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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



DO ALL RELIGIONS PLEASE GOD?

THE WATCHTOWER®

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these 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 God's 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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DO ALL RELIGIONS PLEASE GOD?

Do you feel that all religions please God? Probably any form of worship that you know about encourages good conduct, at least to some extent. But is that enough to please God?

SOME say, 'Just be sincere in your worship, and God will be pleased. There is good in all religions.' For example, the Bahai Faith has carried this view to the point of adopting into its beliefs the nine principal religions of the world. This religious group holds that all of these are of divine origin and are facets of one truth. How could this be so?

Further, you have a right to wonder how a religion could please God when it orders its members to plant nerve gas in public places, with the possibility of killing many people. That charge has been leveled against one religious group in Japan. Or is God pleased with a religion that causes its members to commit suicide? A few years ago, that happened to followers of the religious leader Jim Jones.

Looking back to earlier times, we may well ask, Can religions please God when they foment warfare, as in the case of the Thirty Years' War, fought from 1618 to 1648? According to *The Universal History of the World*, that religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants was "one of the most terrible wars of European history."

The religious Crusades from the 11th to the 13th century also resulted in horrible bloodshed. In the first Crusade, for example, the so-called Christian crusaders brutally slaughtered the Muslim and Jewish residents of Jerusalem.

Consider, too, what happened during the Inquisition, which



Thousands were murdered during the Inquisition

(Psalm 119:160; John 17:17) The fruitage of God-approved worship must conform to Jehovah God's standards.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ indicated that there would be prophets falsely claiming to represent God. Jesus said: "Be on the watch for the false prophets that come to you in sheep's covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will recognize them. Never do people gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? Likewise every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit; a good tree cannot bear worthless fruit, neither can a rotten tree produce fine fruit. Every tree not producing fine fruit gets cut down and thrown into the fire. Really, then, by their fruits you will recognize those men." (Matthew 7:15-20) These words show that we need to be on guard spiritually. We may think that a religious leader or group is acceptable to God and Christ, but we could be mistaken.

A Need for Caution

Though a religion claims to have God's approval and its ministers read passages from the Bible, that does not mean that it is a form of worship pleasing to God. Its leaders might even do impressive things that make it seem as if God were working through them. Nevertheless, the religion could still be false, not producing fruitage acceptable to God. Magic-practicing Egyptian priests of Moses' day were able to do impressive things, but they certainly did not have God's approval.—Exodus 7:8-22.

Today as in the past, many religions promote human ideas and philosophies instead of adhering to what God declares to be the truth. Especially appropriate, then, is the

began in the 13th century and lasted about 600 years. Thousands were tortured and burned to death at the order of religious leaders. In his book *Vicars of Christ—The Dark Side of the Papacy*, Peter De Rosa states: "In the pope's name, [the inquisitors] were responsible for the most savage and sustained onslaught on human decency in the history of the [human] race." Regarding the Dominican inquisitor Torquemada of Spain, De Rosa says: "Appointed in 1483, he ruled tyrannically for fifteen years. His victims numbered over 114,000 of whom 10,220 were burned."

Of course, the religions of Christendom are not the only ones that are bloodguilty. In his work *Pensées*, French philosopher Blaise Pascal observed: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."

Recognized by Their Fruits

From God's standpoint, a religion's acceptability is not based on just one factor. For a religion to be acceptable to him, its teachings and activities must conform to his written Word of truth, the Bible.

WHAT JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES BELIEVE

BELIEF	BIBLICAL BASIS
God's name is Jehovah	Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18
The Bible is God's Word	John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
Jesus Christ is God's Son	Matthew 3:16, 17; John 14:28
Mankind did not evolve but was created	Genesis 1:27; 2:7
Human death is due to the first man's sin	Romans 5:12
The soul ceases to exist at death	Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Ezekiel 18:4
Hell is mankind's common grave	Job 14:13; Revelation 20:13, King James Version
Resurrection is the hope for the dead	John 5:28, 29; 11:25; Acts 24:15
Christ gave his earthly life as the ransom for obedient humans	Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:1, 2
Prayers must be directed only to Jehovah through Christ	Matthew 6:9; John 14:6, 13, 14
Bible's laws on morals must be obeyed	1 Corinthians 6:9, 10
Images must not be used in worship	Exodus 20:4-6; 1 Corinthians 10:14
Spiritism must be avoided	Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Galatians 5:19-21
Blood must not be taken into one's body	Genesis 9:3, 4; Acts 15:28, 29
Jesus' true followers keep separate from the world	John 15:19; 17:16; James 1:27; 4:4
Christians witness, declaring the good news	Isaiah 43:10-12; Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20
Baptism by complete water immersion symbolizes dedication to God	Mark 1:9, 10; John 3:22; Acts 19:4, 5
Religious titles are unscriptural	Job 32:21, 22; Matthew 23:8-12
We are living in "the time of the end"	Daniel 12:4; Matthew 24:3-14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5
Christ's presence is invisible	Matthew 24:3; John 14:19; 1 Peter 3:18
Satan is this world's invisible ruler	John 12:31; 1 John 5:19
God will destroy the present wicked system of things	Daniel 2:44; Revelation 16:14, 16; 18:1-8
God's Kingdom under Christ will rule the earth in righteousness	Isaiah 9:6, 7; Daniel 7:13, 14; Matthew 6:10
A "little flock" is to rule in heaven with Christ	Luke 12:32; Revelation 14:1-4; 20:4
Others whom God approves will receive eternal life on a paradise earth	Luke 23:43; John 3:16; Revelation 21:1-4



Bible's warning: "Look out: perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey through the philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary things of the world and not according to Christ." —Colossians 2:8.

After speaking about good and bad fruitage, Jesus said: "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 expel demons in your name, and perform many powerful works in your name?' And yet then I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness." —Matthew 7:21-23.

Examine the Fruitage

Clearly, then, it is essential to look at the fruitage of a religion before concluding that it is acceptable to God. For instance, is the religion involved with politics? Then note these words, recorded at James 4:4: "Whoever . . . wants to be a friend of the

The Crusades resulted in horrible bloodshed

world is constituting himself an enemy of God." Moreover, Jesus said of his true followers: "They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world." (John 17:16) The religion that is good in God's eyes is not involved with the politics of this world, which "is lying in the power of the wicked one," the invisible spirit creature Satan the Devil. (1 John 5:19) Instead, the religion that God approves loyally advocates his Kingdom under Jesus Christ and declares the good news concerning that heavenly government. —Mark 13:10.

Is a religion acceptable to God if it advocates civil disobedience? The answer is obvious if we heed the apostle Paul's counsel: "Continue reminding them to be in subjection and be obedient to governments and authorities as rulers, to be ready for every good work." (Titus 3:1) Of course, Jesus showed that his followers were to "pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." —Mark 12:17.

Suppose a religion encourages participation in the wars of the nations. First Pe-

ter 3:11 urges us to “do what is good” and to “seek peace and pursue it.” How can a religion please God if its members are willing to kill their fellow worshipers of another country in warfare? Members of the religion that has God’s approval reflect his principal quality—love. And Jesus said: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.” (John 13:35) That love has nothing in common with the violent hatred fostered in the wars of the nations.

True religion changes warlike people into lovers of peace. This was foretold in these words: “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.” (Isaiah 2:4) Instead of spewing out words of hatred, those who practice true worship comply with the command: “You must love your neighbor as yourself.”—Matthew 22:39.

Those practicing true religion strive to live by the high standards of Jehovah God, refusing to adopt immoral life-styles. God’s Word states: “What! Do you not know that unrighteous persons will not inherit God’s

kingdom? Do not be misled. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men kept for unnatural purposes, nor men who lie with men, nor thieves, nor greedy persons, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit God’s kingdom. And yet that is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean, but you have been sanctified, but you have been declared righteous in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God.” —1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

A Time for Decisive Action

It is essential to discern the difference between false worship and true religion. In the Bible book of Revelation, the world empire of false religion is identified as “Babylon the Great,” a symbolic harlot “with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication.” She is bloodguilty and holds a golden cup “full of disgusting things and the unclean things of her fornication.” (Revelation 17:1-6) There is nothing acceptable to God about her.

This is a time for decisive action. To sincere people still in Babylon the Great, our loving Creator sends out this call: “Get out of her, my people, if you do not want to share with her in her sins, and if you do not want to receive part of her plagues.”—Revelation 18:4.

