1) Even Joab, who at times put his own passions and ambitions ahead of what was right, recognized the badness of David's census. We read: "The king's word had been detestable to Joab." (1 Chron. 21:6) Today we are far removed from the facts, but if David's contemporaries knew that this act was absolutely wrong, there must have been a basis for their conclusion. Remember, even David, when he had finished, confessed: "I have sinned very much in what I have done."—2 Sam. 24:10.

As a punishment for this sin Jehovah brought three days of pestilence that killed 70,000 Israelites. (2 Sam. 24:12-16) Was that unjust? Were 70,000 innocent people dying for the king's error? The Bible plainly shows that we all are sinners deserving of death; it is only by God's undeserved kindness that we live. (Rom. 3:23; 6:23; Lam. 3:22, 23) So those who died had no special "right" to life. Additionally, can any human today say for sure that those 70,000 were not guilty of some serious sin not mentioned in the historical record?

Just pause and reflect on how Jehovah has dealt with humans in the past. Did he simply wait until Cain had murdered Abel and then banish him? No, God warned Cain beforehand about the wrong attitude he was developing. (Gen. 4:2-16) Jehovah provided the innocent a way of escape before he destroyed the wicked in Sodom. (Gen. 19:12-25) And in dealing with Israel, God continually sent his servants the prophets to warn the people against their bad ways before he brought punishment.—Jer. 7:25, 26.

These, and many other examples that could be cited, show what fine qualities Jehovah has.

With good cause the Israelites could describe him as "a God of acts of forgiveness, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness." (Neh. 9:17) In all his dealing Jehovah matches what Moses and Elihu said about him: "All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness, with whom there is no injustice." "God himself does not act wickedly, and the Almighty himself does not pervert judgment."—Deut. 32:4; Job 34:12.

So even though we do not have, at this late date, all of the details concerning David's sin in taking a census, or the resulting pestilence, we have good reason to acknowledge that the course God took must have been altogether righteous and just, as have been his other activities involving imperfect humans.

● Was Jesus dead when the Roman soldier pierced Christ's side with a spear?—W. H., Ivory Coast.

Yes, the account in John 19:31-37 makes it clear that Jesus had died before the soldier pierced him.

According to the Mosaic law, an executed criminal was not to hang all night on the execution stake, but should be buried the same day, so as not to defile the land by disregard for God's law. (Deut. 21:22, 23) If Jesus and the criminals beside him lingered alive on the stakes, it already being late afternoon, they would remain on the stakes after the sabbath began at sunset. To prevent this, the Jews asked that all three have their legs broken.

A French researcher, Dr. Jacques Bréhant, commented on the reason for this, as reported on in *Medical World News* for October 21, 1966. We read: "The *crurifragium*, breaking the legs of the crucified man, made it impossible for him to raise himself to breathe. . . . The Jews asked that the legs of all three of the condemned be broken and that they be taken away. The soldiers accordingly broke the legs of the thieves. But when they came to Jesus, the soldiers could see that He was already dead." Dr. Bréhant offered two possible reasons as to why only Jesus was dead: (1) "The thieves may have been tied, rather than nailed." (2) "Christ was greatly weakened by the treatment inflicted before" impalement.

Had Jesus been alive, the soldiers would have broken his legs also. Instead, we read: "But on coming to Jesus, as [the soldiers] saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Yet one of the soldiers jabbed his side

with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out."—John 19:33, 34.

Though John's account is quite plain, the question posed might come up because of reading Matthew 27:49, 50. It says there: "But the rest of them said: 'Let him be! Let us see whether Elijah comes to save him.' Another man took a spear and pierced his side, and blood and water came out. Again Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up his breath." The sentence put in italics is what causes the difficulty; it might lead one to conclude that Jesus was alive when speared.

Many Bible translations, including *The Jerusalem Bible* in French and English, *Elberfelder* and *Aschaffener* in German, and *Moderna*, *Valera* and *Nacar-Colunga* in Spanish, omit that italicized sentence. Other translations include the words, but put them in brackets or provide an explanatory footnote. For example, in the original edition of the *New World Translation* a footnote explains that the sentence is contained in some important manuscripts, such as the Sinaitic and Vatican No. 1209, but not in others. Many scholars feel that a copyist

mistakenly put in Matthew 27:49 words belonging at John 19:34.

The Greek Scripture portion of the *New World Translation* is based primarily on the master text by Westcott and Hort. This respected master text contains the sentence in the main body at Matthew 27:49, but puts it in double brackets. In explanation it says that the sentence "must lie under strong presumption of having been introduced by scribes." Possibly in the future we will have more manuscript evidence regarding Matthew 27:49.

Nonetheless, it is evident from the plain presentation at John 19:31-37 that Jesus was already dead when he was speared. So the account in Matthew must be understood in the light of this. Matthew does not say exactly when the spearing of Jesus' side took place; it simply lists it as one of the occurrences at the time of Jesus' impalement. But John's account does give clear indication of the time element. In view of this, one's understanding of Matthew's account must be influenced by what John wrote. When this is done, there is really no contradiction.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

tions. (Matt. 24:9) Hence faithful Christians need to answer the challenge to true worship raised by the forces of nationalism. The early Christians answered the challenge by preaching despite opposition; they said: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men." (Acts 5:29) Jehovah's witnesses answer the challenge to true worship in the same manner: They steadfastly preach the good news of God's kingdom, obeying God as ruler. To announce Jehovah's kingdom during March, these Christian witnesses will be offering this fine Bible-study aid, *The Watchtower*, on a subscription basis, for a year, for just \$1.

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 April 13: Living Up to Your Decisions. Page 174. Songs to Be Used: 18, 82.

FIELD MINISTRY

True worship has never been popular. The Bible shows that the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ would be hated by all na-