

The Watchtower

December 15, 1989

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



PEACE

*Will It Come by
Disarmament?*



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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as the Sovereign of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as they fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in the now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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Peace

Will It Come by Disarmament?

"IT IS the greatest mistake to mix up disarmament with peace," said Winston Churchill five years before the nations plunged into the second world war. "When you have peace you will have disarmament," he added.

What a paradox! Who is going to risk disarming until peace is ensured? But how can there be real peace while weapons are stockpiled for war? It is a situation from which politicians have never found a way out.

Winston Churchill made his statement in 1934, following the windup of the Disarmament Conference convened by the League of Nations just two years earlier. The purpose of this conference, which had taken 12 years to prepare, was to prevent the rearming of Europe. People around the earth still vividly remembered the horrific slaughter of some nine million combatants during World War I, in addition to millions more wounded and a huge number of civilian casualties. Yet, disarmament never materialized. Why?

Efforts to Disarm

A policy of disarmament can be enforced but rarely effectively. For example, under the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, Germany was disarmed with "adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety." This was in harmony with one of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson's proposals, later incorporated in Article 8 of the covenant of the League of Nations. But when Hitler came to power, he soon flouted the policy.

Was the United Nations more successful in establishing a sound foundation for disarmament following the second world war? No, but its lack of success was not for want of determined effort. With nuclear weapons of mass destruction now being available, though, disarmament was an issue of great urgency. "The previous contention that armaments races were economically inexpedient and led inevitably to war," says *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, "was replaced by the argument that the future use of nuclear weapons in quantity threatened civilization itself."

A 12-nation Disarmament Commission was set up in 1952 to thwart the developing East/West arms race. It failed to make headway, and eventually the two great powers further polarized their opposing camps. Various other agreements and treaties have been made up to the present time. Yet, the climate of mutual distrust has not permitted the complete abolition of all weapons of war. That, says *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, is something "advocated by utopian thinkers."

Counting the Cost

To disarm or not to disarm—what costs are involved? Costs are not always reckoned in money. Employment in weapons-related industries is also of prime consideration. In many lands tax monies are used to purchase

armaments, the making of which stimulates employment. So disarmament might lead to unemployment. That is why countries with heavy commitments to defense budgets shudder at the thought of complete disarmament. Such thinking is a nightmare for them rather than a Utopian dream.

Yet, we cannot ignore the vast sums of money involved in running the war machine. It is estimated that 10 percent of the value of the world's total production is being spent on armaments. How much is that? Actual figures vary with inflation, but think of consuming £1 million (\$1.54 million, U.S.) in this way *every minute of the day!* What priorities would you choose if you had that amount at your disposal? Famine relief? Health care? Child welfare? Ecological restoration? There is so much that could be done!

Take, for example, the "tanks to tractors" program recently announced in the U.S.S.R., where some arms factories are being changed to produce 200 types of "advanced equipment for the agro-industrial sector." Why is that agricultural equipment desperately needed? Because, according to Britain's *Farming News*, "only a third of fruit and vegetables grown on state farms reach the consumer, the rest being left to rot in the fields or perish at transit points and storehouses."

As commendable as producing tractors instead of tanks may be, it makes headlines because it is so unusual. Moreover, its effect on total arms production is minuscule. Countless hundreds of millions of pounds, rubles, and dollars continue to be spent on armaments in a world in which "men become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth," just as Jesus Christ foretold. How can such fear be dissipated? Is complete disarmament to remain just a dream? If not, what is needed to bring it about?—Luke 21:26.

Peace

The Reality



FEW would criticize the ideals behind the efforts of the United Nations to secure peace. "‘Let Us Beat Swords into Plowshares’ expresses the United Nations goal of world peace," says "The World Book Encyclopedia," adding, "The United Nations has two main goals: peace and human dignity."

The inscription under the statue shown here paraphrases words of the Bible prophecy at Isaiah chapter 2, verse 4. They read, according to a modern translation:

***"And they will have to beat their swords
into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears."***

These majestic words should surely have inspired UN member states to secure lasting peace and disarmament. But, sadly, since its inception at the conclusion of the second world war in 1945, UN history has revealed otherwise. Why? Basically because the above words quoted from Isaiah cannot be taken in isolation, as they have been by human governments. The context of the words is all-important. Consider why.

Isaiah's Message

Isaiah was a prophet. He speaks of a glorious vision of harmony and peace for people of all races. For this vision to become a reality, people have to do something. What? Consider the import of verses 2 and 3 as they relate to verse 4.

"[2] And it must occur in the final part of the days that the mountain of the house of Jehovah will become firmly established above the top of the mountains, and it will certainly be lifted up above the hills; and to it all the nations must stream. [3] And many peoples will certainly go and say: 'Come, you people, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will instruct us about his ways, and we will walk in his paths.' For out of Zion law will go forth, and the word of Jehovah out of Jerusalem. [4] And he will certainly render judgment among the nations and set matters straight respecting many peoples. And they will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore."

First, we must acknowledge that our Creator, Jehovah, has the right to instruct us "about his ways," which, as Isaiah later recorded, are 'higher than our ways.' (Isaiah 55:9) Many people, especially self-important world leaders, find this a difficult thing to acknowledge. Only their own ways are right in their own eyes. Still, the fact that their ways have not led to world peace and disarmament surely shows the futility of continuing to pursue such a course.

Second, note the needed earnest desire of individuals to conform to God's laws: "We will walk in *his* paths." Only on that basis will swords be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning shears on

a global scale. How can such a longed-for goal ever be attained?

Divine Instruction

Many people have a copy of the Bible, the book that contains Jehovah God's instructions, but more is required than the mere possession of it. Isaiah says that Jehovah's law and words emanate from "Jerusalem." What does that mean? In Isaiah's day, the literal city was the source of kingly authority to which all faithful Israelites looked. (Isaiah 60:14) Later, at the time of the apostles of Jesus Christ, Jerusalem was still the focal point for instructions that came from the Christian governing body in that city. —Acts 15:2; 16:4.

What of today? Notice that Isaiah prefaces his message with the statement: "It must occur in the final part of the days." Other translations say: "In the last days." (*New International Version*) Evidence is regularly presented in the pages of this magazine to support that we have been living in the last days of this present world order since 1914. So, what should we expect to see, according to verses 3 and 4?

A great multitude of people who no longer learn war and who have already beaten "their swords into plowshares." And see them we do! Well over 3.5 million men, women, and children of all races in over 200 lands joined in common accord, living at peace with one another and preaching the Bible's message of peace to their neighbors. They are known throughout the world as Jehovah's Witnesses.

They have a modern Governing Body of older Christian men from various parts of the earth who give needed oversight to the worldwide activities of God's people. These men, like the apostles and

older men in Jerusalem in the first century, are anointed members of the faithful and discreet slave class designated by Jesus to care for all of his Kingdom interests here upon earth. History has proved that they can be trusted to follow the direction of the holy spirit and that they do not rely on human wisdom in teaching the flock of God the ways of genuine peace.—Matthew 24:45-47; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

True Worship

More than head knowledge or even a desire to live according to divine instructions is involved in living at peace. Heart devotion and worship of our Creator, Jehovah, are essential, as Isaiah also makes clear.

The prophet states that “the mountain of the house of Jehovah will become firmly established above the top of the mountains” and “lifted up above the hills.” In ancient times, some mountains and hills served as sites for idolatrous worship and for sanctuaries of false gods. When King David brought the sacred Ark to the tent he had pitched on Mount Zion (Jerusalem), some 2,500 feet above sea level, he was evidently acting upon divine direction. Later, when the great temple of Jehovah was built on Mount Moriah, the term “Zion” came to include the temple site, so the temple enjoyed an elevation higher than that of some surrounding pagan locations. Jerusalem itself was also called his “holy mountain”; thus, worship of Jehovah remained in an exalted position.—Isaiah 8:18; 66:20.

So today, the worship of Jehovah God has become elevated like a symbolic mountain. Its prominence is for all to see, as it has done something that no other religion has been able to do. What is that? It has unified *all* worshipers of

Jehovah, who have gladly beaten their swords into plowshares and are learning war no more. National and racial barriers no longer divide them. They live as a united people, a brotherhood, even though they are scattered throughout the nations of the world.—Psalm 33:12.

Time of Decision

How does all of this affect you? The words of another Hebrew prophet are most appropriate: “Crowds, crowds are in the low plain of the decision, for the day of Jehovah is near in the low plain of the decision.” (Joel 3:14) It is an urgent time of resolution for all mankind, either to learn the ways of true peace at God’s hand or to continue to give support to a weapons-oriented life that will soon end.