If you wish to practice religion that pleases God, why not get better acquainted with Jehovah’s Witnesses? The accompanying chart lists some of their beliefs, along with Scriptural reasons for these. Check your Bible to see if the beliefs of the Witnesses harmonize with God’s Word. Investigate to find out if their religion produces the kind of fruitage you would expect of true worship. If you find that it does, you will have discovered the religion that pleases God.

True religion is known by its good fruitage



Peter Preaches at Pentecost

IT WAS a mild spring morning in the year 33 C.E. The air was charged with excitement! A bustling crowd of Jews and proselytes flooded the streets of Jerusalem. They had come from such places as Elam, Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Egypt, and Rome. How fascinating it was to see them in their native attire and to hear their varied languages! Some had traveled more than a thousand miles to be present for this special occasion. What was it? Pentecost—a joyous Jewish festival marking the end of the barley harvest.—Leviticus 23:15-21.

Smoke billowed from offerings on the temple altar, and the Levites sang the Hallel (Psalms 113 to 118). Just before 9:00 a.m., something startling happened. From heaven, there occurred “a noise just like that of a rushing stiff breeze.” It filled the whole house in which about 120 disciples of Jesus Christ were gathered. Says the Scriptural account: “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.”—Acts 2:1-4.

Each One Hears His Own Language

Soon, many disciples were streaming out of the house. Amazingly, they could speak in the various languages of the crowd! Imagine how surprising it was when a visitor from Persia and a native of Egypt heard their own languages spoken by Galileans. Understandably,

the crowd was in awe. “What does this thing purport to be?” they asked. Some began to mock the disciples, saying: “They are full of sweet wine.”—Acts 2:12, 13.

Next the apostle Peter stood up and addressed the crowd. He explained that this miraculous gift of tongues was in fulfillment of God’s promise through the prophet Joel: “I shall pour out some of my spirit upon every sort of flesh.” (Acts 2:14-21; Joel 2:28-32) Yes, God had just poured out his holy spirit upon Jesus’ disciples. This was clear evidence that Jesus had been raised from the dead and was now in heaven at God’s right hand. “Therefore,” said Peter, “let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled.”—Acts 2:22-36.

How did the listeners react? “They were stabbed to the heart,” the account says, “and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles: ‘Men, brothers, what shall we do?’” Peter replied: “Repent, and let each one of you be baptized.” About 3,000 did just that! Thereafter, “they continued devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles.”—Acts 2:37-42.

By taking the lead on this monumental occasion, Peter used the first of “the keys of the kingdom of the heavens” that Jesus had promised to give to him. (Matthew 16:19) These keys opened up special privileges to different groups of people. This first key made it possible for Jews to become spirit-anointed Christians. Later, the second and third keys made this same opportunity available to Sa-



maritans and to Gentiles respectively.—Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-48.

Lessons for Us

Although this crowd of Jews and proselytes bore community responsibility for the death of God's Son, Peter addressed them with respect, calling them "brothers." (Acts 2:29) His goal was to move them to repentance, not to condemn them. Therefore, his approach was positive. He presented the facts and backed up his points with Scripture quotations.

Those who preach the good news today do well to follow Peter's example. They should try to establish common ground with their listeners and then tactfully reason with them from the Scriptures. When Bible truth is presented in a positive manner, the righthearted will respond.—Acts 13:48.

Peter's zeal and boldness on the day of Pentecost stand out in stark contrast to his denial of Jesus some seven weeks earlier. On that occasion Peter was paralyzed by fear of man. (Matthew 26:69-75) But Jesus had made supplication in Peter's behalf. (Luke 22:31, 32) Doubtless, Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Peter strengthened the apostle. (1 Corinthians 15:5) As a result, Peter's faith did not give out. Within a short time, he was boldly preaching. So, then, he preached not only at Pentecost but for the rest of his life.

What if we have erred in some way, even as Peter did? Let us manifest repentance, pray for forgiveness, and take steps to get spiritual help. (James 5:14-16) Then we can move ahead with confidence that our sacred service is acceptable to our merciful heavenly Father, Jehovah.—Exodus 34:6.

ALL MUST RENDER AN ACCOUNT TO GOD

"Each of us will render an account for himself to God."—ROMANS 14:12.

JEHOVAH GOD created our first parents, Adam and Eve, as free moral agents. Though they were lower than the angels, they were intelligent creatures capable of making wise decisions. (Psalm 8:4, 5) Yet, that God-given freedom was not a license to exercise self-determination. They were accountable to their Creator, and this accountability has extended to all their descendants.

² Now that we are nearing the climax of this wicked system of things, Jehovah will make an accounting on the earth. (Compare Romans 9:28.) Soon, ungodly men will have to render an account to Jehovah God for the despoiling of earth's resources, the destruction of human life, and especially the persecution of his servants.—Revelation 6:10; 11:18.

³ Faced with this sobering prospect, it is beneficial for us to reflect on Jehovah's righteous dealings with his creatures in times past. How can the Scriptures help us, on our part, to render an acceptable account to our Creator? What examples may be helpful, and which ones should we avoid imitating?

Angels Are Accountable

⁴ Jehovah's angelic creatures in the heav-

1. What limits were placed on the freedom of Adam and Eve?
2. Jehovah will soon make what accounting, and why?
3. What questions will we consider?
4. How do we know that God holds angels accountable for their actions?



Jesus Christ rendered a fine account of himself to his heavenly Father

ens are just as accountable to him as we are. Before the Flood of Noah's day, some angels disobediently materialized in order to engage in sexual relations with women. As free moral agents, these spirit creatures could make this decision, but God held them accountable. When the disobedient angels returned to the spirit realm, Jehovah did not permit them to regain their original position. The disciple Jude tells us that they have been "reserved with eternal bonds under dense darkness for the judgment of the great day."—Jude 6.

⁵ These disobedient angels, or demons, have Satan the Devil as their ruler. (Matthew 12:24-26) This wicked angel rebelled against his Creator and challenged the rightfulness of Jehovah's sovereignty. Satan led our first parents into sin, and this resulted in their eventual death. (Genesis 3:1-7, 17-19) Although Jehovah permitted Satan to have access to heavenly courts for a period thereafter, the Bible book of Revelation foretold that in God's due time, this wicked one would be cast down to the vicinity of the earth. Evidence indicates that this took place shortly after Jesus Christ received Kingdom power in 1914. Eventually, the Devil and his demons will go into everlasting destruction. With the issue of sovereignty finally resolved, the account for rebellion will then have been justly settled—Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Revelation 12:7-9; 20:10.

God's Son Is Accountable

⁶ What a fine example has been set by God's Son, Jesus Christ! As a perfect man on a par with Adam, Jesus was delighted to do the divine will. He was also glad to be held accountable for compliance with Jehovah's law. Concerning him, the psalmist fittingly prophesied: "To do your will, O my God, I have delighted, and your law is within my inward parts."—Psalm 40:8; Hebrews 10:6-9.

⁷ Despite the hateful opposition that Jesus experienced, he did God's will and maintained integrity to death on a torture

5. What fall has been experienced by Satan and his demons, and how will the account for their rebellion be settled?

6. How does Jesus view his own accountability to his Father?

7. When praying on the eve of his death, why could Jesus say the words recorded at John 17:4, 5?

stake. He thereby paid the ransom price to redeem mankind from the death-dealing consequences of Adam's sin. (Matthew 20:28) Hence, on the eve of his death, Jesus could confidently pray: "I have glorified you on the earth, having finished the work you have given me to do. So now you, Father, glorify me alongside yourself with the glory that I had alongside you before the world was." (John 17:4, 5) Jesus could say those words to his heavenly Father because he was successfully meeting the test of accountability and was acceptable to God.

⁸ Unlike the perfect man Jesus Christ, we are imperfect. Yet, we are accountable to God. The apostle Paul said: "Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you also look down on your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written: "'As I live," says Jehovah, "to me every knee will bend down, and every tongue will make open acknowledgment to God.'" So, then, each of us will render an account for himself to God." (Romans 14:10-12) In order that we may do so and find acceptance with Jehovah, he has lovingly given us both a conscience and his inspired Word, the Bible, to guide us in what we say and do. (Romans 2:14, 15; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Taking full advantage of Jehovah's spiritual provisions and following our Bible-trained conscience will help us to find acceptance with God. (Matthew 24:45-47) Jehovah's holy spirit, or active force, is an added source of strength and guidance. If we act in harmony with the spirit's direction and the leadings of our Bible-trained conscience, we show that we do not 'disregard God,' to whom we must account for all

8. (a) How did Paul show that we must render an account of ourselves to Jehovah God? (b) What will help us to find acceptance with God?

our actions.—1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; 1 Peter 3:16, 21.

Accountable as Nations

⁹ Jehovah calls nations to account. (Jeremiah 25:12-14; Zephaniah 3:6, 7) Consider the ancient kingdom of Edom, situated south of the Dead Sea and north of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Edomites were a Semitic people, closely related to the Israelites. Though the forefather of the Edomites was Abraham's grandson Esau, the Israelites were denied permission to travel through Edom on "the king's road" while en route to the Promised Land. (Numbers 20:14-21) Over the centuries Edom's animosity developed into an implacable hatred for Israel. Finally, the Edomites had to account for their urging the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. (Psalm 137:7) In the sixth century B.C.E., Babylonian troops under King Nabonidus conquered Edom, and it became desolate, as Jehovah had decreed.—Jeremiah 49:20; Obadiah 9-11.

¹⁰ Moab fared no better. The Moabite kingdom was north of Edom and east of the Dead Sea. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, the Moabites did not act hospitably toward them, evidently supplying them with bread and water only for financial gain. (Deuteronomy 23:3, 4) Moab's King Balak hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, and Moabite women were used to lure Israelite men into immorality and idolatry. (Numbers 22:2-8; 25:1-9) However, Jehovah did not let Moab's hatred for Israel pass unnoticed. As prophesied, Moab suffered desolation at the hands of the Babylonians. (Jeremiah 9:25, 26; Zephaniah 2:8-11) Yes, God called Moab to account.

9. Who were the Edomites, and what happened to them because of their treatment of Israel?

10. How did the Moabites act toward the Israelites, and how did God call Moab to account?

¹¹ Not only Moab but also Ammon had to render an account to God. Jehovah had foretold: "Moab herself will become just like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah, a place possessed by nettles, and a salt pit, and a desolate waste, even to time indefinite." (Zephaniah 2:9) The lands of Moab and Ammon were devastated, even as God had destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. According to the Geological Society of London, researchers claim to have located the sites of ruined Sodom and Gomorrah on the east coast of the Dead Sea. Any reliable evidence that may yet come to light in this regard can only support Bible prophecies indicating that the present wicked system of things will also be called to account by Jehovah God.—2 Peter 3:6-12.

¹² Though Israel had been highly favored by Jehovah, it had to render an account to God for its sins. When Jesus Christ came to the nation of Israel, the majority rejected him. Only a remnant exercised faith and became his followers. Paul applied certain prophecies to this Jewish remnant when he wrote: "Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Although the number of the sons of Israel may be as the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved. For Jehovah will make an accounting on the earth, concluding it and cutting it short.' Also, just as Isaiah had said aforetime: 'Unless Jehovah of armies had left a seed to us, we should have become just like Sodom, and we should have been made just like Gomorrah.'" (Romans 9:27-29; Isaiah 1:9; 10:22, 23) The apostle cited the example of the

11. Moab and Ammon became like what cities, and what do Bible prophecies indicate regarding the present wicked system of things?

12. Although Israel had to render an account to God for its sins, what had been foretold regarding a Jewish remnant?

7,000 in Elijah's time who had not bowed to Baal, and then he said: "In this way, therefore, at the present season also a remnant has turned up according to a choosing due to undeserved kindness." (Romans 11:5) That remnant was made up of individuals personally accountable to God.

Examples of Personal Accountability

¹³ The Bible cites many cases of personal accountability to Jehovah God. Take Adam's firstborn son, Cain, as an example. Both he and his brother Abel offered sacrifices to Jehovah. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God, but Cain's was not. When called to account for brutally murdering his brother, Cain callously told God: "Am I my brother's guardian?" For his sin, Cain was banished to "the land of Fugitiveness to the east of Eden." He showed no sincere repentance for his crime, regretting only his just punishment.

—Genesis 4:3-16.

¹⁴ One's personal accountability to God is also illustrated in the case of Israel's high priest Eli. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as officiating priests but "were guilty of injustice towards men, and of impiety towards God, and abstained from no sort of wickedness," says historian Josephus. These "good-for-nothing men" did not acknowledge Jehovah, engaged in sacrilegious conduct, and were guilty of gross immorality. (1 Samuel 1:3; 2:12-17, 22-25) As their father and Israel's high priest, Eli had the duty to discipline them, but he merely reproved them mildly. Eli 'kept honoring his sons more than Jehovah.' (1 Samuel 2:29) Retribution came upon the house of Eli.

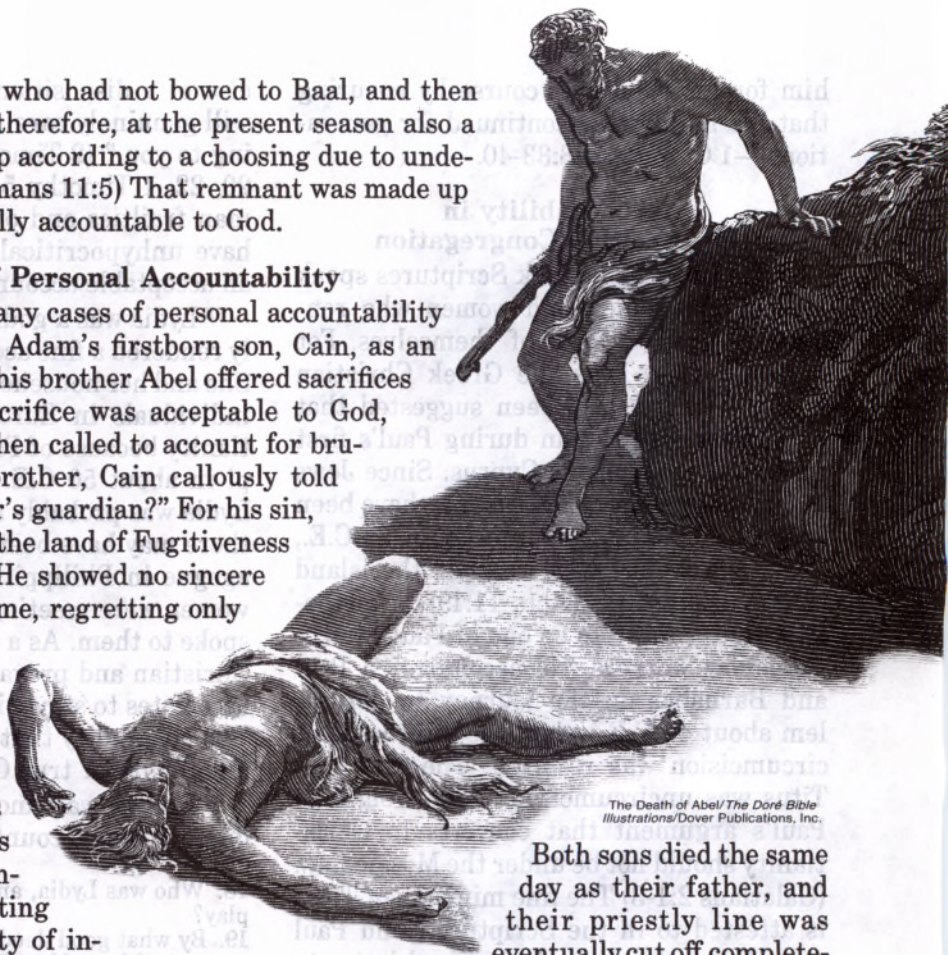
13. What happened to Cain when God called him to account for murdering his brother Abel?

14. How was personal accountability to God illustrated in the case of high priest Eli and his sons?

Both sons died the same day as their father, and their priestly line was eventually cut off completely. Thus the account was settled.—1 Samuel 3:13, 14; 4:11, 17, 18.

¹⁵ An entirely different example was set by King Saul's son Jonathan. Soon after David killed Goliath, "Jonathan's very soul became bound up with the soul of David," and they concluded a covenant of friendship. (1 Samuel 18:1, 3) Likely, Jonathan discerned that God's spirit had left Saul, but his own zeal for true worship remained undiminished. (1 Samuel 16:14) Jonathan's appreciation for David's God-given authority never faltered. Jonathan realized his accountability to God, and Jehovah rewarded

15. Why was King Saul's son Jonathan rewarded?



The Death of Abel/The Doré Bible Illustrations/Dover Publications, Inc.

him for his honorable course by ensuring that his family line continued for generations.—1 Chronicles 8:33-40.