Jesus foretold that a great preaching work would be accomplished in our day. That preaching concerns the “good news” that the Kingdom of God will bring peace to this war-torn earth. (Matthew 24:14) Last year well over three million regular home Bible studies were conducted by Jehovah’s Witnesses throughout the world. Some of these weekly studies were with individuals, but many were held with family groups. Millions of children are thereby being given a sure hope for their future, and their parents gain reassurance that wars, like the ones they have witnessed and maybe even shared in, will be no part of the new world of Jehovah God’s making.

What a world of mutual trust and peace that will be! There will be no need to worry about disarmament, as weapons of war will be things of the past. And all thanks to Jehovah, “the God who gives peace,” who lovingly instructs us now that we may prepare to live life to the full under his Kingdom of righteousness.—Romans 15:33.

Beginning of a Crucial Day

WHEN Jesus leaves Jerusalem on Monday evening, he returns to Bethany on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Two days of his final ministry in Jerusalem have been completed. Jesus no doubt again spends the night with his friend Lazarus. Since arriving from Jericho on Friday, this is his fourth night in Bethany.

Now, early Tuesday morning, Nisan 11, he and his disciples are on the road again. This proves to be a crucial day of Jesus' ministry, the busiest thus far. It is the last day he appears in the temple. And it is the last day of his public ministry before his trial and execution.

They take the same route over the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem. Along that road from Bethany, Peter notices the tree that Jesus cursed the previous morning. "Rabbi, see!" he exclaims, "the fig tree that you cursed has withered up."

But why did Jesus kill the tree? He indicates why when he goes on to say: "Truly I say to you, If only you have faith and do not doubt, not only will you do what I did to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain [the Mount of Olives on which they are standing], 'Be lifted up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. And all the things you ask in prayer, having faith, you will receive."

So by causing the tree to wither, Jesus is providing for his disciples an object lesson on their need to have faith in God. As he states: "All the things you pray and ask for have faith that you have practically received, and you will have them." What an important lesson for them to learn, especially in view of

the awesome tests that are soon to come! Yet, there is another connection between the withering of the fig tree and the quality of faith.

The nation of Israel, like this fig tree, has a deceptive appearance. Although the nation is in a covenant relationship with God and may outwardly appear to observe his regulations, it has proved to be without faith, barren of good fruitage. Because of lack of faith, it is even in the process of rejecting God's own Son! Hence, by causing the unproductive fig tree to wither, Jesus is graphically demonstrating what the end result will be for this fruitless, faithless nation.

Shortly, Jesus and his disciples enter Jerusalem, and as is their custom, they go to the temple, where Jesus begins teaching. The chief priests and older men of the people, no doubt having in mind Jesus' action the previous day against the money changers, challenge him: "By what authority do you do these things? And who gave you this authority?"

In reply Jesus says: "I, also, will ask you one thing. If you tell it to me, I also will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism by John, from what source was it? From heaven or from men?"

The priests and older men begin consulting among themselves as to how they will answer. "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why, then, did you not believe him?' If, though,

we say, 'From men,' we have the crowd to fear, for they all hold John as a prophet."

The leaders do not know what to answer. So they reply to Jesus: "We do not know."

Jesus, in turn, says: "Neither am I telling you by what authority I do these things." **Matthew 21:19-27; Mark 11:19-33; Luke 20:1-8.**

- ♦ What is significant about Tuesday, Nisan 11?
- ♦ What lessons does Jesus provide when he causes the fig tree to wither?
- ♦ How does Jesus answer those who ask by what authority he does things?





Witness for Jehovah and Do Not Tire Out

“Consider closely the one who has endured such contrary talk by sinners . . . that you may not get tired and give out in your souls.”—HEBREWS 12:3.

“I HAVE seen the Lord!” With those startling words, Mary Magdalene broke the news of Jesus’ resurrection. (John 20:18) This marked the beginning of 40 days packed full of exciting events for Christ’s disciples, previously saddened by his death.

² Jesus wanted to leave no doubt in the minds of his disciples that he was actually alive. Thus, as Luke relates: “By many positive proofs [Jesus] showed himself alive after he had suffered, being seen by them throughout forty days.” (Acts 1:3) In

1, 2. What convincing proof did Jesus give to his disciples that he had been resurrected?

fact, on one occasion “he appeared to upward of five hundred brothers at one time.” (1 Corinthians 15:6) Certainly, there was now no further room for doubt. Jesus was alive!

³ Jesus’ disciples then thought only of an earthly “kingdom of God,” one restored to Israel. (Luke 19:11; 24:21) So they asked Jesus: “Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?” No doubt his answer surprised them, for he said: “It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has

3. What question regarding the Kingdom did Jesus’ disciples put to him, and why did his answer surprise them?

placed in his own jurisdiction; but you will receive power when the holy spirit arrives upon you, and you will be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8) What a challenge was now set before the disciples! And what a responsibility! How could they accomplish such a task? The answer soon came in a startling manner.

Accepting the Challenge

⁴ Luke relates: "While the day of the festival of Pentecost was in progress they were all together at the same place, and suddenly there occurred from heaven a noise just like that of a rushing stiff breeze, and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting. And tongues as if of fire became visible to them and were distributed about, and one sat upon each one of them, and they all became filled with holy spirit and started to speak with different tongues, just as the spirit was granting them to make utterance." So great was the noise that it attracted the attention of a multitude of Jews staying in Jerusalem for the festival. They were amazed to hear in 'their own tongues about the magnificent things of God.' —Acts 2:1-11.

⁵ Peter lost no time in giving a dynamic talk, proving beyond any doubt that "Jesus the Nazarene," whom they had impaled, was the "Lord" foretold by David in the words: "Jehovah said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.'" Stabbed to the heart, Peter's listeners asked: "Men, brothers, what shall we do?" In reply Peter urged them: "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus

Christ for forgiveness of your sins." The result? Three thousand were baptized! (Acts 2:14-41) Already the witness was being given in Jerusalem. Later on, it widened out into all Judea, then Samaria, and finally "to the most distant part of the earth." So rapid was the expansion of the Kingdom-preaching work that about 60 C.E. the apostle Paul could say that the good news "was preached in all creation that is under heaven."—Colossians 1:23.

Kingdom Expansion and Persecution

⁶ Not long after Pentecost 33 C.E., Jesus' disciples had reason to recall his words: "A slave is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:20) The Jewish leaders were enraged when "the word of God went on growing, and the number of the disciples kept multiplying in Jerusalem very much." On false charges, the disciple Stephen was stoned to death. That appeared to be the signal many were awaiting, for "on that day great persecution arose against the congregation that was in Jerusalem; all except the apostles were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." —Acts 6:7; 7:58-60; 8:1.

⁷ The persecution temporarily subsided. But shortly afterward, Herod Agrippa I killed the apostle James. Peter was imprisoned but was released by an angel. Later the brothers in Jerusalem became materially impoverished, and aid had to be sent to them by fellow believers elsewhere. (Acts 9:31; 12:1-11; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3) During a visit of the apostle Paul to Jerusalem, religious fanaticism was evident as a multitude screamed: "Take such a man

6, 7. (a) How did Kingdom expansion and persecution of Christians go hand in hand during the first century? (b) What urgent need arose among the Christians in Jerusalem, and how was this need filled?

4. Describe what happened on the day of Pentecost.

5. To what extent was Jesus' prediction at Acts 1:8 soon fulfilled?

away from the earth, for he was not fit to live!" (Acts 22:22) Certainly, those Christians living in Jerusalem and Judea needed much encouragement to keep on faithfully witnessing about the Kingdom. Jesus had promised his disciples that "the holy spirit, which the Father will send in my name," would act as a "helper." (John 14:26) But how would the Father now provide such needed help or comfort? The answer, in part, was through the apostle Paul.

Paul's Letter to the Hebrews

⁸ In about 61 C.E., Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but he was aware of what was happening to his brothers in Jerusalem. Therefore, under the direction of Jehovah's spirit, he wrote his timely letter to the Hebrews. It is full of loving concern for his Hebrew brothers and sisters. Paul knew what they needed to have their faith and confidence built up in Jehovah as their Helper. Then they could 'run with endurance the race set before them' and confidently say: "Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 12:1; 13:6) It is upon this aspect of Paul's letter to the Hebrews (chapters 11-13) that we now wish to focus our attention. Why? Because the situation those early Christians faced is the same as that facing Jehovah's Witnesses today.

⁹ Within our generation, multitudes have responded positively to the Kingdom message by dedicating themselves to Jehovah and getting baptized as his Witnesses. However, along with this expansion of true worship has come violent per-

8. (a) What prompted Paul to write his letter to the Hebrews? (b) Upon what aspect of his letter are we going to focus our attention, and why?

9. What issue facing Christians in the first century faces Christians today, and how only can it be met?

secution, many Christians even forfeiting their lives as did Stephen, James, and other faithful first-century witnesses. Hence, the issue is the same now as it was then: Who will be able to stand the test of their integrity in the face of mounting opposition to the Kingdom message? Furthermore, who will be able to face up to the awesome happenings as the unparalleled "great tribulation" soon descends upon this present generation? (Matthew 24:21) The answer is, those prepared to "fight the fine fight of the faith," those who are "solid in the faith." These are the ones who will finally be able to say: "This is the conquest that has conquered the world, our faith."—1 Timothy 6:12; 1 Peter 5:9; 1 John 5:4.

Benefiting From Faithful Examples

¹⁰ What is faith? Paul answers: "Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld. For by means of this the men of old times had witness borne to them." (Hebrews 11:1, 2) Paul then backs up his definition of faith by showing faith at work. He captures the highlights in the lives of some "men of old times," as well as women like Sarah and Rahab. How encouraging it is to find that "God is not ashamed of them, to be called upon as their God"! (Hebrews 11:16) Can God say the same of us because of our faith? May we give him no cause to be ashamed of us as each day ends.

¹¹ Following the account of these faithful men and women, Paul says: "So, then, because we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also put off every weight and the sin that easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance

10. (a) What is faith? (b) How did God feel about men and women of faith of old times?

11. How can we today benefit from the "cloud of witnesses surrounding us"?

the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1) Although now sleeping in the grave, are these exemplary faithful witnesses alive in our mind? Do you know them and their experiences well enough to answer yes? This is one of the many rewards of regular Bible study, using all our senses to relive the exciting experiences of this "cloud of witnesses." Truly, taking to heart their faithful example will greatly help us to overcome any lack of faith. In turn, this will help us to give a bold and fearless witness to the truth under all circumstances.—Romans 15:4.

Not Tiring Out

¹² Our greatest example of faith is Jesus. Paul urges: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, as we look intently at the Chief Agent and Perfecter of our faith, Jesus. . . . Indeed, consider closely the one who has endured such contrary talk by sinners against their own interests, that you may not get tired and give out in your souls." (Hebrews 12:1-3) How "closely" have you considered Jesus' example? How "intently" have you been looking at him? (1 Peter 2:21) Satan wants us to 'get tired and give out in our souls.' He wants us to stop doing the work of witnessing. How does he do this? Sometimes by outright opposition from religious and worldly authorities, as in the first century. Last year, the Kingdom-preaching work was restricted in some 40 countries. But did that cause our brothers to tire out? No! Their faithful work resulted in 17,000 and more being baptized in those lands in 1988. What a stimulus this should be to all those living in countries where there is relative freedom! Let us never tire out in preaching the good news of the Kingdom!

12. (a) How can Jesus' example help us not to 'get tired and give out in our souls'? (b) What are some present-day examples of those not tiring out?

¹³ However, there are other more subtle things that could cause us to become weary. These include opposition in a divided home, mental distress, health problems, peer pressure, discouragement due to a lack of positive results in our preaching work, or perhaps a feeling of impatience because the end of this system of things has not yet come. Well, what helped Jesus to endure mental and physical suffering? It was "the joy that was set before him." (Hebrews 12:2) Jesus was sustained by the joy of making his Father's heart glad by vindicating Him and by the anticipation of the later happiness he would experience in administering the marvelous blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. (Psalm 2:6-8; 40:9, 10; Proverbs 27:11) Could we follow more intently this joyful attitude of Jesus? And remember Peter's assurance at 1 Peter 5:9: "The same things in the way of sufferings are being accomplished in the entire association of your brothers in the world." Knowing that Jehovah understands, feeling the warmth of the worldwide brotherhood, and keeping our eyes on the joys ahead of us under Kingdom rule—all of this will help us not to tire out in serving Jehovah in faith and in preaching when the end is so close at hand.

Why Jehovah Disciplines

¹⁴ Paul now throws light on the reason why we may have to endure tests and sufferings. He suggests that we look upon such as a form of discipline. Paul reasons: "My son, do not belittle the discipline from Jehovah, neither give out when you are corrected by him; for whom Jehovah loves he disciplines." (Hebrews 12:5, 6) Even Jesus "learned obedience from the

13. (a) What are some of the subtle things that could cause us to become weary in our preaching work? (b) What was 'the joy set before Jesus,' and how can we acquire a similar joyful attitude?
14. What benefits may result from tests and sufferings that we may have to endure?

things he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8) Surely, we also need to learn obedience. Notice the beneficial effects of allowing discipline to mold us. Said Paul: “To those who have been trained by it it yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness.” How encouraging that is!—Hebrews 12:11.

¹⁵ If we accept “discipline from Jehovah” in this light, we will take to heart Paul’s positive counsel: “Hence straighten up the hands that hang down and the enfeebled knees, and keep making straight paths for your feet.” (Hebrews 12:12, 13) Sometimes it is very easy to deviate from the ‘cramped road leading off into life.’ (Matthew 7:14) The apostle Peter and others in Antioch were once guilty of doing this. Why? Because “they were not walking straight according to the truth of the good news.” (Galatians 2:14) Today, we must keep listening to our Grand Instructor, Jehovah God. We need to make full use of the helps provided through “the faithful and discreet slave.” This will ensure a ‘straight path’ for our feet.—Matthew 24:45-47; Isaiah 30:20, 21.

¹⁶ Paul next warns that we should be “carefully watching that no one may be deprived of the undeserved kindness of God; that no poisonous root may spring up and cause trouble and that many may not be defiled by it.” (Hebrews 12:15) Becoming disgruntled, dissatisfied, finding fault with the way things are done in the congregation can be like a “poisonous root” that can quickly spread and poison the wholesome thoughts of others in the congregation. We can counteract such negative thoughts by contemplating the count-

15. How can we apply Paul’s counsel to ‘keep making straight paths for our feet’?

16. (a) How might a “poisonous root” take hold in a congregation? (b) Why does Paul link immorality with a lack of appreciation for sacred things, and how can we safeguard ourselves against such dangers?

less blessings that the truth has brought into our life. (Psalm 40:5) Another danger is that of having immoral tendencies or a ‘lack of appreciation for sacred things, like Esau.’ (Hebrews 12:16) Paul links these two dangers together, since the one can easily lead to the other. No Christian need succumb to such selfish desires if he applies Peter’s words: “Take your stand against [the Devil], solid in the faith.”—1 Peter 5:9.

“Realities Though Not Beheld”

¹⁷ Our faith is very dependent upon “realities though not beheld.” (Hebrews 11:1) Some of these unseen realities Paul goes on to speak of at Hebrews 12:18-27. He describes the awesome happenings at Mount Sinai when God spoke directly to Israel and when Moses said: “I am fearful and trembling.” The apostle then adds: “But you have approached a Mount Zion and a city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, and myriads of angels, in general assembly.” In the case of the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai, God’s voice shook the earth, said Paul, but now He has promised, saying: “Yet once more I will set in commotion not only the earth but

17. Compare the awesome happenings at Mount Sinai with those confronting Christians today.

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ Why is Paul’s letter to the Hebrews beneficial to us?
- ☐ What issue must Christians face today?
- ☐ How can we benefit from faithful witnesses of old?
- ☐ Why does Jehovah discipline those whom he loves?
- ☐ What is the key to witnessing without tiring out?

also the heaven.” Although these words are primarily addressed to anointed Christians, the “great crowd” of other sheeplike ones can also take them to heart. (Revelation 7:9) Do you fully appreciate what Paul is saying? We stand before an assembly of tens of thousands of angels. Of course, we stand also before Jehovah. At his right hand is Jesus Christ. Indeed, we are in a more awesome position and under greater responsibility than were those ancient Hebrews at Mount Sinai! And remember, the shaking at the coming battle of Armageddon will cause the present wicked heaven and earth to vanish. Today is certainly no time to “beg off” from listening to God’s Word and obeying it!

¹⁸ Truly, then, we are living at the most awesome time in human history. As Jehovah’s Witnesses, we have been sent to the most distant part of the earth to preach the good news of God’s established Kingdom. To do so, we must have a faith that cannot be shaken, a faith that does not tire out, a faith that enables us to accept Jehovah’s discipline. If we have such faith, we shall be found among those who will “continue to have undeserved kindness, through which we may acceptably render God sacred service with godly fear and awe.” (Hebrews 12:28) Yes, and we will continue to witness for Jehovah and not tire out.

18. How only can we continue to witness for Jehovah, not tiring out?

Jehovah Is My Helper

“Be of good courage and say: ‘Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”—HEBREWS 13:6.