Accountability in the Christian Congregation

¹⁶ The Christian Greek Scriptures speak well of many men and women who rendered a good account of themselves. For instance, there was the Greek Christian named Titus. It has been suggested that he became a Christian during Paul's first missionary journey to Cyprus. Since Jews and proselytes from Cyprus may have been in Jerusalem during Pentecost of 33 C.E., Christianity may have reached the island shortly thereafter. (Acts 11:19) Nevertheless, Titus proved to be one of Paul's faithful fellow workers. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on the journey to Jerusalem about 49 C.E., when the vital issue of circumcision was resolved. The fact that Titus was uncircumcised added weight to Paul's argument that converts to Christianity should not be under the Mosaic Law. (Galatians 2:1-3) The fine ministry of Titus is attested to in the Scriptures, and Paul even directed a divinely inspired letter to him. (2 Corinthians 7:6; Titus 1:1-4) Evidently to the very end of his earthly course, Titus continued to render a fine account of himself to God.

¹⁷ Timothy was another zealous individual who rendered an acceptable account of himself to Jehovah God. Though Timothy had some health problems, he displayed 'faith without any hypocrisy' and 'slaved with Paul in furtherance of the good news.' The apostle could therefore tell fellow Christians in Philippi: "I have no one

else of a disposition like [Timothy's] who will genuinely care for the things pertaining to you." (2 Timothy 1:5; Philippians 2:20, 22; 1 Timothy 5:23) In the face of human frailties and other trials, we too can have unhypocritical faith and can render an acceptable account of ourselves to God.

¹⁸ Lydia was a godly woman who evidently rendered a fine account of herself to God. She and her household were among the first individuals in Europe to embrace Christianity because of Paul's activity in Philippi in about 50 C.E. A native of Thyatira, Lydia was probably a Jewish proselyte, but there may have been few Jews and no synagogue in Philippi. She and other devout women were meeting by a river when Paul spoke to them. As a result, Lydia became a Christian and prevailed upon Paul and his associates to stay with her. (Acts 16:12-15) The hospitality that Lydia showed remains a hallmark of true Christians.

¹⁹ Dorcas was another woman who rendered a fine account of herself to Jehovah

18. Who was Lydia, and what spirit did she display?

19. By what good deeds did Dorcas render a fine account of herself to God?

What Are Your Answers?

- ☐ How would you prove that angels and God's Son are accountable to Jehovah?
- ☐ What Bible examples are there to show that God holds nations accountable?
- ☐ What does the Bible say about personal accountability to God?
- ☐ Who were some individuals of Bible record that rendered a fine account to Jehovah God?

16. Who was Titus, and why can it be said that he rendered a good account of himself to God?

17. What account did Timothy render, and how can this example affect us?



Like Dorcas, Christian women today render a good account of themselves to Jehovah God

God. When she died, Peter went to Joppa in response to a request by disciples living there. The two men who met Peter “led him up into the upper chamber; and all the widows presented themselves to him weeping and exhibiting many inner garments and outer garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.” Dorcas was brought back to life. But is she to be remembered solely for her magnanimous spirit? No. She was a “disciple” and surely engaged in disciple-making work herself.

Christian women today similarly ‘abound in good deeds and gifts of mercy.’ They are also delighted to have an active share in proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and making disciples.—Acts 9:36-42; Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

²⁰ The Bible clearly shows that nations and individuals must render an account to the Sovereign Lord Jehovah. (Zephaniah 1:7) If we are dedicated to God, we may therefore ask ourselves, ‘How do I view my God-given privileges and responsibilities? What kind of account am I giving of myself to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ?’

20. What questions may we ask ourselves?

MAY JEHOVAH CREDIT GOOD TO YOUR ACCOUNT

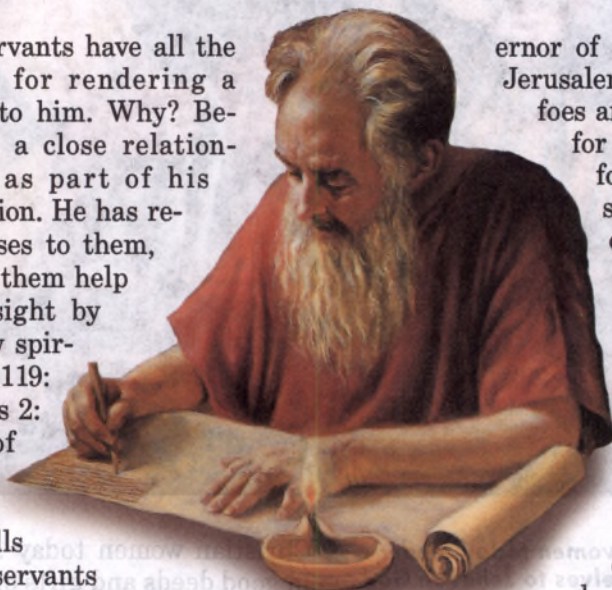
"This . . . do remember to my account, O my God . . . Do remember me, O my God, for good."—NEHEMIAH 13:22, 31.

JEHOVAH'S servants have all the help needed for rendering a fine account to him. Why? Because they have a close relationship with God as part of his earthly organization. He has revealed his purposes to them, and he has given them help and spiritual insight by means of his holy spirit. (Psalm 51:11; 119:105; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13) In view of these special circumstances, Jehovah lovingly calls upon his earthly servants to give him an account of themselves both for what they are and for what they accomplish in his strength and with the help of his holy spirit.

² One man who gave a good account of himself to God was Nehemiah, cupbearer to Persian King Artaxerxes (Longimanus). (Nehemiah 2:1) Nehemiah became gov-

1. What helps those dedicated to God to render a fine account to Jehovah?

2. (a) In what ways did Nehemiah give a good account of himself to God? (b) With what plea did Nehemiah conclude the Bible book bearing his name?



ernor of the Jews and rebuilt Jerusalem's wall in the face of foes and dangers. With zeal for true worship, he enforced God's Law and showed concern for the oppressed. (Nehemiah 5:14-19) Nehemiah urged the Levites to purify themselves regularly, guard the gates, and sanctify the Sabbath day. He could therefore pray: "This, also, do remember to my account, O my God, and do feel sorry for me according to the abundance of your loving-kindness." Appropriately, too, Nehemiah concluded his divinely inspired book with the plea: "Do remember me, O my God, for good."

—Nehemiah 13:22, 31.

³ A person who does good is virtuous and performs upright deeds that benefit others. Nehemiah was such a man. He had a reverential fear of God and great zeal for true

3. (a) How would you describe a person who does good? (b) Reflecting on Nehemiah's course may cause us to ask ourselves what questions?

worship. Moreover, he was thankful for his privileges in God's service and rendered a fine account of himself to Jehovah. Reflecting on his course may well cause us to ask ourselves, 'How do I view my God-given privileges and responsibilities? What kind of account am I giving of myself to Jehovah God and Jesus Christ?'

Knowledge Makes Us Accountable

⁴ Jesus gave his followers this commission: "Go . . . and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them . . . , teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) Disciples were to be made by teaching them. Those thus taught and who were "rightly disposed for everlasting life" would get baptized, as Jesus did. (Acts 13: 48; Mark 1:9-11) Their desire to observe all the things he had commanded would come from the heart. They would get to the point of dedication by taking in and applying accurate knowledge of God's Word. —John 17:3.

⁵ The deeper our Scriptural knowledge is, the better is the foundation for our faith. At the same time, our accountability to God becomes greater. James 4:17 says: "If one knows how to do what is right and yet does not do it, it is a sin for him." This statement is evidently a conclusion to what the disciple James had just said about boasting instead of completely depending on God. If a person knows that he can accomplish nothing lasting without Jehovah's help but does not act accordingly, this is a sin. But James' words can also apply to sins of omission. In Jesus'

parable of the sheep and the goats, for instance, the goats are condemned, not for bad acts, but for not helping Christ's brothers. —Matthew 25:41-46.

⁶ One man with whom Jehovah's Witnesses were conducting a Bible study was making little spiritual progress, apparently because he did not give up smoking, although he knew that he should do so. An elder asked him to read James 4:17. After commenting on the significance of this scripture, the elder said: "Though you are not baptized, you are accountable and must take full responsibility for your decision." Happily, the man responded, stopped smoking, and soon qualified for baptism in symbol of his dedication to Jehovah God.

Accountable for Our Ministry

⁷ Our heartfelt desire should be to please our Creator. One way to display our gratitude for "the very knowledge of God" is to carry out the commission to make disciples of his Son, Jesus Christ. This is also a way to show our love for God and for our neighbor. (Proverbs 2:1-5; Matthew 22:35-40) Yes, our knowledge of God makes us accountable to him, and we need to view our fellow humans as potential disciples.