JEHOVAH GOD is an unfailing source of help. The psalmist knew this from experience and could say: “Jehovah is on my side; I shall not fear. What can earthling man do to me?” (Psalm 118:6) Similar sentiments were expressed by the apostle Paul when he wrote his divinely inspired letter to Hebrew Christians.

² Evidently quoting the psalmist’s words from the Greek *Septuagint*, Paul told Hebrew fellow worshipers: “Be of good courage and say: ‘Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:6) Why did the apostle write in this way? And what can we learn from the context?

In Need of Jehovah’s Help

³ Paul was a self-sacrificing witness who had evidence that Jehovah was his Helper. God helped the apostle in the face of many hardships. Paul was imprisoned, beaten, and stoned. In his travels as a Christian minister, he experienced shipwreck as well as many other dangers. He was well-acquainted with toil, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, even nakedness. “Besides those things of an external kind,” said he, “there is what rushes in on me from day to day, the anxiety for all the congregations.” (2 Corinthians 11:24-29) Paul had that kind of concern for

1, 2. (a) Both the psalmist and the apostle Paul expressed what confidence in Jehovah? (b) What questions arise?

3. (a) Under what circumstances did Jehovah prove to be Paul’s Helper? (b) Why did Hebrew Christians especially need Jehovah as their Helper?

Hebrew Christians. Jerusalem's days were numbered, and the apostle's Jewish brothers and sisters in Judea would face great tests of faith. (Daniel 9:24-27; Luke 21:5-24) So they would need to have Jehovah as their Helper.

⁴ In opening his letter to Hebrew Christians, Paul showed that divine help would be experienced only if they listened to God's Son, Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1, 2) This point was developed in the letter. For instance, to back up this counsel, the apostle reminded his readers that the Israelites were punished for disobedience in the wilderness. How much less would Hebrew Christians escape punishment if they rejected what God said to them by means of Jesus and became apostates clinging to the Mosaic Law that was set aside by Christ's sacrifice!—Hebrews 12:24-27.

Brotherly Love in Action

⁵ The letter to the Hebrews gave prospective heirs of the heavenly Kingdom counsel on how to follow their Exemplar, Jesus Christ, 'render sacred service with godly fear and awe,' and have Jehovah as their Helper. (Hebrews 12:1-4, 28, 29) Paul urged fellow believers to meet regularly and 'incite one another to love and fine works.' (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Now he counseled: "Let your brotherly love continue."—Hebrews 13:1.

⁶ Jesus required such love of his followers, for he said: "I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among

yourselves." (John 13:34, 35) This was "a new commandment" in that it called for more than did the Mosaic Law, which said: "You must love your fellow [or, neighbor] as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) The "new commandment" did more than require that a person love his neighbor as he loved himself. It called for self-sacrificing love to the point of giving one's life for someone. Jesus' life and death exemplified that kind of love. Tertullian alluded to this identifying mark when he quoted the remarks of worldly people concerning Christians and said: "'Look,' they say, 'how they love one another . . . and how they are ready to die for each other.'" —*Apology*, chapter XXXIX, 7.

⁷ Brotherly love was evident among Jesus' disciples after Pentecost 33 C.E. So that many newly baptized believers from distant places could extend their stay in Jerusalem and learn more about God's provision for salvation through Christ, "all those who became believers were together in having all things in common, and they went selling their possessions and properties and distributing the proceeds to all, just as anyone would have the need."—Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37.

⁸ Such brotherly love exists among Jehovah's Witnesses in our time. For instance, after World War II, such love moved God's people to carry out a two-and-a-half-year relief campaign. Witnesses in Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and other lands donated clothing and money to buy food for fellow believers in the war-torn countries of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines,

7. How was brotherly love evident after Pentecost 33 C.E.?

8. What proof is there that brotherly love exists among Jehovah's Witnesses today?

Poland, and Romania. This is only an example, for God's servants more recently have shown such love for Christian victims of earthquakes in Peru and Mexico, storm winds in Jamaica, and similar disasters elsewhere. In this and many other ways, Jehovah's people 'let their brotherly love continue.'

Be Hospitable

⁹ Paul next mentioned another quality manifested by those who follow Christ, 'render sacred service with godly fear and awe,' and have Jehovah as their Helper. He urged: "Do not forget hospitality, for through it some, unknown to themselves, entertained angels." (Hebrews 13:2) Who unknowingly "entertained angels"? Well, the patriarch Abraham was the host for three angels. (Genesis 18:1-22) Two of them departed, and his nephew Lot invited these very strangers into his home in Sodom. Before they could retire, however, Lot's house was surrounded by a mob, "from boy to old man." They demanded that Lot turn over his guests for immoral purposes, but he staunchly refused. Though Lot did not know it at first, he had entertained angels, who then assisted him and his daughters to escape death when 'Jehovah rained down fire and sulphur from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah.' —Genesis 19:1-26.

¹⁰ Hospitable Christians enjoy many blessings. They hear the enriching experiences related by their guests and benefit from their spiritually rewarding association. Gaius was commended for receiving fellow believers hospitably, "and strangers at that," even as many of Jehovah's people now entertain traveling overseers. (3 John

9. (a) What godly quality is mentioned at Hebrews 13:2? (b) How did some unknowingly 'entertain angels'?

10. What blessings do hospitable Christians enjoy?



1, 5-8) Being hospitable is a qualification for appointment as an elder. (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:7, 8) It is also noteworthy that Jesus promised Kingdom blessings to sheeplike individuals who hospitably did good to his anointed "brothers." —Matthew 25:34-40.

Remember Those Persecuted

¹¹ Those desiring to have Jehovah's help and to 'render sacred service to him with godly fear and awe' must not forget fellow believers who are suffering. Paul understood the hardships endured by ill-treated Christians. Some time earlier, disciples had been scattered by persecution, and his coworker Timothy had just been released from prison. (Hebrews 13:23; Acts 11:19-21) Christian missionaries were also traveling about forming new congregations or upbuilding existing ones spiritually.

11. Why was the counsel of Hebrews 13:3 apropos?



Since many of the brothers and sisters then on the move were Gentiles, some Hebrew Christians might not have been sufficiently concerned about them. Appropriate, then, was the admonition: "Keep in mind those in prison bonds as though you have been bound with them, and those being ill-treated, since you yourselves also are still in a body."—Hebrews 13:3.

¹² The Hebrews had "expressed sympathy for those in prison" but were not to forget such faithful fellow worshipers, whether they were Jews or Gentiles. (Hebrews 10:34) But what about us? How may we show that we keep ill-treated Christians in mind? In some cases it may be appropriate for us to appeal to governmental authorities by letter in an effort to assist fellow believers imprisoned for their faith in lands where the Kingdom-preaching work is banned. Especially should we remember them in our prayers, even mentioning some by name, if possible. Their persecution affects us deeply, and Jehovah hears our earnest petitions in their behalf. (Psalm 65:2; Ephesians 6:

12. How may we apply the counsel to keep ill-treated fellow believers in mind?

17-20) While we are not in the same prison cell, it is as though we are bound with them and able to offer help and encouragement. Spirit-begotten Christians certainly sympathize with ill-treated anointed ones. (Compare 1 Corinthians 12:19-26.) These have similar concern for their persecuted companions with earthly hopes, who also suffer ill-treatment of many kinds at the hands of persecutors. Such fellow feeling is appropriate, since all of us are in a human body and liable to undergo sufferings and persecution as worshipers of Jehovah. —1 Peter 5:6-11.

Marriage Must Be Honorable

¹³ Following Christ's example and 'rendering sacred service to Jehovah with godly fear and awe' should affect our concern for others in many ways. Having said that "you yourselves also are still in a body," Paul mentioned a relationship having a bodily, or physical, aspect that afforded opportunity to show proper regard for others. (Hebrews 13:3) He gave Hebrew Christians this exhortation: "Let marriage be honorable among all, and the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers." (Hebrews 13:4) How appropriate this counsel, since sexual immorality was prevalent in the Roman Empire! Present-day Christians also need to heed these words in view of the world's low moral standards and the fact that each year thousands are disfellowshipped from the congregation because of sexual immorality.

¹⁴ Among those who did not hold marriage in high esteem were the Essenes of Paul's time. They were usually celibates, like some in clerical circles today who wrongly consider celibacy to be holier than

13. In essence, what did Paul say at Hebrews 13:4?

14. Why would you say that marriage is honorable?

matrimony. By what Paul told Hebrew Christians, however, he clearly indicated that marriage is honorable. High regard for it was evident when Naomi expressed this wish for her widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah: "May Jehovah make a gift to you, and do you find a resting-place each one in the house of her husband." (Ruth 1:9) Elsewhere, Paul himself pointed out that 'in later periods of time some would fall away from the faith, forbidding to marry.'—1 Timothy 4:1-5.

¹⁵ Hebrews once under the Law but taken into the new covenant knew the commandment: "You must not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14) But they were in an immoral world and needed the warning: "Let . . . the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers." Among the fornicators are unmarried persons who engage in sexual intercourse. Adulterers more particularly are married individuals who cohabit with those not their mates, defiling their own marriage bed. Since unrepentant practicers of fornication and adultery merit God's adverse judgment, they will neither be admitted into heavenly New Jerusalem nor enjoy life eternal on earth under Kingdom rule. (Revelation 21:1, 2, 8; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10) This warning not to defile the marriage bed should also make married Christians avoid defiling sexual conduct with their mates, though there is nothing unclean about proper physical intimacies within marriage. —See *The Watchtower*, March 15, 1983, pages 27-31.

Content With the Present Things

¹⁶ We will find contentment if we follow

15. Who were designated as fornicators and adulterers at Hebrews 13:4, and how would God judge them?

16, 17. What was said at Hebrews 13:5, and why did the Hebrews need this counsel?

our Exemplar and 'render sacred service with godly fear and awe,' confident that Jehovah is our Helper. Getting deeply involved in materialistic pursuits can be such a temptation. But Christians must not succumb to it. The Hebrews were told: "Let your manner of life be free of the love of money, while you are content with the present things. For he has said: 'I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5) Why did the Hebrews need this counsel?

¹⁷ Perhaps the Hebrews were overly concerned about money because they recalled the "great famine" in the reign of Claudius Caesar (41-54 C.E.). That famine was so bad that Christians elsewhere sent relief provisions to their brothers in Judea. (Acts 11:28, 29) According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the famine lasted for three years or more, causing oppressive poverty in Judea and Jerusalem.—*Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 2, 5; 5, 2.

¹⁸ Is there a lesson here for us? Yes, for no matter how poor we may be, we should not love money or be overly concerned about it. Instead of being anxious about material security, possibly even becoming covetous, we should be "content with the present things." Jesus said: "Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and [God's] righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:25-34) He also showed that we should concentrate on being "rich toward God" because 'our life does not result from the things we possess.' (Luke 12:13-21) If love of money is threatening our spirituality, then, let us heed Paul's counsel to the Hebrews and also remember that "godly devotion along with self-sufficiency" is "a means of great gain."—1 Timothy 6:6-8.

18. The counsel at Hebrews 13:5 provides what lesson for us?

Trust in Jehovah

¹⁹ As Jesus' followers who are seeking to 'render sacred service with godly fear and awe,' we must place our trust not in money but in our heavenly Father, whose help is vital. Whatever problems we face, we should remember his assurance: "I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) Here Paul alluded to God's words to Joshua: "I shall neither desert you nor leave you entirely." (Joshua 1:5; compare Deuteronomy 31:6, 8.) Jehovah never deserted Joshua, and He will not forsake us if we trust in Him.

²⁰ God's unfailing help will be emphasized among Jehovah's Witnesses in the months ahead, for their 1990 yeartext reads: "Be of good courage and say: 'Jehovah is my helper.'" These words are found at Hebrews 13:6, where Paul quoted the psalmist and told the Hebrews: "So that

19. What assurance did God give Joshua, and how should this affect us?

20. (a) What is the yeartext for 1990? (b) Without fear, what should we continue to do?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ Why did Hebrew Christians especially need Jehovah's help?
- ☐ How have Jehovah's people 'let their brotherly love continue'?
- ☐ Why be hospitable?
- ☐ What can we do to show that we remember ill-treated fellow believers?
- ☐ Why must marriage be kept honorable?

we may be of good courage and say: 'Jehovah is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' " (Psalm 118:6) Though persecuted, we are not fearful, for humans can do no more than God permits. (Psalm 27:1) Even if we must die as integrity keepers, we have the resurrection hope. (Acts 24:15) So let us continue to follow our Exemplar in 'rendering sacred service with godly fear and awe,' confident that Jehovah is our Helper.

Offer Sacrifices That Please Jehovah

"Through [Jesus Christ] let us always offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name."—HEBREWS 13:15.

JEHOVAH is the Helper of those offering acceptable sacrifices to him. Therefore, his favor once rested upon Israelites who offered animal sacrifices. But what happened after they repeatedly sinned? Through the prophet Hosea, they

1. What did Jehovah urge sinful Israelites to do?

were urged: "Do come back, O Israel, to Jehovah your God, for you have stumbled in your error. Take with yourselves words and come back to Jehovah. Say to him, all you people, 'May you pardon error; and accept what is good, and we will offer in return the young bulls of our lips.'"—Hosea 14:1, 2.

² So it was that God's ancient people were encouraged to offer to Jehovah God 'the young bulls of their lips.' What were these? Why, sacrifices of sincere praise! Alluding to this prophecy, the apostle Paul urged Hebrew Christians to "offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name." (Hebrews 13:15) What can help Jehovah's Witnesses to offer such sacrifices today?

"Imitate Their Faith"

³ Applying the counsel Paul gave the Hebrews will enable us to offer acceptable sacrifices to our Great Helper, Jehovah God. For instance, the apostle wrote: "Remember those who are taking the lead among you, who have spoken the word of God to you, and as you contemplate how their conduct turns out imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7) To whom did Paul refer when he said, "Remember those who are taking the lead among you," or "are governors of you"?—*New World Translation Reference Bible*, footnote.

⁴ Paul spoke of those "taking the lead," or governing. (Verses 7, 17, 24) The English word "govern" is derived through Latin from the Greek *ky-ber-na'o*, meaning to "steer a ship, direct, govern." Christian elders govern by using their "abilities to direct" (Greek, *ky-ber-ne'seis*) in providing leadership and guidance in local congregations. (1 Corinthians 12:28) But the apostles and other elders in Jerusalem served as a body to give guidance and counsel to all the congregations. (Acts 15:1, 2, 27-29) Today, therefore, a governing body of el-

ders provides spiritual oversight for Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide.

⁵ Local elders and members of the Governing Body take the lead among us; hence, we should respect them and pray that God grant them the wisdom needed to govern the congregation. (Compare Ephesians 1:15-17.) How fitting that we remember any 'who spoke the word of God to us'! Timothy was taught not only by his mother and grandmother but also later by Paul and others. (2 Timothy 1:5, 6; 3:14) So Timothy could contemplate how the conduct of those taking the lead turned out and was able to imitate their faith.

⁶ Such individuals as Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Rahab, and Moses exercised faith. (Hebrews 11:1-40) Thus, we can imitate their faith without hesitation because they died loyal to God. But we can also 'imitate the faith' of loyal men now taking the lead among us. Of course, we do not follow imperfect humans, for we keep our eyes on Christ. As Bible translator Edgar J. Goodspeed said: "The heroes of old are not the believer's models, for in Christ he has a better pattern . . . The Christian runner must fix his eyes upon Jesus." Yes, 'Christ suffered for us, leaving a model for us to follow his steps closely.'—1 Peter 2:21; Hebrews 12:1-3.

⁷ Focusing attention on God's Son, Paul added: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) Faithful witnesses such as Stephen and James had displayed immovable integrity, after Jesus' steadfast pattern. (Acts 7:1-60; 12:1, 2) Since they were willing to die as followers of Christ, their faith is worthy of our imitation. In the past, at

2. What were 'the young bulls of the lips,' and how did the apostle Paul allude to Hosea's prophecy?

3. In essence, what did the apostle Paul say at Hebrews 13:7, raising what question?

4. (a) According to the Greek text, what are those "taking the lead" doing? (b) Who are those "taking the lead" among Jehovah's Witnesses?

5. Why and how should we pray for congregation elders and members of the Governing Body?

6. Whose faith should we imitate, but whom do we follow?

7. How should Hebrews 13:8 affect our attitude toward suffering for Jesus Christ?

present, and even in the future, godly persons do not beg off from suffering martyrdom as Jesus' disciples.

Avoid False Teachings

⁸ The unchangeableness of Jesus' personality and teachings should make us cling to what he and his apostles taught. The Hebrews were told: "Do not be carried away with various and strange teachings; for it is fine for the heart to be given firmness by undeserved kindness, not by eatables, by which those who occupy themselves with them have not been benefited."—Hebrews 13:9.