⁸ The apostle Paul knew that wholehearted acceptance of and obedience to the good news results in salvation, whereas rejection of it can bring destruction. (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8) He therefore felt accountable to Jehovah for his ministry. In fact, Paul and his associates appreciated their ministry so much that they carefully avoided even giving the appearance of making financial gain from it. Moreover, Paul's heart impelled him to

4. What commission did Jesus give his followers, and what did those who were "rightly disposed for everlasting life" do?

5, 6. How are we to understand James 4:17? Illustrate its application.

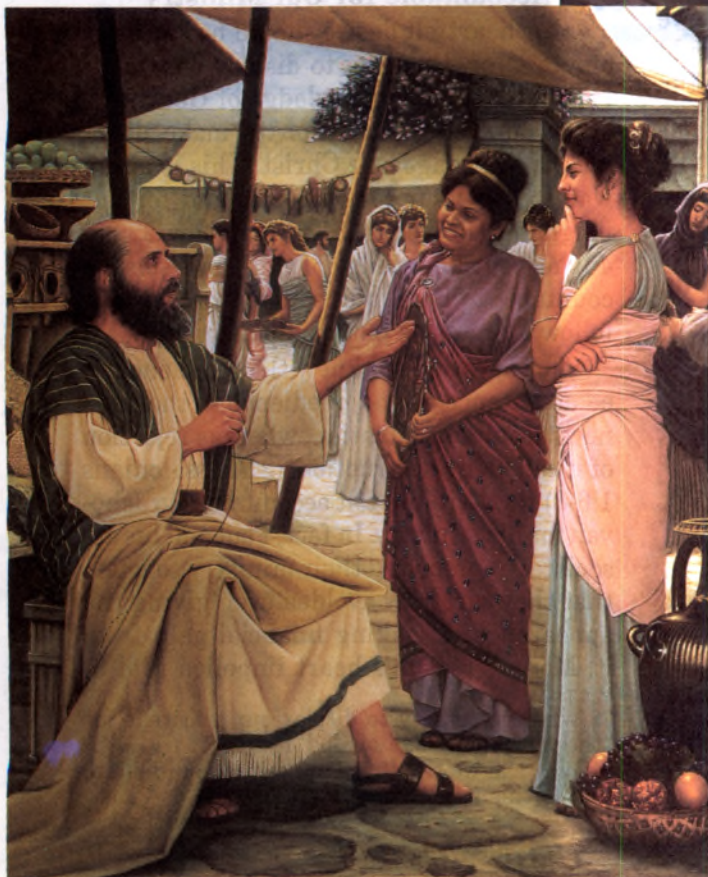
7. What is one way to display our gratitude for "the very knowledge of God"?

8. Why can we say that Paul felt accountable to God for his ministry?

say: "If, now, I am declaring the good news, it is no reason for me to boast, for necessity is laid upon me. Really, woe is me if I did not declare the good news!"—1 Corinthians 9:11-16.

⁹ Since we are Jehovah's dedicated servants, 'necessity is laid upon us to declare the good news.' It is our commission to preach the Kingdom message. We accepted that responsibility when we dedicated ourselves to God. (Compare Luke 9: 23, 24.) Furthermore, we have a debt to discharge. Paul said: "Both to Greeks and to Barbarians, both to

9. What notable debt do all Christians have to discharge?



Like Paul, we can render a fine account to God as Kingdom proclaimers

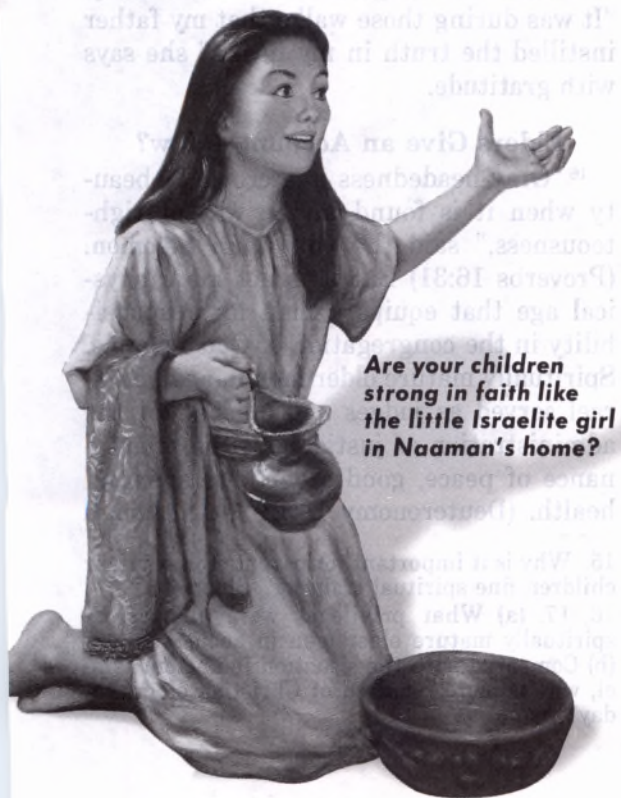
wise and to senseless ones I am a debtor: so there is eagerness on my part to declare the good news also to you there in Rome." (Romans 1: 14, 15) Paul was a debtor because he knew that it was his duty to preach so that people could hear the good news and be saved. (1 Timothy 1:12-16; 2:3, 4) He therefore labored to fulfill his commission and discharge his debt to fellow humans. As Christians, we too have such a debt to discharge. Kingdom preaching is also a principal way to demonstrate love for God, for his Son, and for our neighbors.—Luke 10:25-28.

¹⁰ One way to render an acceptable account to God is to use our abilities to expand our ministry. To illustrate: There has been an influx of people of many national groups into Britain in recent years. To reach such people with the good news, over 800 pioneers (full-time Kingdom preachers) and hundreds of other Witnesses are learning different languages. This has resulted in a fine stimulus to the ministry. Said a pioneer teaching a Chinese class: "I never thought I would ever teach my language to other Witnesses, for them to share the truth with others in this way. It is so satisfying!" Could you expand your ministry in a similar way?

¹¹ Likely, each one of us would do what we

10. By doing what have some expanded their ministry?

11. What resulted when one Christian witnessed informally?



Are your children strong in faith like the little Israelite girl in Naaman's home?

could to save a drowning man. Jehovah's servants are similarly eager to use their abilities to witness at every opportunity. A Witness recently sat next to a woman on a bus and talked to her about the Scriptures. Thrilled with what she heard, the woman asked many questions. When the Witness was about to get off the bus, the woman implored her to come to her home instead, as she still had many questions. The Witness agreed. The outcome? A Bible study was started, and six months later the woman became an unbaptized Kingdom publisher. Soon she was conducting six home Bible studies of her own. What a thrilling reward for using one's abilities in Kingdom service!

¹² Our abilities as ministers can be employed effectively in the field by using such publications as the 192-page book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*. By April of 1996, the Writing Committee of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses had approved the publication of the *Knowledge* book in over 140 languages, and by then 30,500,000 copies of it had already been printed in 111 languages. This book was written with the objective of helping Bible students to learn enough about God's Word and purposes to make a dedication to Jehovah and get baptized. Since Kingdom publishers will not be conducting a home Bible study with the same student for many years, they can conduct studies with more people or increase their share in the house-to-house work and other forms of the ministry. (Acts 5:42; 20:20, 21) Aware of their accountability to God, they call attention to divine warnings. (Ezekiel 33:7-9) But their main interest is to honor Jehovah and help as many as possible to learn about the good news in the short time yet remaining for this wicked system of things.

12. How can our abilities as ministers be put to good use in the field service?

Rendering a Fine Account as Families

¹³ Each individual and family embracing true Christianity is accountable to God and should therefore “press on to maturity” and become “solid in the faith.” (Hebrews 6:1-3; 1 Peter 5:8, 9) For example, those who have studied the *Knowledge* book and have been baptized need to round out their Scriptural knowledge by attending meetings regularly as well as by reading the Bible and other Christian publications. Godly families should also have a regular family study, for that is an important way to “stay awake, stand firm in the faith, carry on as men, grow mighty.” (1 Corinthians 16:13) If you are the head of a household, you are especially accountable to God to make sure that your family is well-fed spiritually. Just as nutritious physical food contributes to natural health, so abundant and regular spiritual food is needed if you and your family are to remain “healthy in the faith.” —Titus 1:13.

¹⁴ If there are children in your household, God will credit good to your account for giving them sound spiritual instruction. Such teaching will benefit them, as it did a little Israelite girl captured by the Syrians in the days of God’s prophet Elisha. She became the maidservant of the wife of a leprous Syrian army chief, Naaman. Young though the girl was, she told her mistress: “If only my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria! In that case he would recover him from his leprosy.” Because of her witness, Naaman went to Israel, finally complied with Elisha’s direction to bathe seven times in the Jordan River, and was cleansed of leprosy. Moreover,

13. Why should godly families have a regular family Bible study?

14. What resulted from the witness given by a well-taught Israelite girl?

Naaman became a worshiper of Jehovah. How that must have thrilled that little girl! —2 Kings 5:1-3, 13-19.

¹⁵ It is not easy to raise God-fearing children in this morally impoverished world that is lying in Satan’s power. (1 John 5:19) From Timothy’s infancy, however, his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice, successfully taught him the Scriptures. (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14, 15) Studying the Bible with your children, taking them to Christian meetings regularly, and eventually having them accompany you in the ministry are all part of the pattern of training for which you must render an account to God. One Christian in Wales, now in her mid-80’s, recalls that in the early 1920’s, her father took her with him when he walked 6 miles over a mountain (a round-trip of 12 miles) to distribute Bible tracts to villagers in the next valley. “It was during those walks that my father instilled the truth in my heart,” she says with gratitude.

Elders Give an Account—How?

¹⁶ “Gray-headedness is a crown of beauty when it is found in the way of righteousness,” said the wise man Solomon. (Proverbs 16:31) But it is not mere physical age that equips a man for responsibility in the congregation of God’s people. Spiritually mature older men in ancient Israel served as judges and officers for the administration of justice and the maintenance of peace, good order, and spiritual health. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20) Although

15. Why is it important for parents to give their children fine spiritual training? Illustrate.

16, 17. (a) What privileges were enjoyed by spiritually mature older men in ancient Israel? (b) Compared with the situation in ancient Israel, why is more required of Christian elders today?

the same is true of the Christian congregation, more is required of elders as the end of this system of things draws close. Why?

¹⁷ The Israelites were a 'chosen people' whom God delivered from ancient Egypt. Since they received the Law through their mediator, Moses, their descendants were born into a dedicated nation and were familiar with Jehovah's precepts. (Deuteronomy 7:6, 11) However, nobody is born into such a dedicated nation today, and comparatively few grow up in godly families well acquainted with Scriptural truth. Especially may those who have recently started "walking in the truth" need instruction on how to live according to Scriptural principles. (3 John 4) What a responsibility therefore rests on the shoulders of faithful elders as they 'hold to the pattern of healthful words' and assist Jehovah's people!—2 Timothy 1:13, 14.

¹⁸ A young child learning to walk may stumble and fall. He feels insecure and needs parental help and reassurance. An individual dedicated to Jehovah could likewise stumble or fall spiritually. Even the apostle Paul found it necessary to struggle to do what was right or good in God's sight. (Romans 7:21-25) Shepherds of God's flock need to give loving assistance to Christians who have erred but are truly repentant. When elders visited one dedicated woman who had made a serious mistake, she said in the presence of her dedicated husband: "I know you will disfellowship me!" But she broke down in tears when told that the elders wanted to know what help was needed to restore the family spiritually. Aware that they must render an account, the elders were happy to assist a repentant fellow believer.—Hebrews 13:17.

18. What kind of assistance must congregation elders be prepared to give, and why?

Keep On Rendering a Fine Account

¹⁹ Congregation elders and all other servants of God need to keep on rendering a fine account of themselves to Jehovah. This is possible if we adhere to God's Word and do his will. (Proverbs 3:5, 6; Romans 12:1, 2, 9) We especially want to do good to those related to us in the faith. (Galatians 6:10) However, the harvest is still great, and the workers remain few. (Matthew 9:37, 38) So let us do good to others by diligently proclaiming the Kingdom message. Jehovah will render good to our account if we fulfill our dedication, do his will, and faithfully proclaim the good news.

²⁰ Let us therefore continue to have plenty to do in the Lord's work. (1 Corinthians 15:58) And we do well to consider Nehemiah, who rebuilt Jerusalem's wall, enforced God's Law, and zealously promoted true worship. He prayed that Jehovah God would remember him for the good he had done. May you prove to be as devoted to Jehovah, and may he credit good to your account.

19. How can we keep on rendering a fine account of ourselves to God?

20. What do we learn from considering the course of Nehemiah?

What Are Your Answers?

- ☐ What example was set by Nehemiah?
- ☐ Why does knowledge make us accountable to God?
- ☐ How can we render an acceptable account to Jehovah in our ministry?
- ☐ What can families do to render a fine account to God?
- ☐ How do Christian elders render an account?

Do You Really Need to Apologize?

'I NEVER apologize,' wrote George Bernard Shaw. 'What is done is done,' others may say.

Perhaps we ourselves are reluctant to admit a fault for fear of losing face. Maybe we rationalize that the problem lies with the other person. Or we may intend to apologize but put it off until we think the matter has finally been overlooked.

So, then, are apologies essential? Can they really accomplish anything?

Love Obliges Us to Apologize

Brotherly love is an identifying mark of Jesus Christ's true followers. He said: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves." (John 13:35) The Scriptures urge Christians to "love one another intensely from the heart." (1 Peter 1:22) Intense love obliges us to apologize. Why? Because human imperfection inevitably causes hurt feelings that inhibit love if they are not healed.

For example, because of personal differences with someone in the Christian congregation, we may prefer not to speak with him. If we have caused offense, how can a loving relationship be restored? In most cases, by apologizing and then making the effort to converse in a warm manner. We owe our fellow believers love, and when we say that we are sorry for having caused offense, we discharge some of that debt.—Romans 13:8.

To illustrate: Mari Carmen and Paqui are two Christian women who had a long

friendship. Because Mari Carmen believed some harmful gossip, however, her friendship with Paqui cooled off. Without explanation, she shunned Paqui completely. Nearly a year later, Mari Carmen learned that the gossip was untrue. What was her reaction? Love moved her to go to Paqui and humbly express her deep regret for behaving so badly. Both of them gave way to floods of tears, and they have been firm friends ever since.

Though we may not feel that we have done anything wrong, an apology may resolve a misunderstanding. Manuel recalls: "Many years ago my wife and I stayed in the home of one of our spiritual sisters while she was hospitalized. We did our utmost to help her and her children during her illness. But after she returned home, she complained to a friend that we had not administered the household expenses properly.

"We visited and explained that perhaps because of our youth and lack of experience, we had not taken care of things as she would have. She immediately responded by saying that she was the one who was indebted to us and that she was truly grateful for all that we had done for her. The problem was solved. That experience taught me the importance of humbly asking forgiveness when misunderstandings occur."

Jehovah blessed this couple for showing love and 'pursuing the things making for peace.' (Romans 14:19) Love also involves awareness of the feelings of others. Peter counsels us to show "fellow feeling." (1 Pe-



**Sincere apologies
promote Christian love**

ter 3:8) If we have fellow feeling, we are more likely to discern the pain we have caused by a thoughtless word or deed and we will be impelled to apologize.

“Gird Yourselves With Lowliness of Mind”

Even faithful Christian elders may occasionally have a heated exchange. (Compare Acts 15:37-39.) These are occasions when an apology would be very beneficial. But what will help an elder or any other Christian who finds it difficult to apologize?

Humility is the key. The apostle Peter counseled: “Gird yourselves with lowliness of mind toward one another.” (1 Peter 5:5) Although it is true that in most disputes both parties share the blame, the humble Christian concerns himself with his own failings and is willing to admit them. —Proverbs 6:1-5.

The one receiving an apology should accept it in a humble manner. By way of illustration, let us suppose that two men who need to communicate are standing on the tops of two different mountains. Conversation across the chasm that divides them proves impossible. When one of them descends to the valley below and the oth-



er follows his example, however, they can converse easily. Similarly, if two Christians need to resolve a difference between them, let each one humbly meet the other in the valley, so to speak, and make suitable apologies.—1 Peter 5:6.

Apologies Mean a Lot in Marriage

A marriage of two imperfect people inevitably provides opportunities to apologize. And if husband and wife both have fellow feeling, it will impel them to apologize should they happen to speak or act inconsiderately. Proverbs 12:18 points out: “There exists the one speaking thoughtlessly as with the stabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise ones is a healing.” “Thoughtless stabs” cannot be undone, but they can be healed by a sincere apology. Of course, this requires continuous awareness and effort.