⁹ Jews pointed to such things as the spectacular giving of the Law at Mount Sinai and the lasting kingship of David. But Paul showed Hebrew Christians that although the instituting of the Law covenant was awesome, Jehovah more forcefully bore witness with signs, portents, powerful works, and distributions of holy spirit when the new covenant was inaugurated. (Acts 2:1-4; Hebrews 2:2-4) Christ's heavenly Kingdom cannot be shaken, as was the earthly kingship of Davidic rulers in 607 B.C.E. (Hebrews 1:8, 9; 12:28) Moreover, Jehovah gathers anointed ones before something far more awe-inspiring than the miraculous display at Mount Sinai, for they approach heavenly Mount Zion.—Hebrews 12:18-27.

¹⁰ The Hebrews therefore needed to avoid being "carried away with various and strange teachings" of Judaizers. (Galatians 5:1-6) Not by such teachings but 'by God's undeserved kindness can the heart be given firmness' so as to remain steadfast in the truth. Some apparently argued

8. How would you paraphrase Paul's words at Hebrews 13:9?

9. To what superior things did Paul point in the letter to the Hebrew Christians?

10. According to Hebrews 13:9, by what is the heart given firmness?

about foods and sacrifices, for Paul said that the heart was not made firm "by eatables, by which those who occupy themselves with them have not been benefited." Spiritual benefits result from godly devotion and appreciation for the ransom, not from undue concern about eating certain foods and observing particular days. (Romans 14:5-9) Moreover, Christ's sacrifice made Levitical sacrifices ineffective.—Hebrews 9:9-14; 10:5-10.

Sacrifices That Please God

¹¹ Levitical priests ate meat from sacrificial animals, but Paul wrote: "We have an altar from which those who do sacred service at the tent [the tabernacle] have no authority to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is taken into the holy place by the high priest for sin are burned up outside the camp" on Atonement Day. (Hebrews 13:10, 11; Leviticus 16:27; 1 Corinthians 9:13) Christians have a figurative altar denoting approach to God on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice that atones for sin and results in Jehovah's forgiveness and salvation to eternal life.

¹² Paul does not press the analogy with Atonement Day, yet he adds: "Hence Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate" of Jerusalem. There Christ died and provided the completely effective propitiatory sacrifice. (Hebrews 13:12; John 19:17; 1 John 2:1, 2) The apostle Paul urged fellow anointed Christians: "Let us, then, go forth to him [Christ] outside the camp, bearing the reproach he bore, for we do not have here a city that continues, but we are earnestly seeking the one to come." (Hebrews 13:13, 14; Leviticus 16:10) Though we are

11. (a) What is the essence of Paul's words at Hebrews 13:10, 11? (b) What figurative altar do Christians have?

12. At Hebrews 13:12-14, what were anointed Christians urged to do?



Sacrifices pleasing to God include making shepherding calls and building up fellow Christians with loving counsel

reproached as Jesus was, we persevere as Jehovah's Witnesses. We 'repudiate ungodliness and worldly desires and live with soundness of mind and righteousness and godly devotion amid this present system of things' while looking to the new world. (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:13; 1 John 2:15-17) And anointed ones among us earnestly seek the "city," the heavenly Kingdom.—Hebrews 12:22.

¹³ Paul next mentioned sacrifices that please God, writing: "Through him [Jesus] let us always offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name. Moreover, do not forget the doing of good and the

13. Sacrifices that please God do not consist simply of what?

sharing of things with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Hebrews 13:15, 16) Christian sacrifices do not consist simply of humanitarian works. People in general do such things. For instance, this happened when people of many nations came to the aid of earthquake victims in Soviet Armenia in late 1988.

¹⁴ The sacred service we render to Jehovah "with godly fear and awe" is founded on the self-sacrificing kind of love Jesus displayed. (Hebrews 12:28; John 13:34; 15:13) This service stresses our preaching work, for through Christ as High Priest 'we offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips which make public declaration to his name.' (Hosea 14:2; Romans 10:10-15; Hebrews 7:26) Of course, we "do not forget the doing of good and the sharing of things

14. Offering God an acceptable sacrifice lays stress on what work?

with others," including, even, others than "those related to us in the faith." (Galatians 6:10) Especially when fellow Christians experience calamity or are in need or distress, we render loving help materially and spiritually. Why? Because we love one another. We also want them to be able to hold fast the public declaration of their hope without wavering, "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."—Hebrews 10:23-25; James 1:27.

Be Submissive

¹⁵ To render acceptable sacrifices, we must cooperate fully with God's organization. Without harping on the matter of authority, Paul wrote: "Be obedient to those who are taking the lead among you and be submissive, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will render an account; that they may do this with joy and not with sighing, for this would be damaging to you." (Hebrews 13:17) We should respect the appointed elders who take the lead in the congregation, so that they do not have to sigh with distress over our lack of cooperation. Our failing to be submissive would prove burdensome to the overseers and would result in our spiritual harm. A cooperative spirit makes it easier for elders to render assistance and contributes to unity and the progress of the Kingdom-preaching work.—Psalm 133:1-3.

¹⁶ How appropriate that we be submissive to those taking the lead! They teach at our meetings and help us in the ministry. As shepherds, they seek our welfare. (1 Peter 5:2, 3) They help us to maintain a good relationship with God and the congrega-

15. (a) How would you paraphrase the counsel of Hebrews 13:17? (b) Why show respect for those who are taking the lead?

16. Why is it appropriate to be submissive to those taking the lead among us?

tion. (Acts 20:28-30) By submitting to wise and loving oversight, we show respect for the Supreme Overseer, Jehovah God, and his Deputy Overseer, Jesus Christ.—1 Peter 2:25; Revelation 1:1; 2:1-3:22.

Be Prayerful

¹⁷ Since Paul and his associates were separated from the Hebrews, perhaps because of persecution, he said: "Carry on prayer for us, for we trust we have an honest conscience, as we wish to conduct ourselves honestly in all things. But I exhort you more especially to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner." (Hebrews 13:18, 19) If Paul had been a devious person with a seared conscience, what right would he have had to ask the Hebrews to pray that he join them? (Proverbs 3:32; 1 Timothy 4:1, 2) Of course, he was an honest minister, who in good conscience withstood Judaizers. (Acts 20:17-27) Paul was also confident that he would be able to rejoin the Hebrews sooner if they prayed for that to occur.

¹⁸ Paul's request for the prayers of the Hebrews shows that it is proper for Christians to pray for one another, even by name. (Compare Ephesians 6:17-20.) But if we expect others to pray for us, should we not be like the apostle and make sure that we 'have an honest conscience and are conducting ourselves honestly in all things'? Are you honest in all your dealings? And do you have the same confidence in prayer that Paul had?—1 John 5:14, 15.

Closing Words and Exhortation

¹⁹ Having sought the prayers of the He-

17. What prayers did Paul request, and why could he rightly ask for them?

18. If we expect others to pray for us, what questions might we ask ourselves?

19. (a) What was Paul's prayerful wish for the Hebrews? (b) Why is the new covenant an everlasting covenant?

brews, Paul expressed a prayerful wish, saying: "Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of an everlasting covenant, our Lord Jesus, equip you with every good thing to do his will, performing in us through Jesus Christ that which is well-pleasing in his sight; to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (Hebrews 13:20, 21) With a peaceful earth in view, "the God of peace" resurrected Christ to immortal life in heaven, where Jesus presented the merit of his shed blood that validated the new covenant. (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Luke 22:20) It is an everlasting covenant because those on earth receive permanent benefits from the services of the 144,000 spiritual sons of God who reign with Jesus in heaven and who are in the new covenant. (Revelation 14:1-4; 20:4-6) It is through Christ that God, to whom we ascribe glory, 'equips us with every good thing needed to do his will and be well-pleasing in his sight.'

²⁰ Uncertain about how the Hebrews

20. How would you paraphrase and explain Paul's closing exhortation to the Hebrew Christians?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ How did the letter to the Hebrews help them to avoid false teachings?
- ☐ Sacrifices that please God focus on what important work?
- ☐ Who are "those taking the lead," and why be submissive to them?
- ☐ How does the letter to the Hebrews highlight prayer?
- ☐ Why can we say that the letter to Hebrew Christians is of lasting value?

would react to his letter, Paul said: "Now I exhort you, brothers, to bear with this word of encouragement [to listen to God's Son, not Judaizers], for I have, indeed, composed a letter to you in few words [considering its weighty content]. Take note that our brother Timothy has been released [from prison], with whom, if he comes quite soon, I shall see you." Probably writing from Rome, the apostle hoped that he along with Timothy would visit the Hebrews in Jerusalem. Then Paul said: "Give my greetings to all those who are taking the lead [as hardworking elders] among you and to all the holy ones [those having the heavenly hope]. Those in Italy send you their greetings. The undeserved kindness [of God] be with all of you."—Hebrews 13:22-25.

A Letter of Lasting Value

²¹ Perhaps more than any other book of the Holy Scriptures, the letter to the Hebrews helps us to understand the significance of the sacrifices offered under the Law. The epistle clearly shows that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the only one that provides the needed ransom for sinful humankind. And a notable message found in the letter is that we should listen to God's Son.

²² Furthermore, as we have seen in the two previous articles, we have other reasons to be grateful for the divinely inspired letter to the Hebrews. It helps us not to tire out in our ministry, and it fills us with courage, for we know that Jehovah is our Helper. Moreover, it encourages us to use our lips and all our faculties unselfishly in rendering sacred service day and night and offering heartfelt sacrifices that please our praiseworthy and loving God, Jehovah.

21. The letter to the Hebrews helps us to understand what major points?

22. What are some reasons for us to be grateful for the letter to the Hebrews?



Harper's Weekly

“St. Nicholas Day”

Where Did It Come From?

WALK through the streets of Belgium in early December, and you will see a captivating sight: small groups of children going from house to house, singing short rhymes called “St. Nicholas songs.” Householders respond to the charming youngsters by rewarding them with fruit, candy, or money.

The occasion? “St. Nicholas Day”! In the United States and other lands, “St. Nicholas,” or “Santa Claus,” is connected with Christmas day. But in Belgium, the beard-

ed “saint” has a day of his own. Indeed, “St. Nicholas” (*Sinterklaas*, or *Sint Nicolaas*), whose day of festivity falls on the sixth of December, is one of the most popular “saints” in Belgium and the Netherlands. Many a church, chapel, street, or housing quarter has been named after him. He is traditionally known as “the great friend of the children” who readily distributes gifts to them on his feast day.

The evening before that holiday, the young children place one of their shoes or

slippers near the chimney while they sing their little rhymes. They have been told that "Saint" Nicholas and his black servant (called Black Peter) will arrive that night by steamship from Spain. Afterward, the "saint" will ride his gray horse across the rooftops, followed by Black Peter, who carries a rod and a large bag containing toys and sweets. Nicholas also brings apples, nuts, and other produce of the field. Often he leaves a kind of brown, spiced biscuit called *speculaas*, or bishop's biscuits, which are baked in special, cleverly designed shapes.

The recipients? Children who have been good during the past year. The disobedient ones, though, will supposedly get the rod; or worse, they may be put into Black Peter's bag and carried off! Understandably, then, the children are eager to appease these nocturnal visitors. Thus, a glass of gin awaits the "saint," and a carrot or a few sugar cubes are laid ready for his horse.

Many parents in Belgium consider "St. Nicholas Day" the most joyful time of the year. They delight to watch the expectant faces of their little ones who are eager to find out what the "good saint" has brought them! So they pass on the legends to their offspring, little knowing where these customs originated. If they knew, perhaps they would be shocked.

"Saint" Nicholas and Odin

The *Oosthoeke Encyclopedia* explains: "[St. Nicholas'] celebration in the household sprang from the church festivity (including surprises for the children) which in turn sprang from pre-Christian elements. Saint Nicholas, who rides on the rooftops, is the pagan god Wodan [Odin]. . . . Saint Nicholas was also the leader of the wild chase in which the souls of the dead visit the earth."

Yes, the Teutons believed that Odin, or Wodan, their chief god, led the souls of the dead on a furious cross-country ride during the "twelve bad days" between Christmas and Epiphany (January 6). The resulting gale carried along the seeds of the produce of the fields, stimulating fertility. The apples, nuts, and other autumn produce given around "St. Nicholas Day"? These were symbols of fertility. Ancient people believed that they could appease their gods by giving them presents during the cold, dark winter days. This would result in increased fertility for man, animal, and soil.

Odin was accompanied by his servant Eckhard, the forerunner of Black Peter, who also carried a rod. As recently as the Middle Ages, it was the popular belief that certain trees and plants could render humans fertile and that merely striking a woman with a branch of such a tree sufficed to make her pregnant.

The book *Feest-en Vierdagen in kerk en volksgebruik* (Holidays and Celebrations in the Church and in Popular Customs) mentions a few other similarities between Odin and "Saint" Nicholas: "Wodan, too, filled the boots and wooden shoes placed by the chimney but with gold. For Wodan's steed, hay and straw were also placed in the wooden shoe. The last sheaf of the field was also for the horse."

The book *Sint Nicolaas*, by B. S. P. van den Aardweg, points to a few other striking similarities:

"St. Nicholas: a tall, powerful figure on a white horse. He has a long white beard, a crosier in his hand, and a miter on his head . . . with a wide, flowing bishop's cloak.

"Wodan: a person of tall stature with a white beard. He wears a wide-brimmed hat pulled deeply over his eyes. In his hand he holds a magic spear. He is clad in

a wide mantle and rides his loyal gray horse Sleipnir.

"There are more of these apparent similarities: Wodan rode his gray horse through the air and shuddering people offered cakes with filling in addition to meat and produce of the fields. St. Nicholas rides on the rooftops and children prepare hay, carrots, and water for the horse. Gingersnaps and the rod were symbols of fertility long before the beginning of the St. Nicholas festivities."

Modern-Day Fertility Rites

A number of other customs in connection with "Saint" Nicholas likewise betray their pagan origins. For example, in northern areas on December 4, young boys from 12 to 18 years of age appear on the streets. Dressed in grotesque costumes adorned with feathers, shells, and other regional products, the masked boys represent "little Saint Nicholases," or *Sunne Klæzjen*. During the evening of the following day, men 18 years and older get their turn. In the early evening, they rove the streets. Using brooms, buffalo horns, and cudgels, they drive away all the women, girls, and little boys they happen to meet. Young girls are made to dance or jump over a stick.

The purpose of all of this? Again it was fertility—the ever-recurring concern of ancient cultures. Winter was a dark and anxious period, and it was often viewed as the time during which the fertility god was asleep or dead. It was thought that by various means the deity could be given new life or that the god or goddess could at least be given some assistance. Gifts, dances, noise, blows from a fertility rod—all of these were viewed as ways to expel wicked spirits and increase fertility in humans, animals, and the soil.

So when young girls jump over the stick, they mimic their ancestors who be-

lieved that the height to which they jumped would be the height to which flax would grow. By driving out women and children, the young men reenact the rite of driving out wicked spirits.

A Decision for True Worshipers

Why have such rites become a part of so-called Christianity? Because centuries ago, church missionaries did not insist that their converts follow the Scriptural command: "Get out from among them, and separate yourselves . . . and quit touching the unclean thing." (2 Corinthians 6:17) Instead of eliminating pagan practices, Christendom's missionaries actually perpetuated these customs by modifying and using them. Such customs were then spread throughout the world.

Dutch emigrants who settled in North America took the "Saint" Nicholas celebration with them. In time the name was corrupted to "Santa Claus." The stately bishop was transformed into a red-cheeked, obese fellow dressed in a bright-red suit. His bishop's miter was exchanged for an elf's hat and the white horse for a sleigh pulled by reindeer. Santa Claus, however, continued to be a gift bringer, although his visitation was shifted to Christmas Eve.

In Protestant areas of Germany, the Catholic "Saint" Nicholas was replaced by the more neutral "Father Christmas." The pagan elements, however, remain clearly discernible to this day.

Jesus Christ said that "true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth." (John 4:23) For sincere worshipers, "Saint" Nicholas customs present a real challenge: Will these worshipers continue to perpetuate the ancient practices of the Odin cult, or will they break free from vestiges of heathenism? This is a good time of the year to think about that serious question.

Insight on the News

"No Part of the World"

When more than a hundred thousand persons crowded West Berlin's Olympic Stadium for the final session of the German Evangelical Church Conference, church president Helmut Simon urged them to get involved in politics.

Simon listed such issues as the proper use of resources, preservation of the ecology, the establishment of a just economic system, an end to the arms race, and the removal of unemployment. He felt that these were to be among mankind's unsolved threats. To rally his listeners to the urgency of these issues, the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reports that "he said nothing better could happen to the community in West and East than to have their citizens get involved in politics." Simon encouraged all in attendance "to consider such involvement as a duty and to view the church conference as a Protestant civil rights movement."

Can true Christians, however, rightly involve themselves in such political movements? Did not Jesus say that his followers "are no part of the world, just as [he was] no part of the world"? (John 17:16) Jesus taught his followers to pray for God's Kingdom as the only real hope for mankind. Why? Because, as the prophet Daniel long ago foretold, God's Kingdom "will crush and put an end to" the

failing worldly governments, "and it itself will stand to times indefinite."—Daniel 2:44.

No Sin to Steal?