Speaking of her marriage, Susan* says: "Jack* and I have been married for 24 years, but we are still learning new things about each other. Sadly, some time ago, we separated and lived apart for a few weeks. However, we listened to Scriptural counsel from the elders and got together again. We now realize that since we have very different personalities, clashes are likely to occur. When this happens, we quickly apologize and try really hard to understand the other person's point of view. I'm happy to say that our marriage has improved considerably." Jack adds: "We have also learned to identify those moments when we are prone to get upset. At such times we treat each other with extra sensitivity." —Proverbs 16:23.

Should you apologize if you think that you are not at fault? When deep feelings are involved, it is hard to be objective about where the blame lies. But the important thing is peace in the marriage. Consider Abigail, an Israelite woman whose husband mistreated David. Though she could not be blamed for her husband's stupidity, she apologized. "Pardon, please, the transgression of your slave girl," she pleaded. David responded by treating her considerately, humbly admitting that if it had not been for her, he would have shed innocent blood. —1 Samuel 25:24-28, 32-35.

Likewise, a Christian woman named June, who has been married for 45 years, feels that a successful marriage requires a willingness to be the first one to apologize. She says: "I tell myself that our marriage is more important than my feelings as an individual. So when I apologize, I feel I am contributing to the marriage." An elderly man named Jim states: "I apologize to my wife even for trivial things. Ever since she had a serious

operation, she gets distressed easily. So I regularly put my arm around her and say, 'Sorry, Love. I didn't mean to upset you.' Like a plant that is watered, she perks up immediately."

If we have hurt the person we love most, a prompt apology is very effective. Milagros heartily agrees, saying: "I suffer from a lack of self-confidence, and a sharp word from my husband unnerves me. But when he apologizes, I feel better immediately." Aptly, the Scriptures tell us: "Pleasant sayings are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and a healing to the bones."—Proverbs 16:24.

Practice the Art of Apologizing

If we make it a practice to apologize when necessary, we are likely to find that people will respond favorably. And perhaps they will even apologize themselves. When we suspect that we have upset someone, why not make it a custom to apologize rather than go to great lengths to avoid admitting any fault? The world may feel that an apology is a sign of weakness, but it really gives evidence of Christian maturity. Of course, we would not want to be like those who acknowledge some wrong yet minimize their responsibility. For instance, do we ever say that we are sorry without meaning it? If we arrive late and make profuse apologies, do we determine to improve our punctuality?

So, then, do we really need to apologize? Yes, we do. We owe it to ourselves and others to do so. An apology can help to ease the pain caused by imperfection, and it can heal strained relationships. Each apology we make is a lesson in humility and trains us to become more sensitive to the feelings of others. As a result, fellow believers, marriage mates, and others will view us as those who deserve their affection and trust. We will have peace of mind, and Jehovah God will bless us.

* Not their real names.

FLOOD LEGEND SUPPORTS BIBLE ACCOUNT

THE global Deluge of Noah's day is a historical fact. Versions of the account are found in the oral history of many different civilizations around the world. In the African country of Chad, the Moussaye tribe explains the Flood like this:

'Once upon a time, in a faraway place, there lived a family. One day, the mother of this family wanted to prepare a sumptuous meal for her loved ones. So she took her mortar and pestle to pound the grain into flour. At that time the sky was much closer than it is now. In fact, if you reached up with your hand, you could touch it. She pounded the grain with all her strength, and the millet she pounded quickly turned to flour. But as she pounded, the woman carelessly lifted the pestle too high, and she poked a hole in the sky! Immediately, a great quantity of water started falling to the earth. This was no ordinary rain. It rained for seven days and seven nights until the whole earth was covered with water. As the rain fell, the sky began to rise until it ended up where it is now—unreachably high. What a catastrophe for humanity! Since then, we have lost the privilege of touching the sky with our hands.'

Interestingly, ancient accounts telling of a global flood can be found all around the world. Native civilizations of the Americas as well as Aborigines of Australia all have stories about it. The details may differ, but most accounts contain the thought that the earth was covered by water and only a few people survived in a man-made vessel. The widespread presence of this theme adds support to the fact that a worldwide Deluge did occur, as reported in the Bible.—Genesis 7:11-20.



LYDIA

Hospitable Worshiper of God

FROM ancient times, servants of the true God have distinguished themselves for their hospitality. (Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3) Defined as “love of, fondness for, or kindness to strangers,” the hospitality that springs from a sincere heart is even today a sign of true Christianity. In fact, it is a requirement for all who would worship God acceptably.—Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9.

One person who displayed hospitality in an exemplary manner was Lydia. She “just made” the Christian missionaries visiting Philippi stay in her home. (Acts 16:15) Though Lydia is mentioned only briefly in the Scriptures, what little is said about her can be of encouragement to us. In what way? Who was Lydia? What do we know about her?

“Seller of Purple”

Lydia lived in Philippi, the principal city of Macedonia. However, she was from Thyatira, a city of the region of Lydia, in western Asia Minor. For this reason some suggest that “Lydia”



was a nickname given to her in Philippi. In other words, she was “the Lydian,” much as the woman to whom Jesus Christ witnessed could be called “the Samaritan woman.” (John 4:9) Lydia sold “purple” or articles colored with this dye. (Acts 16:12, 14) The existence of dyemakers both in Thyatira and in Philippi is attested to by inscriptions unearthed by archaeologists. It is possible that Lydia had moved because of her job, either to carry on her own business or as a representative of a company of Thyatiran dyers.

Purple dye could come from various sources. The most expensive was extracted from certain kinds of marine mollusks. According to the first-century Roman poet Martial, a cloak of the best purple of Tyre (another center where this substance was produced) could cost up to 10,000 sesterces, or 2,500 denarii, the equivalent of a laborer’s pay for 2,500 days. Clearly, such garments were luxury items that only a few could afford. So Lydia may have been well-off economically. In any case, she was able to offer hospitality to the apostle Paul and his companions—Luke, Silas, Timothy, and perhaps others.

Paul’s Preaching in Philippi

About the year 50 C.E., Paul first set foot in Europe and began to preach in Philippi.* When he arrived in a new city, it was Paul’s

* Among the most important cities of Macedonia, Philippi was a relatively prosperous military colony governed by *jus italicum* (Italic Law). This legislation guaranteed the Philippians rights comparable to those enjoyed by Roman citizens.—Acts 16:9, 12, 21.

custom to visit the synagogue to preach first to the Jews and proselytes who gathered there. (Compare Acts 13:4, 5, 13, 14; 14:1.) According to some, however, Roman law prohibited the Jews from practicing their religion within the “sacred confines” of Philippi. Therefore, after spending



Ruins at Philippi



“some days” there, on the Sabbath day the missionaries found a place beside a river outside the city where ‘they thought there was a place of prayer.’ (Acts 16:12, 13) This was apparently the River Gangites. There the missionaries found only women, one

of whom was Lydia.

“A Worshiper of God”

Lydia was “a worshiper of God,” but she probably was a proselyte to Judaism in search of religious truth. Though she had a good job, Lydia was not materialistic. Rather, she reserved time for spiritual matters. “Jehovah opened her heart wide to pay attention to the things being spoken by Paul,” and Lydia accepted the truth. In fact, “she and her household got baptized.”—Acts 16:14, 15.

Jewish Life in Philippi

Life in Philippi must not have been easy for Jews and proselytes to Judaism. There may have been certain anti-Jewish sentiments, for shortly before Paul's visit, Emperor Claudius had banished the Jews from Rome.—Compare Acts 18:2.

Significantly, Paul and Silas were dragged before the magistrates after healing the slave girl who had a spirit of divination. Her owners, now deprived of a lucrative source of income, exploited the prejudices of their fellow citizens by asserting: "These men are disturbing our city very much, they being Jews, and they are publishing customs that it is not lawful for us to take up or practice, seeing we are Romans." As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown into prison. (Acts 16:16-24) In such a climate, openly worshiping Jehovah, the God of the Jews, called for courage. But evidently Lydia did not mind being different.

The Bible does not specify who the other members of Lydia's household were. Since there is no mention of a husband, she may have been single or widowed. Perhaps "her household" was composed of relatives, but the term could also imply slaves or servants. In any case, Lydia zealously shared the things she had learned with those who lived with her. And what joy she must have had when they believed and embraced the true faith!

"She Just Made Us Come"

Before meeting Lydia, perhaps the missionaries had to be content with lodgings obtained at their own expense. But she was happy to be able to offer alternative accommodations. The fact that she had to insist, though, implies that Paul and his companions put up certain resistance. Why? Paul wanted to 'furnish the good news without

cost, to the end of not abusing his authority' and not becoming a burden to anyone. (1 Corinthians 9:18; 2 Corinthians 12:14) But Luke adds: "Now when she and her household got baptized, she said with entreaty: 'If you men have judged me to be faithful to Jehovah, enter into my house and stay.' And she just made us come." (Acts 16:15) Lydia was most concerned about being faithful to Jehovah, and offering hospitality apparently was an evidence of her faith. (Compare 1 Peter 4:9.) What an excellent example! Do we too use our possessions to promote the interests of the good news?