Is stealing a sin? Not always, according to Catholic priest Ivo Storniolo. *O Estado de S. Paulo*, a Brazilian newspaper, quotes Storniolo as stating that "God blesses and makes legitimate the stealing done by the poor." Later, he said he was referring "only to those poor who steal in order to survive." In the view of this priest, delinquent youths who steal should not be punished, for they have been "previously robbed by the powerful." "In his opinion," notes *O Estado*, "marginais [social outcasts or misfits, generally poor, unemployed] are also 'among God's chosen ones.'"

Does the Bible support such reasoning? Not at all. While Jesus encouraged his followers to show compassion to the needy, he never said that social problems, such as poverty, were a justification for theft. Rather, as the apostle Paul wrote: "Anyone who was a thief must stop stealing; instead he should exert himself at some honest job with his own hands so that he may have something to share with those in need."—Ephesians 4:28, *The New Jerusalem Bible*.

Idolatrous Commerce

A national exhibition of religious objects and furniture, held in the north of Italy, allowed 97 companies to present

their products. Among the items displayed was a heated, sound absorbent confessional with hygienic grating and padded chair. Also some "Pope John" odorless votive candles with 40-hour timers; computerized concerts of church bells; "safe-like" armored charity boxes; educational videos for children (i.e., *The Bible according to Johnny*); and fake-leather briefcases containing the essentials for an open-air Mass.

Clerical fashion was not excluded from the fair. Two "designers of religious fashions" explained to the Italian paper *La Stampa* that "most of all, young priests want a new look, pure wool with German-style embroidering, linear, uniform, plain yet rich. And business, thanks to God, is going well."

Religious tourism is also creating revenue for commerce. "Each year there are 15 million people that travel for religious reasons, and tour operators, religious or not, compete to have them," reports the Italian paper *La Repubblica*. Illustrating this, the Italian newspaper *Il Messaggero* says concerning "Saint" Anthony's basilica in Padua that "people drop millions not only in hotels but especially in the money boxes of the basilica for holy pictures and keepsakes."

It is no wonder that when Christendom, along with all false religion, is destroyed, the traveling merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her. As Revelation 18:11 continues: "There is no one to buy their full stock anymore."

Do You Remember?

Have you given careful thought to recent issues of *The Watchtower*? If so, you will probably be able to recall the following:

□ In what sense does Paul use the term "mediator" when referring to Jesus at 1 Timothy 2: 5, 6?

In this text, Paul uses the Greek word *me-si'tes* for "mediator," which term has a legal significance, so he is not using this word in the broad sense common in many languages. Hence, Paul is not saying that Jesus is Mediator between God and all mankind. Rather, he is referring to Christ as legal Mediator of the new covenant, which laid the basis for Christ's anointed followers to share with him in his heavenly Kingdom. (2 Corinthians 5:1, 5; Ephesians 1:13, 14; Hebrews 8: 7-13)—8/15, pages 30, 31.

□ At Matthew 25:34, what does Jesus mean when he says to sheeplike ones: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world"?

Jesus did not mean that these sheeplike ones will reign with him in heaven. Instead, the sheep will inherit the earthly realm of the Kingdom prepared for them "from the founding of the world" of redeemable mankind. In this way they become the earthly children of their "Eternal Father," the King, Christ Jesus. (Isaiah 9: 6, 7)—9/1, page 20.

□ Would it be necessary for the anointed remnant to be alive on earth to welcome back resurrected faithful ones who died prior to 33 C.E.?

No, this would not be necessary. Many of the great crowd who will survive the great tribulation are now being trained to take care

of organizational responsibility. Therefore, they would be able to take care of that situation and to acquaint the resurrected ones with the "new earth" under the "new heavens." (2 Peter 3:13)—9/1, pages 20, 21.

□ What things are involved in getting "saved"? (Acts 16:30)

The prime requirement is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will get saved." (Acts 16:31) This involves taking in accurate knowledge of God's purposes and his way of salvation. Then faith has to be exercised in Jesus Christ as the Chief Agent of salvation. (John 3:16; Titus 2:14) This places the Christian in a saved condition, but he must now persevere in doing God's will and continue to adhere to all of God's requirements for the rest of his life. Only then will he be saved to eternal life. (Matthew 24:13)—9/15, page 7.

□ How did Noah's faith condemn the world? (Hebrews 11:7)

Noah's obedience and righteous acts demonstrated that others besides him and his family could have survived the Flood if they had been willing to change their life-style. Despite pressures from his own imperfect flesh, the world around him, and the Devil, Noah proved that it was possible to live a life that pleased God. —10/1, page 11.

□ Why should we guard against even light gossip?

We may make a remark not meant to hurt anyone, but this seemingly innocent gossip may become hurtful when it is repeated, embellished, or twisted, so that it damages the reputation of the one talked about, robbing

him of his good name. (Proverbs 20:19)—10/15, page 13.

□ What are the advantages when marriage partners are evenly yoked?

Husband and wife are in a position to encourage each other as to worshiping their God. Also, they can look to the Scriptures for guidance in settling their differences. —11/1, page 20.

□ How can the Ten Commandments help us today?

They reveal Jehovah's viewpoint on matters and serve as reminders of our obligation to love God and neighbor. (Matthew 22: 37-39; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17)—11/15, pages 5, 6.

□ On what three occasions did God speak in the hearing of Jesus and other men?

The first occasion was at the time of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer (Matthew 3:17); the second was when Jesus was transfigured in the sight of James, John, and Peter (Matthew 17:5); and the third was on Nisan 10, four days before Jesus' death, when God's voice was heard by a crowd standing in the temple. (John 12:28)—12/1, page 8.

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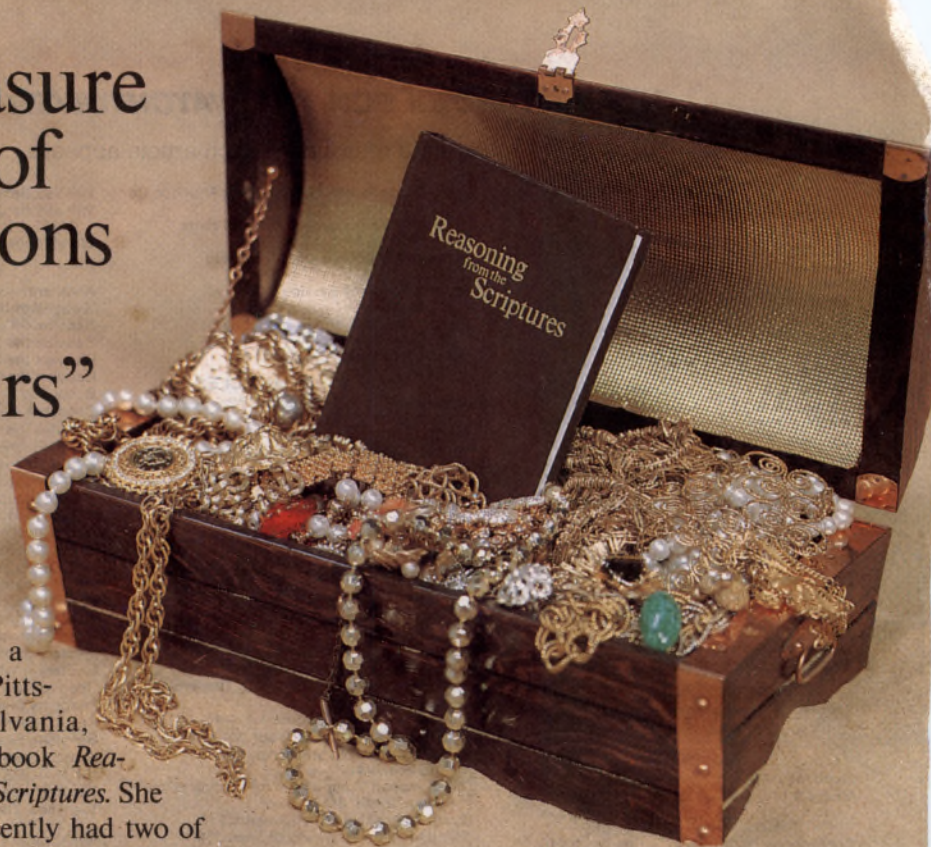
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“A treasure chest of questions and answers”

That is what a woman from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, called the handbook *Reasoning From the Scriptures*. She explained: “I recently had two of Jehovah’s Witnesses come to my home. . . . One mistakenly left (at my home) a book entitled *Reasoning From the Scriptures*. I must admit, I ransacked that book! I sat reading it for hours. I was extremely impressed. . . . This book was to me like a treasure chest of questions and answers, many that I’ve asked myself.”



Reasoning
from the
Scriptures