The Brothers in Philippi

When Paul and Silas were freed from prison after the episode involving the demon-possessed slave girl, they returned to Lydia's home, where they found some brothers. (Acts 16:40) Believers in the newly formed Philippian congregation may have used Lydia's home as a regular meeting place. It is logical to think that her home continued to be a center of theocratic activity in the city.

The initial warm hospitality shown by Lydia proved to be a characteristic of the whole congregation. Despite their poverty, on several occasions the Philippians sent Paul the things he needed, and the apostle was grateful.—2 Corinthians 8:1, 2; 11:9; Philippians 4:10, 15, 16.

Lydia is not mentioned in the letter sent by Paul to the Philippians about 60-61 C.E. The Scriptures do not reveal what happened to her after the events narrated in Acts chapter 16. Nonetheless, the brief mention of this dynamic woman makes us want to "follow the course of hospitality." (Romans 12:13) How thankful we are to have Christians like Lydia in our midst! Their spirit does much to make congregations warm and friendly, to the glory of Jehovah God.

BACK TO DUST

HOW?

“DUST you are and to dust you will return.” When the first man, Adam, heard those words, he knew what to expect. He had been made from the dust of the ground and would return to nothing more than dust. He would die because he had disobeyed his Creator, Jehovah God.—Genesis 2:7, 15-17; 3:17-19.

The Bible shows that humans are made



**Common methods of handling
human remains**



of dust. It also says: "The soul that is sinning—it itself will die." (Ezekiel 18:4; Psalm 103:14) Death has brought grief to millions and has repeatedly raised questions about the disposing of human remains.

Past and Present Practices

How were human remains disposed of among God's people of ancient times? In its early pages, the Bible mentions various ways of dealing with the dead, including burial in the ground. (Genesis 35:8) The patriarch Abraham and his wife, Sarah, as well as their son Isaac and grandson Jacob were buried in the cave of Machpelah. (Genesis 23:2, 19; 25:9; 49:30, 31; 50:13) Israelite judges Gideon and Samson were buried 'in the burial places of their fathers.' (Judges 8:32; 16:31) This suggests that having family grave sites was preferred among the ancient people of God. When Jesus Christ died in the first century C.E., his body was laid in a newly hewn rock tomb. (Matthew 27:57-60) Generally, then, human remains were buried in the earth or were entombed. This is still the practice in most places around the earth.

In some parts of the world today, however, a serious shortage of space and the high cost of land are making it increasingly difficult to obtain burial sites. Therefore, some people are considering other ways of disposing of human remains.

Scattering the ashes after the cremation of human remains is becoming more common. In England about 40 percent of the dead are now cared for in this manner. In Sweden, where over 80 percent of the deceased in urban areas are cremated, certain woodlands are designated for the scattering of ashes. And in Shanghai and a few other maritime cities of China, city govern-

ments sponsor mass scatterings at sea several times a year.

Where can ashes be scattered? Not just any place. Some may fear that scattering the ashes is detrimental to the environment. Actually, though, any possible risk of epidemics is nullified through cremation. Certain cemeteries in England and memorial parks in the United States set aside lawn areas or flower gardens as scattering grounds. Of course, Christians are especially concerned about the Scriptural view of cremation and the scattering of ashes.

What Is the Scriptural View?

In a pronouncement against "the king of Babylon," the prophet Isaiah said: "You have been thrown away without a burial place for you." (Isaiah 14:4, 19) Should the scattering of ashes be compared to such a case of humiliation? No, for there is no reference to cremation and the preservation or the scattering of the resulting ashes.

Jesus Christ spoke of the earthly resurrection of the dead that will take place during his Millennial Reign when he said: "All those in the memorial tombs will hear [my] voice and come out." (John 5:28, 29) However, that a specific grave is not necessarily required to resurrect a person is borne out in another prophetic description of the

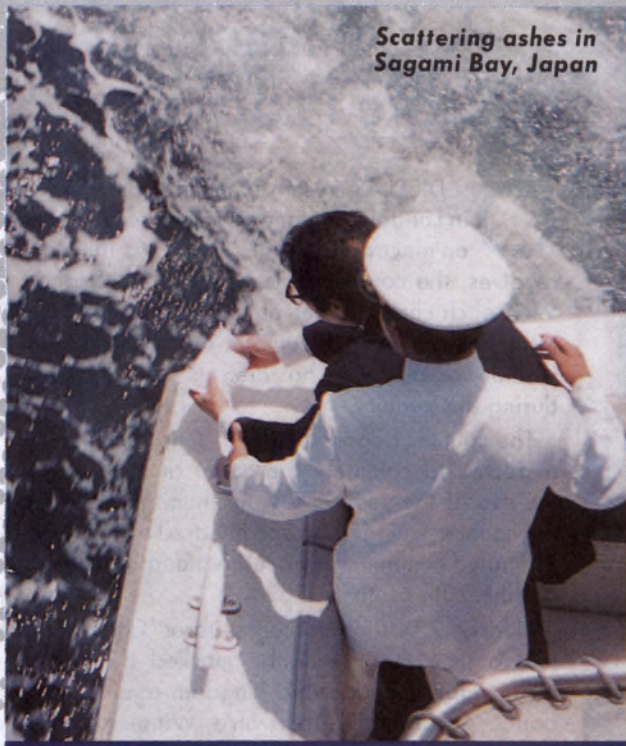
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Scattering ashes in Sagami Bay, Japan



Courtesy of Kaseisha, Tokyo

resurrection. Revelation 20:13 states: "The sea gave up those dead in it, and death and Hades gave up those dead in them." So, what matters is not where or how a person 'returns to dust.' Rather, it is whether he is remembered by God and is resurrected. (Job 14:13-15; compare Luke 23:42, 43.) Jehovah certainly does not need impressive tombs to help him remember people. Cremation does not prevent a person's resurrection. And if the scattering of ashes is done with a proper motive and without false religious ceremonies, it would not be incompatible with the Scriptures.

Those who decide in favor of scattering the ashes will need to pay attention to the law of the land. It would also be appropriate for them to take into account the feelings of the bereaved and others. Ser-

vants of Jehovah will do well to be careful that exercising their Scriptural freedom in this regard does not bring reproach upon the good name Christians bear. This is especially important in lands where cremation and the scattering of ashes are legally permissible but not yet fully accepted in the community. Of course, a Christian will stay away from any rites or customs based on the belief in the immortality of the human soul.

Full Freedom From the Grave!

Some who advocate the scattering of ashes say that it means freedom from burial in graves. Bringing the greatest relief, however, will be the fulfillment of the Bible's promise that "as the last enemy, death is to be brought to nothing."—1 Corinthians 15:24-28.

This means that graves, tombs, even cremation and the scattering of ashes, will become things of the past. Yes, death will be no more. Under divine inspiration the apostle John wrote: "I heard a loud voice from the throne say: 'Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.'"—Revelation 21:3, 4.

All of this will come about when human death resulting from Adam's sin is completely done away with under God's Kingdom. At that time obedient mankind will not be faced with the prospect of returning to the dust.

A Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy

ON DISPLAY in the Imperial War Museum in London, England, is a unique clock and an electronic digital counter. As the clock revolves, the counter clicks every 3.31 seconds. With each click another number is added to the total. Each click, each number, represents a man, woman, or child who has died as a result of war during this century.

The counter began its tally in June 1989 and is expected to complete the count at midnight on the eve of the year 2000. By then the figure on the counter will register one hundred million—the estimated number of war-related deaths throughout the 20th century.

Nearly 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ foretold a time that would be marked by 'nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom.' Accordingly, Jehovah's Witnesses have long been preaching that the devastating wars of this century, along with numerous earthquakes, pestilences, food shortages, and other developments, collectively supply proof that we are living in the "the last days"—the period of time following Christ's installment as King in heaven in the year 1914.—Luke 21:10, 11; 2 Timothy 3:1.

Using the Bible as its authority, *The Watchtower* announces the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy oppressors and turn the earth into a paradise. And what about the future of warfare? The Bible states: "Come, you people, behold the activities of Jehovah, how he has set astonishing events on the earth. He is making wars to cease to the extremity of the earth. The bow he breaks apart and does cut the spear in pieces; the [war] wagons he burns in the fire."
—Psalm 46:8, 9.



Clock: By Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum