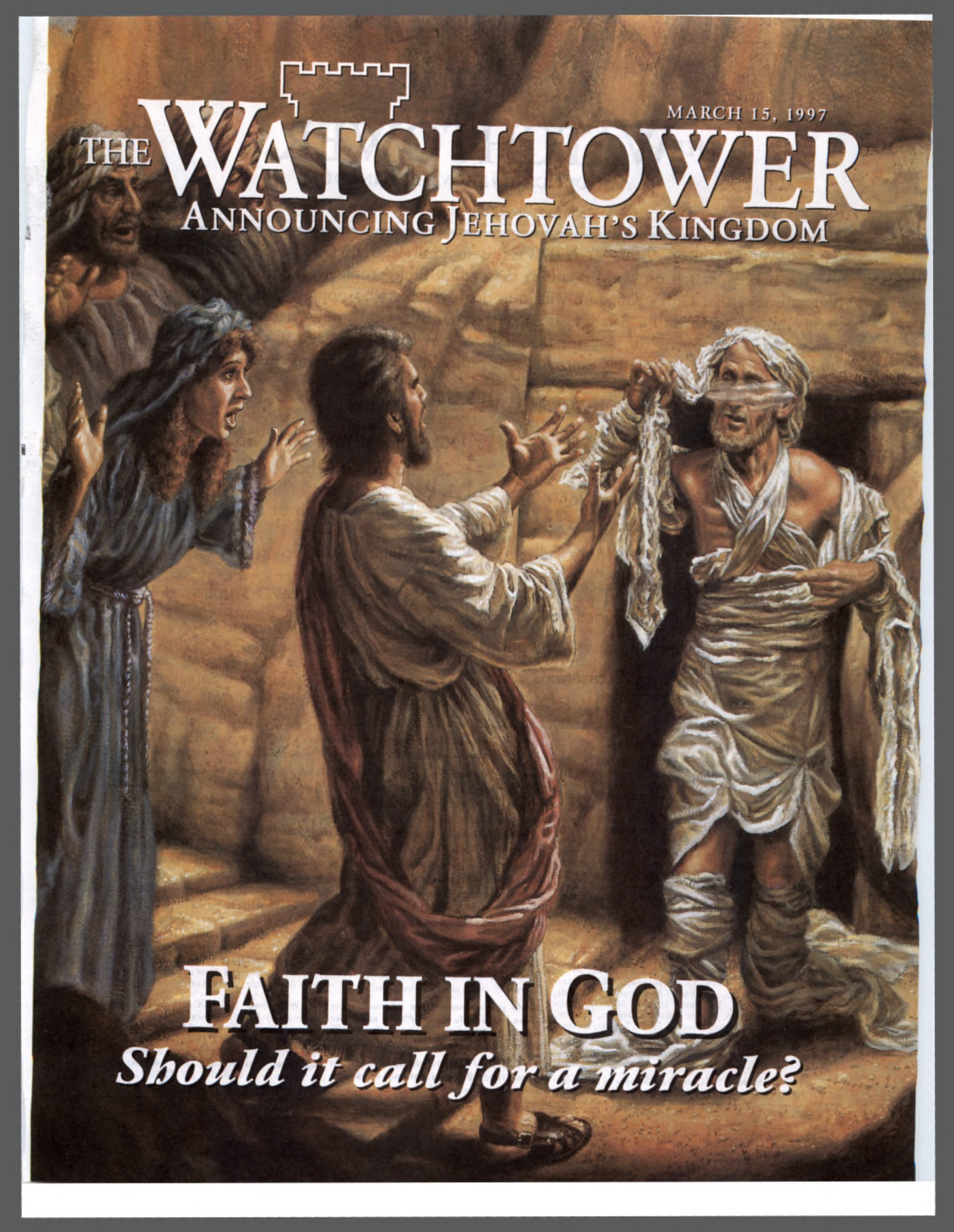




MARCH 15, 1997

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

FAITH IN GOD
Should it call for a miracle?

THE WATCHTOWER[®]

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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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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Faith in God

Should it call for a miracle?

ALBERT was in his early 20's when he began searching for God. He tried a number of religions but remained dissatisfied. Reading parts of the Bible, he learned how God dealt with such individuals as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. Albert found himself drawn to the God of the Bible. Could he, however, be sure that God really exists?

One evening Albert drove to an isolated place where he prayed, "Please God, give me a sign—anything to prove that you exist." Albert waited and waited. He recalls that when nothing happened, his expectation "turned to disappointment, to emptiness, to anger."

Like Albert, many feel that they have searched for God in vain. They may be confused by the sermons of clergymen or disillusioned by the salesmanship of television evangelizers. Struck by the hypocrisy evident among many of their neighbors, some are not sure what to believe. Yet, King David of ancient Israel assured his son Solomon: "If you search for [God], he will let himself be found by you."—1 Chronicles 28:9.

Well, then, how does God reveal himself? Should you expect a sign—some supernatu-

ral experience that will prove to you that God exists? According to a recent poll reported in *Time* magazine, more than two thirds of Americans believe in miracles. The article also noted that "the fastest-growing churches in America are the Charismatic and Pentecostal congregations whose worship revolves around 'signs and wonders.'"

Should it really take "signs and wonders" to believe in God? He has used miracles in times past. To illustrate: Saul of Tarsus, who was persecuting the followers of God's Son, Jesus Christ, had an extraordinary experience on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. This miraculous encounter with the resurrected Jesus led to Saul's conversion. (Acts 9: 1-22) Thus a former persecutor became the apostle Paul—one of the foremost advocates of Christianity!



God's Son miraculously spoke to Saul of Tarsus. Should you expect a miracle?

But do miracles always evoke such a favorable response? Is genuine faith in God dependent upon one's having some miraculous experience?



Why Miracles Alone Do Not Build Faith

SEEING is believing. That is the view of many. Some say that they would believe in God if he were to reveal himself in some miraculous way. Perhaps that is so, but would such belief lead to genuine faith?

Consider the Israelites Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The Bible shows that they were eyewitnesses of these awe-inspiring miracles from God: the ten plagues upon Egypt, the escape of the nation of Israel through the Red Sea, and the annihilation of the Egyptian Pharaoh and his military force. (Exodus 7:19-11:10; 12:29-32; Psalm 136:15) Korah, Dathan, and Abiram also heard Jehovah speak from heaven at Mount Sinai. (Deuteronomy 4:11, 12) Yet, not long after these miracles occurred, the three men instigated a rebellion against Jehovah and his appointed servants.—Numbers 16:1-35; Psalm 106:16-18.

About 40 years later, a prophet named Balaam also witnessed a miracle. Even angelic intervention did not deter him from siding with God's enemies, the Moabites. That miracle notwithstanding, Balaam went ahead and took a stand against Jehovah God and His people. (Numbers 22:1-35; 2 Peter 2:15, 16) Balaam's lack of faith, however, pales alongside that of Judas Iscariot. Despite having been a close companion of Jesus and an eyewitness to an extraordinary array of miracles, Judas betrayed Christ for thirty silver pieces.—Matthew 26:14-16, 47-50; 27:3-5.

The Jewish religious leaders were also

aware of Jesus' many miracles. After he resurrected Lazarus, they even admitted: "This man performs many signs." But did the sight of the now-living Lazarus soften their hearts and give them faith? No, indeed. Instead, they schemed to kill both Jesus and Lazarus!—John 11:47-53; 12:10.

Even direct intervention by God failed to produce faith in those wicked men. While Jesus was in the temple precincts on one occasion, he prayed aloud: "Father, glorify your name." Jehovah replied in a voice out of heaven: "I both glorified it and will glorify it again." Yet, this miraculous event did not produce faith in the hearts of those present. Says the Bible: "Although he had performed so many signs before them, they were not putting faith in him."—John 12:28-30, 37; compare Ephesians 3:17.

Why Miracles Did Not Build Faith

How can such lack of faith exist in the face of miracles? Rejection of Jesus by Jewish religious leaders seems especially puzzling when you consider that at the very time that he began his ministry, the Jews as a whole were "in expectation" of "the Christ," or the Messiah. (Luke 3:15) However, the problem lay in what those expectations were. Lexicographer W. E. Vine quotes a well-known Bible scholar as saying that the Jews were obsessed with the idea of a Messiah who would give them "temporal triumph" and "material greatness." Hence, they were not prepared for the humble, non-



**Even the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus
did not move Jesus' enemies to exercise faith**

political Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared in their midst as the true Messiah in 29 C.E. The religious leaders also feared that Jesus' teachings would upset the existing state of affairs and jeopardize their prominent positions. (John 11:48) Their preconceived ideas and selfishness blinded them to the meaning of Jesus' miracles.

Jewish religious leaders and others later rejected the miraculous proof that Jesus' followers enjoyed divine favor. For example, when his apostles healed a man lame from birth, irate members of the Jewish high court asked: "What shall we do with these men? Because, for a fact, a noteworthy sign has occurred through them, one manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. Nevertheless, in

order that it may not be spread abroad further among the people, let us tell them with threats not to speak anymore upon the basis of this name to any man at all." (Acts 3: 1-8; 4:13-17) Clearly, this wonderful miracle had not built or produced faith in the hearts of those men.

Ambition, pride, and greed are factors that have moved many to shut the doors of their hearts. This appears to have been the case with Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, mentioned at the outset. Jealousy, fear, and a host of other hurtful attitudes have hindered others. We are reminded, too, of the disobedient angels, the demons, who once had the privilege of looking upon the very face of God. (Matthew 18:10) They do not doubt the existence of God. Indeed, "the

demons believe and shudder.” (James 2:19) Yet, they have no faith in God.

The Meaning of True Faith

Faith is more than mere belief. It is also more than a momentary emotional reaction to some miracle. Says Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld.” An individual having faith is convinced in his heart that everything Jehovah God promises is as good as fulfilled. Moreover, the undeniable proof of unseen realities is so powerful that faith itself is said to be equivalent to that evidence. Yes, faith is based on evidence. And in times past, miracles played a role in the development of faith or the building of it. The signs performed by Jesus served to convince others that he was the promised Messiah. (Matthew 8:16, 17; Hebrews 2:2-4) Similarly, such gifts of God’s holy spirit, or active force, as miraculous healing and speaking in tongues proved that the Jews no longer had Jehovah’s favor but that his approval now rested on the Christian congregation, established by his Son, Jesus Christ.—1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

Among the miraculous gifts of the spirit it was the ability to prophesy. When unbelievers observed this miracle, some were moved to worship Jehovah, declaring: “God is really among you.” (1 Corinthians 14:22-25) However, Jehovah God did not intend that miracles be a permanent feature of Christian worship. Accordingly, the apostle Paul wrote: “Whether there are gifts of prophesying, they will be done away with; whether there are tongues, they will cease.” (1 Corinthians 13:8) These gifts evidently ceased with the death of the apostles and those who had received such gifts by means of them.

Would people then be left without a basis for faith? No, for Paul said: “[God] did not leave himself without witness in that he did good, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts to the full with food and good cheer.” (Acts 14:17) Indeed, to honesthearted ones who are willing to open their minds and hearts to the evidence that surrounds us, Jehovah God’s “invisible qualities are clearly seen from the world’s creation onward, because they are perceived by the things made, even his eternal power and Godship, so that they [those who deny God] are inexcusable.”—Romans 1:20.

More than belief in God’s existence is needed. Paul urged: “Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2) This can be done by diligently studying the Scriptures with the aid of Christian publications, such as this magazine. Faith based on accurate knowledge of God’s Word, the Bible, is not weak or shallow. Those who have discerned God’s will and are doing it in faith are rendering sacred service to God.—Romans 12:1.

Believing Though Not Seeing

The apostle Thomas had difficulty exercising faith in Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and stick my finger into the print of the nails and stick my hand into his side, I will certainly not believe,” Thomas declared. When Jesus later materialized a body that displayed the wounds of his impalement, Thomas responded favorably to this miracle. However, Jesus said: “Happy are those who do not see and yet believe.”—John 20:25-29.



Faith must be based on accurate knowledge of the Bible

With the help of his spirit, they are able to understand the Bible's teachings and its predominant theme—the vindication of Jehovah God's sovereignty by means of his heavenly Kingdom. (Matthew 6:9, 10; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) With great benefit to themselves,

these genuine Christians apply the Bible's wise counsel in life. (Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 48:17, 18) They accept the irrefutable proof that Bible prophecies mark our time as "the last days," and they have faith that God's promised new world is near at hand. (2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 24:3-14; 2 Peter 3:13) For them it is a joy to share the knowledge of God with others. (Proverbs 2:1-5) They know that it is only through a study of the Scriptures that those seeking God can truly find him.—Acts 17:26, 27.

Do you recall Albert, who was mentioned in the previous article? A few days after his prayer for a miracle had gone unanswered, he was visited by one of Jehovah's Witnesses, an elderly woman who left some Bible-based literature with him. Albert thereafter accepted a free home Bible study. As he became better acquainted with the Bible's message, his disappointment turned to excitement. He began to realize that he had found God after all.

The Scriptures urge: "Search for Jehovah, you people, while he may be found. Call to him while he proves to be near." (Isaiah 55:6) You can do this, not by awaiting a modern-day miracle from God, but by gaining accurate knowledge of his Word. This is a necessity, for miracles alone do not build faith.

Today, millions of Jehovah's Witnesses are "walking by faith, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7) Although they did not see the miracles recorded in the Bible, they firmly believe that these occurred. The Witnesses exercise faith in God and his Word.



DO YOU LONG TO SERVE MORE FULLY?

“I WAS angry with Jehovah,” says Laura. “I prayed and prayed that he would help us fix our financial problems so that I could continue to pioneer—but to no avail. I finally had to get off the pioneer list. I must also admit that I was jealous of those who could continue.”

Consider, too, the case of Michael, a ministerial servant in a congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses. He had been reaching out for the office of overseer. (1 Timothy 3:1) When his longing went unfulfilled for several years, he became so bitter that he no longer wanted to be considered for the privilege. “I just couldn’t bear the pain of disappointment again,” he says.

Have you had a similar experience? Have you had to relinquish a beloved theocratic privilege? For instance, have you had to stop serving as a pioneer, a full-time Kingdom proclaimer? Or do you long for certain congregation responsibilities entrusted to others? It may even be that you keenly desire to serve at Bethel or as a missionary, but your circumstances do not allow it.

“Expectation postponed is making the heart sick,” acknowledges the book of Proverbs. (Proverbs 13:12) This may especially be so when others receive the very privileges that you hope for. Does God’s Word provide insight, comfort, and hope for any who experience such disappointments? Yes, it does. In fact, the 84th Psalm expresses the sentiments of a servant of Jehovah

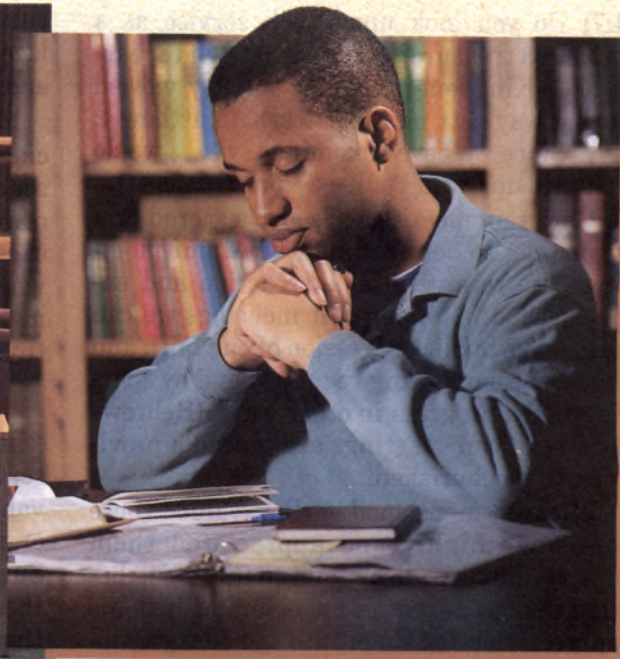
who had similar unfulfilled desires regarding Jehovah’s service.

A Levite’s Appreciation

The composers of the 84th Psalm were the sons of Korah, Levites who served at Jehovah’s temple and highly esteemed their service privileges. “How lovely your grand tabernacle is, O Jehovah of armies!” one of them exclaims. “My soul has yearned and also pined away for the courtyards of Jehovah. My own heart and my very flesh cry out joyfully to the living God.”—Psalm 84:1, 2.

This Levite had such a longing to serve at Jehovah’s temple that even the ordinary scenery along the way to Jerusalem appeared attractive to him. “Passing along through the low plain of the Baca bushes,” he says, “they turn it into a spring itself.” (Psalm 84:6) Yes, a normally dry area was like a well-watered region.

Because the psalmist was a nonpriestly Levite, he could serve at the temple for only one week every six months. (1 Chronicles 24:1-19; 2 Chronicles 23:8; Luke 1:5, 8, 9) The rest of his time was spent at home in one of the Levite cities. He therefore sang: “Even the bird itself has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she has put her young ones—your grand altar, O Jehovah of armies, my King and my God!” (Psalm 84:3) How happy the Levite would have been if he was like the birds



***In setting personal goals,
put the doing of God's will first***

that had a more permanent dwelling place at the temple!

It would have been easy for the Levite to give in to bitterness because he could not serve at the temple more often. However, he was pleased to serve as he could, and he surely realized that wholehearted devotion to Jehovah is worth the effort. What helped this faithful Levite to remain content with his service privileges?

Learn to Be Content

"A day in your courtyards is better than a thousand elsewhere," says the Levite: "I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God rather than to move around in the tents of wickedness." (Psalm 84:10) He appreciated that spending even

one day at Jehovah's house is an inestimable privilege. And the Levite had far more than one day to serve at the temple. His contentment with his privileges made him sing for joy.

What about us? Do we count our blessings, or do we tend to forget what we already have in Jehovah's service? Because of their devotion to him, Jehovah has entrusted to his people a wide range of privileges and duties. These include the heavier responsibilities of oversight, shepherding, teaching, and various features of the full-time service. But they also involve other precious things having to do with Jehovah's worship.

For example, consider the Christian ministry. The apostle Paul likens our privilege of preaching the good news to our having a "treasure in earthen vessels." (2 Corinthians

4:7) Do you look upon such service as a priceless treasure? Jesus Christ, who spearheaded Kingdom-preaching activity, viewed it that way, setting the pattern. (Matthew 4:17) "Since we have this ministry . . . , we do not give up," said Paul.—2 Corinthians 4:1.

Christian meetings are also a sacred provision not to be taken lightly. At our meetings, we receive vital instruction and enjoy needed fellowship. At meetings we can also make public expression of our faith and hope by commenting regularly and by sharing in the program in other ways. (Hebrews 10:23-25) Our meetings are indeed a provision to be cherished!

Michael, mentioned earlier, valued these blessings highly and appreciated them deeply. But his disappointment at not being able to serve as an elder pushed his appreciation for them into the background temporarily. By refocusing on them, he was able to regain his equilibrium and patiently wait on Jehovah.

Rather than feeling discontent because of not having a certain privilege, we do well to reexamine the ways that Jehovah is blessing us, as did the psalmist.* If we fail to see much, we need to look again, asking

* Please see the article "Do You Appreciate Sacred Things?" in the June 15, 1988, issue of *The Watchtower*.

In Our Next Issue

Are These Really the Last Days?

Deliverance Into
a Righteous New World

The "Holy Coat of Trier"

Jehovah to open our eyes to see our privileges and the ways that he is blessing us and using us to his praise.—Proverbs 10:22.

It is also important to realize that special privileges, such as the office of overseer, call for specific qualifications. (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) So we need to examine ourselves, looking for any areas where improvement is needed and then make earnest efforts to improve.—1 Timothy 4:12-15.

Do Not Become Discouraged

If we do not receive a certain privilege of service, we need not conclude that Jehovah has more love for those who do enjoy it or that he is holding back good from us. Surely, we should not enviously assume that these others have undeservedly obtained their privileges through human favoritism instead of theocratic appointment. Brooding over such ideas may lead to jealousy, contention, and even to our giving up altogether.—1 Corinthians 3:3; James 3:14-16.

Laura, mentioned at the outset, did not give up. She eventually came to grips with her feelings of anger and jealousy. Laura repeatedly prayed to God for help to overcome her negative reaction to her being unable to pioneer. She also sought assistance from qualified men in the congregation and felt reassured of God's love. "Jehovah gave me peace of mind," she said. "While my husband and I can't pioneer now, we cherish the time when we did and draw strength from experiences that we had. We also help our grown son in his pioneering." Being content, Laura is now able to "rejoice with people who rejoice" in their pioneer service.—Romans 12:15.

Set Attainable Goals

Our being content with current service privileges does not require that we stop set-

GOALS WE MIGHT SET

- ☐ Reading the Bible daily.—Joshua 1:8; Matthew 4:4
- ☐ Improving our perceptive powers through Scriptural training.—Hebrews 5:14
- ☐ Developing a closer relationship with God.—Psalm 73:28
- ☐ Cultivating each of the fruits of the spirit.—Galatians 5:22, 23
- ☐ Improving the quality of our prayers.—Philippians 4:6, 7
- ☐ Becoming more effective in preaching and teaching.—1 Timothy 4:15, 16
- ☐ Reading and meditating on each issue of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines.—Psalm 49:3

ting further theocratic goals. In discussing the heavenly resurrection, Paul spoke of “stretching forward to the things ahead.” He also said: “To what extent we have made progress, let us go on walking orderly in this same routine.” (Philippians 3:13-16) Theocratic goals can help us stretch forward. The challenge, however, is to keep them realistic.

Realistic goals are reasonable and attainable. (Philippians 4:5) This does not mean that a goal requiring several years of hard work is unrealistic. Such a long-range goal can be reached gradually by setting a series of intermediate goals, or steps. These can serve as markers for spiritual progress. Successfully completing each step will provide a sense of satisfaction along the way rather than disappointment.

A Fine Balance

It is important to recognize, however, that because of our circumstances and limitations, some privileges may not be received. Setting them as goals leads only to disappointment and frustration. Such goals should be set aside, at least for the time be-

ing. Doing this will not be difficult if we pray for godly contentment and make the doing of Jehovah’s will our chief concern. When we reach out for privileges, Jehovah’s glory—not the recognition of our personal accomplishments—is important. (Psalm 16:5, 6; Matthew 6:33) The Bible appropriately tells us: “Roll your works upon Jehovah himself and your plans will be firmly established.”—Proverbs 16:3.

In considering the 84th Psalm, we can see that the psalmist manifested such an attitude toward service privileges, and Jehovah blessed him richly. Moreover, this psalm continues to benefit Jehovah’s people down to this day.

With prayerful reliance upon Jehovah, you can balance your longing for additional privileges with contentment with those you now enjoy. Never let the desire to do more rob you of appreciation for what you have now and the joy of serving Jehovah forever. Trust in Jehovah, for this results in happiness, as shown in the Levite’s words: “O Jehovah of armies, happy is the man that is trusting in you.”—Psalm 84:12.

INCLINE YOUR HEART TO DISCERNMENT

*"Jehovah himself gives wisdom; out of his mouth
there are knowledge and discernment."—PROVERBS 2:6.*

JEHOVAH is our Grand Instructor. (Isaiah 30:20, 21) But what must we do to benefit from "the very knowledge of God" revealed in his Word? In part, we must 'incline our heart to discernment'—have a heart-felt desire to acquire and display this quality. For this, we must look to God, for the wise man said: "Jehovah himself gives wisdom; out of his mouth there are knowledge and discernment." (Proverbs 2:1-6) What are knowledge, wisdom, and discernment?

² *Knowledge* is familiarity with facts acquired by experience, observation, or study. *Wisdom* is the ability to put knowledge to work. (Matthew 11:19) King Solomon displayed wisdom when two women claimed the same child and he used his knowledge of a mother's devotion to her offspring to settle the dispute. (1 Kings 3:16-28) *Discernment* is "acuteness of judgment." It is "the power or faculty of the mind by which it distinguishes one thing from another." (*Webster's Universal Dictionary*) If we incline our heart to discernment, Jehovah will give it to us through his Son. (2 Timothy 2:1, 7) But how can discernment affect various aspects of life?

Discernment and Our Speech

³ Discernment helps us to realize that

1. How can we incline our heart to discernment?
2. (a) What is knowledge? (b) How would you define wisdom? (c) What is discernment?
3. How would you explain Proverbs 11:12, 13 and what it means to be "in want of heart"?

there is "a time to keep quiet and a time to speak." (Ecclesiastes 3:7) This quality also makes us careful about what we say. Proverbs 11:12, 13 states: "The one in want of heart has despised his own fellowman, but the man of broad discernment is one that keeps silent. The one walking about as a slanderer is uncovering confidential talk, but the one faithful in spirit is covering over a matter." Yes, a man or a woman who despises another person is "in want of heart." According to lexicographer Wilhelm Gesenius, such an individual is "void of understanding." He or she lacks good judgment, and the use of the term "heart" shows that positive qualities of the inner person are deficient. If a professing Christian should carry his or her loose talk to the point of slander or reviling, appointed elders must act to put an end to this unwholesome situation in the congregation.—Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 101:5; 1 Corinthians 5:11.

⁴ Unlike those "in want of heart," individuals of "broad discernment" keep silent when it is appropriate to do so. They do not betray a confidence. (Proverbs 20:19) Knowing that unguarded speech can cause harm, discerning ones are "faithful in spirit." They are loyal to fellow believers and do not divulge confidential matters that might endanger them. If discerning Christians receive confidential information of any kind

4. What do discerning and faithful Christians do about confidential information?

pertaining to the congregation, they keep it to themselves until Jehovah's organization sees good to make it known by its own means of publication.

Discernment and Our Conduct

⁵ Bible proverbs help us to use discernment and avoid improper conduct. For example, Proverbs 10:23 says: "To the stupid one the carrying on of loose conduct is like sport, but wisdom is for the man of discernment." Those to whom loose conduct is "like sport" are blind to the wrongness of their course and discount God as the one to whom all must render an account. (Romans 14:12) Such 'stupid ones' become perverted in their reasoning to the point of assuming that God does not see their wrongdoing. By their actions, they in effect say: "There is no Jehovah." (Psalm 14:1-3; Isaiah 29:15, 16) Not being guided by godly principles, they lack discernment and cannot judge matters correctly.—Proverbs 28:5.

⁶ "The man of discernment" realizes that loose conduct is not "sport," a game. He knows that it displeases God and can destroy our relationship with him. Such conduct is stupid because it robs people of self-respect, ruins marriages, harms both mind and body, and leads to loss of spirituality. Let us therefore incline our heart to discernment and avoid loose conduct or immorality of any kind.—Proverbs 5:1-23.

Discernment and Our Spirit

⁷ Inclining our heart to discernment also

5. How do 'stupid ones' view loose conduct, and why?

6. Why is loose conduct stupid, and how will we view it if we have discernment?

7. What are some physical effects of anger?

helps us to control our spirit. "He that is slow to anger is abundant in discernment," says Proverbs 14:29, "but one that is impatient is exalting foolishness." One reason why a discerning person strives to avoid uncontrolled anger is that it has adverse effects upon us physically. It can raise blood pressure and cause respiratory trouble. Doctors have cited anger and rage as emotions aggravating or causing such ailments as asthma, skin diseases, digestive problems, and ulcers.

⁸ It is not just to avoid injuring our health that we should use discernment and be



Discernment helps us to control our spirit

"slow to anger." Being impatient can lead to foolish actions that we will regret. Discernment makes us consider what could result from unbridled speech or rash conduct and thus keeps us from "exalting foolishness" by doing something unwise. Especially does discernment help us to realize that rage can upset our thinking processes, so that we cannot use sound judgment. This would impair our ability to do the divine will and

8. Being impatient can lead to what, but how can discernment help us in this regard?

live according to God's righteous principles. Yes, yielding to uncontrolled anger is spiritually damaging. In fact, "fits of anger" are classed among the detestable "works of the flesh" that would keep us from inheriting God's Kingdom. (Galatians 5:19-21) As discerning Christians, then, let us be "swift about hearing, slow about speaking, slow about wrath."—James 1:19.

⁹ If we do become angry, discernment may indicate that we should keep quiet so as to avoid a conflagration. Proverbs 17:27 says: "Anyone holding back his sayings is possessed of knowledge, and a man of discernment is cool of spirit." Discernment and brotherly love will help us to see the need to control an urge to blurt out something hurtful. If an outburst of anger has already occurred, love and humility will move us to apologize and make amends. But suppose someone has offended us. Then let us speak to him alone in a mild and humble way and with the principal objective of promoting peace.—Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15-17.

Discernment and Our Family

¹⁰ Family members need to show wisdom and discernment, for these qualities will build up a household. Says Proverbs 24:3, 4: "By wisdom a household will be built up, and by discernment it will prove firmly established. And by knowledge will the interior rooms be filled with all precious and pleasant things of value." Wisdom and discernment are like fine building blocks for successful family life. Discernment helps Christian parents to draw out the feelings and concerns of their children. A discerning person is able to communicate, to listen and gain insight into the feelings and thoughts of his or her marriage mate.—Proverbs 20:5.

9. How can discernment and brotherly love help us to resolve differences?

10. What role do wisdom and discernment play in family life?

¹¹ Wisdom and discernment are unquestionably vital for happy family life. For instance, Proverbs 14:1 says: "The truly wise woman has built up her house, but the foolish one tears it down with her own hands." A wise and discerning married woman in proper subjection to her husband will work hard for the good of the household and will thereby help to build up her family. One thing that will 'build up her house' is that she always speaks well of her husband and thus increases the respect of others for him. And a capable, discerning wife who has the reverential fear of Jehovah wins praise for herself.—Proverbs 12:4; 31:28, 30.

Discernment and Our Course in Life

¹² Discernment helps us to maintain a proper course in all our affairs. This is indicated at Proverbs 15:21, which says: "Foolishness is a rejoicing to one who is in want of heart, but the man of discernment is one who goes straight ahead." How are we to understand this proverb? A course of foolishness, or folly, is a cause of joy to senseless men, women, and young people. They are "in want of heart," lacking good motive, and are so unwise that they rejoice in foolishness.

¹³ Israel's discerning King Solomon learned that frivolity means very little. He admitted: "I said, even I, in my heart: 'Do come now, let me try you out with rejoicing. Also, see good.' And, look! that too was vanity. I said to laughter: 'Insanity!' and to rejoicing: 'What is this doing?'" (Ecclesiastes 2:1, 2) As a man of discernment, Solomon found that mirth and laughter alone

11. How can a discerning married woman 'build up her house'?

12. How do those "in want of heart" view foolishness, and why?

13. What did Solomon discern about laughter and frivolity?



**Discerning King Solomon realized that
frivolity is not really satisfying**

are not satisfying, for they do not produce real and lasting happiness. Laughter may help us to forget our problems temporarily, but afterward they may loom up to an even greater degree. Solomon could rightly speak of laughter as “insanity.” Why? Because thoughtless laughter beclouds sound judgment. It may cause us to take very serious matters lightly. The kind of rejoicing associated with the words and actions of a court jester cannot be pointed to as producing something worthwhile. Discerning the import of Solomon’s experiment with laughter and mirth helps us to avoid being “lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God.” —2 Timothy 3:1, 4.

¹⁴ How is it that the man of discernment goes “straight ahead”? Spiritual discernment and the application of godly principles lead people in an upright, straightforward

14. How does the man of discernment go “straight ahead”?

ward course. Byington’s translation bluntly says: “Foolishness is bliss to a brainless man, but an intelligent man will go straight.” “The man of discernment” makes straight paths for his feet and is able to distinguish between right and wrong because of applying God’s Word in life.—Hebrews 5:14; 12:12, 13.

Always Look to Jehovah for Discernment

¹⁵ To follow an upright course in life, all of us need to acknowledge our imperfection and look to Jehovah for spiritual discernment. Says Proverbs 2:6-9: “Jehovah himself gives wisdom; out of his mouth there are knowledge and discernment. And for the upright ones he will treasure up practical wisdom; for those walking in integrity he is a shield, by observing the paths of judgment, and he will guard the very way of his loyal ones. In that case you will understand righteousness and judgment and uprightness, the entire course of what is good.”—Compare James 4:6.

¹⁶ Acknowledging our dependence upon Jehovah, let us humbly seek to discern his will by delving deeply into his Word. He possesses wisdom in the absolute sense, and his counsel is always beneficial. (Isaiah 40:13; Romans 11:34) In fact, any advice that stands in opposition to him is valueless. Proverbs 21:30 states: “There is no wisdom, nor any discernment, nor any counsel in opposition to Jehovah.” (Compare Proverbs 19:21.) Only spiritual discernment, developed by a study of God’s Word with the help of publications provided through “the

15. What do we learn from Proverbs 2:6-9?

16. Why is there no wisdom, discernment, or counsel in opposition to Jehovah?

faithful and discreet slave,” will help us to pursue a proper course in life. (Matthew 24:45-47) Let us therefore direct our way of life in harmony with the counsel of Jehovah, knowing that no matter how plausible contrary advice may seem, it cannot stand against his Word.

¹⁷ Discerning Christians who give counsel realize that it should be based solidly on God’s Word and that Bible study and meditation are required before answering a question. (Proverbs 15:28) If questions about serious matters are wrongly answered, great harm can result. Hence, Christian elders need spiritual discernment and should pray for Jehovah’s guidance when endeavoring to assist fellow believers spiritually.

Abound With Spiritual Discernment

¹⁸ To please Jehovah, we need “discernment in all things.” (2 Timothy 2:7) Avid study of the Bible and compliance with the direction of God’s spirit and organization will help us to discern what to do when we face situations that could lead us into a wrong course. For example, suppose something in the congregation is not handled as we think it should be. Spiritual discernment will help us to see that this is no reason to stop associating with Jehovah’s people and to quit serving God. Think of our privilege to serve Jehovah, of the spiritual freedom we enjoy, of the joy we can derive from our service as Kingdom proclaimers. Spiritual discernment enables us to get the right perspective and to realize that we are dedicated to God and should cherish our relationship with him, regardless of what others do.

17. What can result if the wrong counsel is given?

18. If a problem should arise in the congregation, how can discernment help us to maintain our spiritual balance?

If there is nothing that we can do theocratically to handle a problem, we need to wait patiently for Jehovah to remedy the situation. Instead of quitting or yielding to despair, let us “wait for God.”—Psalm 42:5, 11.

¹⁹ Spiritual discernment helps us to remain loyal to God and his people. Paul told Christians in Philippi: “This is what I continue praying, that your love may abound yet more and more with accurate knowledge and full discernment; that you may make sure of the more important things, so that you may be flawless and not be stumbling others up to the day of Christ.” (Philippians 1:9, 10) To reason properly, we need “accurate knowledge and full discernment.” The Greek word here rendered “discernment” denotes “sensitive moral perception.” When we learn something, we want to perceive its relationship to God and Christ and to meditate on how it magnifies Jehovah’s personality and provisions. This enhances our discernment and our appreciation for what Jehovah God and Jesus Christ have done for us. If we do not fully understand something, discernment will help us to realize that we

19. (a) What was the essence of Paul’s prayer for the Philippians? (b) How can discernment help us if we do not fully understand something?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ Why should we incline our heart to discernment?
- ☐ How can discernment affect our speech and conduct?
- ☐ What effect can discernment have on our spirit?
- ☐ Why should we always look to Jehovah for discernment?

must not cast aside our faith in all the important things we have learned about God, Christ, and the divine purpose.

²⁰ We will abound with spiritual discernment if we always harmonize our thoughts and actions with God's Word. (2 Corinthians 13:5) Doing this in a constructive way helps us to be humble, not opinionated and critical of others. Discernment will help us to

20. How can we abound with spiritual discernment?

benefit from correction and make sure of the more important things. (Proverbs 3:7) With a desire to please Jehovah, then, let us seek to be filled with accurate knowledge of his Word. This will enable us to discern right from wrong, determine what is truly important, and loyally cling to our precious relationship with Jehovah. All of this is possible if we incline our heart to discernment. Yet, something else is needed. We must let discernment safeguard us.

LET DISCERNMENT SAFEGUARD YOU

*"Thinking ability itself will keep guard over you,
discernment itself will safeguard you."*—PROVERBS 2:11.

JEHOVAH wants you to exercise discernment. Why? Because he knows that it will safeguard you from various dangers. Proverbs 2:10-19 opens by saying: "When wisdom enters into your heart and knowledge itself becomes pleasant to your very soul, thinking ability itself will keep guard over you, discernment itself will safeguard you." Safeguard you from what? From such things as "the bad way," those leaving upright paths, and people devious in their general course.

² Likely you will recall that discernment is the faculty of the mind whereby it distinguishes one thing from another. A person with discernment perceives differences

of ideas or things and has good judgment. As Christians, we especially desire spiritual discernment based on accurate knowledge of God's Word. When we study the Scriptures, it is as though we are quarrying the building blocks of spiritual discernment. What we learn can help us to make decisions that please Jehovah.

³ When God asked Israel's King Solomon what blessing he wanted, the young ruler said: "You must give to your servant an obedient heart to judge your people, to discern between good and bad." Solomon asked for discernment, and Jehovah gave it to him to an unusual degree. (1 Kings 3:9; 4:30) To acquire discernment, we need to pray, and we have to study God's Word with

3. How can we acquire spiritual discernment?

1. Discernment can safeguard us from what?
2. What is discernment, and what kind do Christians especially desire?

**Discernment will help us to apply
Jesus' counsel to keep on seeking
first the Kingdom**

the help of the enlightening publications provided through "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45-47) This will help us to develop spiritual discernment to the extent that we become "full-grown in powers of understanding," able to "distinguish [or, discern between] both right and wrong."—1 Corinthians 14:20; Hebrews 5:14.

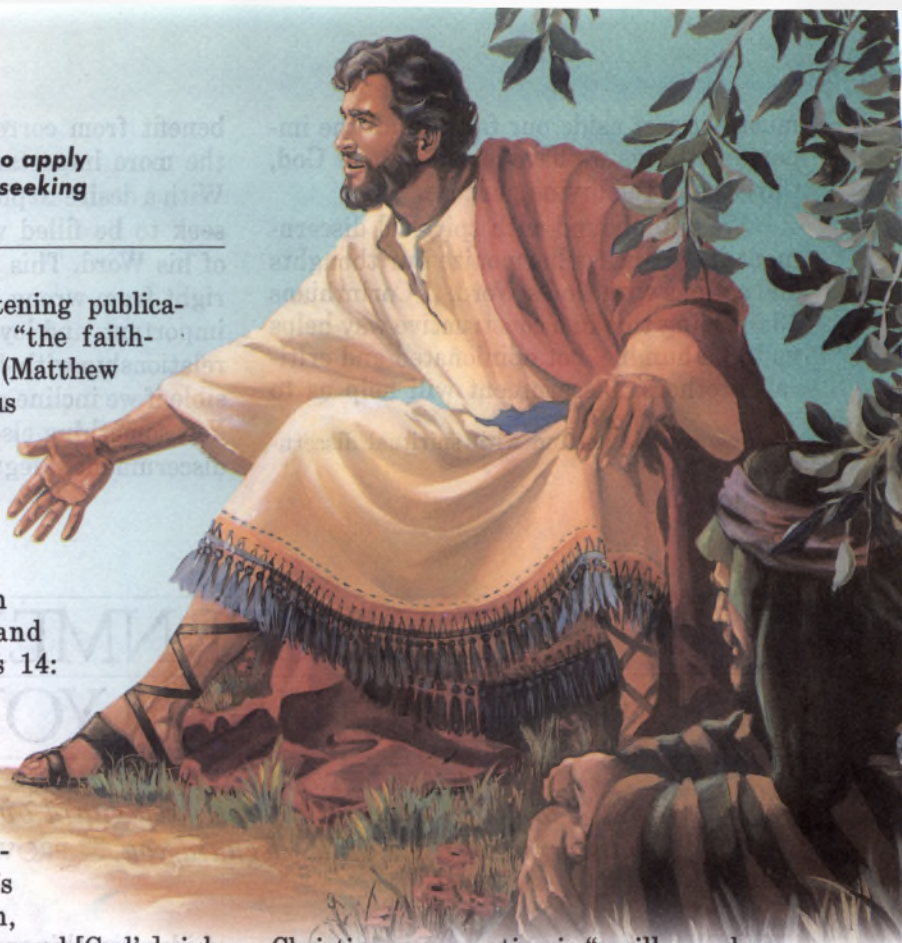
**Special Need for
Discernment**

⁴ With proper discernment, we can act in harmony with Jesus Christ's words: "Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and [God's] righteousness, and all these other [material] things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33) Jesus also said: "The lamp of the body is your eye. When your eye is simple, your whole body is also bright." (Luke 11:34) The eye is a figurative lamp. A "simple" eye is sincere, focused. With such an eye, we can show discernment and walk without stumbling spiritually.

⁵ Instead of keeping their eye simple, some have complicated their lives and the lives of others with tempting business dealings. But we should remember that the

4. What does it mean to have a "simple" eye, and how can it benefit us?

5. With regard to business dealings, what should we bear in mind about the purpose of the Christian congregation?



Christian congregation is "a pillar and support of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15) Like a building's columns, the congregation upholds God's truth, not anyone's business enterprise. Congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses have not been established as locations to promote commercial interests, goods, or services. We must refrain from pursuing personal business affairs in the Kingdom Hall. Discernment helps us to see that Kingdom Halls, Congregation Book Studies, assemblies, and conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses are places for Christian association and *spiritual* discussion. If we were to use spiritual relationships to promote any sort of commercialism, would this not show at least some lack of appreciation for spiritual values? Congregational connections should never be exploited for financial gain.

⁶ Some have used theocratic contacts to sell health or beauty aids, vitamin products, telecommunication services, construction materials, travel plans, computer programs and equipment, and so forth. However, congregation meetings are no place for selling or promoting commercial products or services. We can discern the underlying principle if we remember that Jesus “drove all those with the sheep and cattle out of the temple, and he poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. And he said to those selling the doves: ‘Take these things away from here! Stop making the house of my Father a house of merchandise!’”—John 2:15, 16.

What About Investments?

⁷ Both discernment and caution are needed when considering an investment in a business venture. Suppose someone wants to borrow money and makes promises like these: “I guarantee that you will make money.” “You can’t lose. This is a sure thing.” Beware when anyone gives such assurances. Either he is not being realistic or he is dishonest, for investing is rarely a sure thing. In fact, some smooth-talking, unscrupulous individuals have defrauded members of the congregation. This calls to mind the “ungodly men” who slipped into the first-century congregation and ‘turned the undeserved kindness of God into an excuse for loose conduct.’ They were like jagged underwater rocks that could rip and kill swimmers. (Jude 4, 12) True, the motives of defrauders are different, but they too prey upon members of the congregation.

⁸ Even well-meaning Christians have

6. Why should commercial products and services not be sold or promoted at congregation meetings?

7. Why are discernment and caution needed with regard to investments?

8. What has happened in connection with some seemingly profitable business ventures?

shared information about seemingly profitable ventures, only to find that they and those following their example lost the money they invested. As a result, a number of Christians have lost privileges in the congregation. When get-rich-quick ventures prove to be fraudulent schemes, the only one to profit is the defrauder, who often promptly disappears. How can discernment help one to avoid such situations?

⁹ Discernment carries the thought of being able to grasp what is obscure. This ability is needed to evaluate claims about investments. Christians trust one another, and some may reason that their spiritual brothers and sisters would not get involved in ventures that would endanger the resources of fellow believers. But the fact that a businessman is a Christian does not guarantee that he excels in business matters or that his enterprise will succeed.

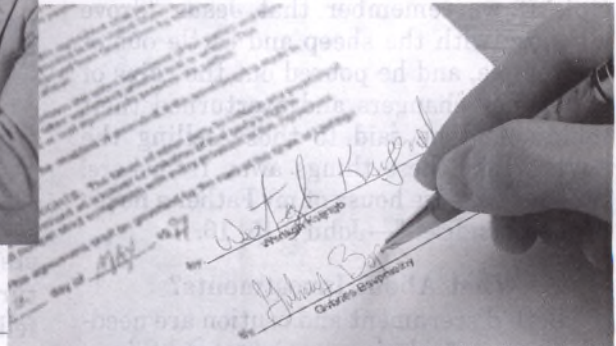
¹⁰ Some Christians seek business loans from fellow believers because reputable lending agencies would never advance money for their risky enterprises. Many have been fooled into believing that simply by investing their money, they could make a quick fortune without doing much work or perhaps no work at all. Some are attracted to an investment because of the glamour associated with it, only to lose their life savings! One Christian invested a large sum of money, expecting to get a 25-percent rate of return in just two weeks. He lost all that money when bankruptcy was declared. In another venture, a real-estate developer borrowed large sums of money from others in the congregation. He promised

9. Why is discernment needed to evaluate claims about investments?

10. Why do some Christians seek business loans from fellow believers, and what could happen to such investments?



Always commit business agreements to writing



unreasonably high returns but went bankrupt and lost the borrowed funds.

When Business Ventures Fail

¹¹ Business failures have led to disappointment and even to loss of spirituality on the part of some Christians who entered into unsound ventures. Heartache and bitterness have resulted from failure to let discernment act as a safeguard. Greed has snared many. "Let . . . greediness not even be mentioned among you, just as it befits holy people," wrote Paul. (Ephesians 5:3) And he warned: "Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things, and by reaching out for this love some have been led astray from the faith and have stabbed themselves all over with many pains."—1 Timothy 6:9, 10.

11. What counsel did Paul give regarding greed and the love of money?

¹² If a Christian developed a love of money, he would cause himself much spiritual harm. The Pharisees were money lovers, and this is a trait of many in these last days. (Luke 16:14; 2 Timothy 3:1, 2) In contrast, a Christian's manner of life should be "free of the love of money." (Hebrews 13:5)

Of course, Christians can do business with one another or start businesses together. If they do so, however, discussions and negotiations should be kept separate from congregational matters. And remember: Even among spiritual brothers, *always commit business agreements to writing*. Helpful in this regard is the article "Put It in Writing!," published in *Awake!* of February 8, 1983, pages 13 to 15.

¹³ Proverbs 22:7 tells us: "The borrower is servant to the man doing the lending." It is often unwise for us to put ourselves or our brother in the position of such a servant. When anyone asks us to lend him money for a business venture, it would be advisable to consider his ability to repay the sum. Is he known to be reliable and trustworthy? Of course, we should realize that making such a loan could mean the loss of the money because many business ventures fail. A con-

12. If Christians do business with one another, what should they especially remember?

13. How would you apply Proverbs 22:7 to business ventures?

tract in itself does not ensure a successful venture. And surely it is not prudent for anyone to place more at risk in an enterprise than he could afford to lose.

¹⁴ We need to show discernment if we have lent funds to a Christian for business purposes and the money was lost, though no dishonest practices were involved. If the business failure was not the fault of our fellow believer who borrowed the money, can we say that we were wronged? No, because we voluntarily made the loan, we have probably been collecting interest on it, and nothing dishonest has taken place. Since there was no dishonesty, we have no basis for legal action against the borrower. What good would it do to sue an honest fellow Christian who had to file for bankruptcy because a well-intentioned business venture failed? —1 Corinthians 6:1.

¹⁵ Those experiencing business failures sometimes seek relief by declaring bankruptcy. Since Christians are not negligent about indebtedness, even after being legally freed of certain debts, some have felt obliged to try to pay off canceled sums if the creditors would accept payment. But what if a borrower lost his brother's money and then lived in a luxurious manner? Or what if the borrower acquired sufficient funds to pay back what he borrowed but ignored the moral obligation he may have to his brother financially? Then there would be questions about the borrower's qualifications to serve in a responsible capacity in the congregation.—1 Timothy 3:3, 8; see *The Watchtower*, September 15, 1994, pages 30-1.

14. Why do we need to show discernment if we have lent money to a fellow Christian whose business fails?

15. What factors require consideration if bankruptcy is declared?

What if There Is Fraud?

¹⁶ Discernment helps us to realize that profits do not result from all investments. Yet, what if fraud is involved? Fraud is "the intentional use of deception, trickery, or perversion of truth for the purpose of inducing another to part with some valuable thing belonging to him or to give up a legal right." Jesus Christ outlined steps that may be taken when a person thinks he has been defrauded by a fellow worshiper. According to Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus said: "If your brother commits a sin, go lay bare his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, in order that at the mouth of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector." The illustration that Jesus subsequently gave indicates that he had in mind such sins as those involving financial matters, including fraud.—Matthew 18:23-35.

¹⁷ Of course, there would be no Scriptural basis for taking the steps outlined at Matthew 18:15-17 if there was no evidence or even a suggestion of fraud. Yet, what if a professing Christian actually defrauded us? Discernment can safeguard us from taking action that may put the congregation in a bad light. Paul advised fellow Christians to let themselves be wronged and even defrauded instead of taking a brother to court.—1 Corinthians 6:7.

¹⁸ Our genuine brothers and sisters are not 'full of fraud and villainy,' like the

16. What steps may be taken if we seem to be victims of business fraud?

17, 18. If a professing Christian defrauds us, how can discernment safeguard us?

sorcerer Bar-Jesus. (Acts 13:6-12) So let us use discernment when money is lost in business ventures involving fellow believers. If we are thinking about taking legal action, we should consider the possible effects on us personally, on the other person or persons, on the congregation, and on outsiders. Pursuing compensation could consume much of our time, energy, and other resources. It might result only in enriching attorneys and other professionals. Sadly, some Christians have sacrificed theocratic privileges because of becoming overly absorbed in these things. Our being sidetracked in this manner must make Satan happy, but we want to make Jehovah's heart rejoice. (Proverbs 27:11) On the other hand, accepting a loss may spare us heartaches and save much time for us and for the elders. It will help to preserve the congregation's peace and will enable us to keep on seeking first the Kingdom.

Discernment and Decision-Making

¹⁹ Making decisions regarding financial or business matters can be quite stressful. But

19. What can spiritual discernment and prayer do for us when we are making stressful decisions?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ What is discernment?
- ☐ Why is there a special need to show discernment regarding business dealings among Christians?
- ☐ How can discernment help us if we feel that a fellow believer has defrauded us?
- ☐ What role should discernment play in decision-making?

spiritual discernment can help us to weigh factors and make wise decisions. Moreover, prayerful reliance on Jehovah can bring us "the peace of God." (Philippians 4:6, 7) It is a calmness and tranquillity resulting from a close personal relationship with Jehovah. Surely, such peace can help us to maintain our balance when we are faced with difficult decisions.

²⁰ Let us be determined not to let business disputes disrupt our peace or that of the congregation. We need to remember that the Christian congregation functions to help us spiritually, not to serve as a center for commercial pursuits. Business matters should always be kept separate from congregation activities. We need to use discernment and caution when embarking upon business ventures. And let us always maintain a balanced view of such matters, seeking Kingdom interests first. If a business venture involving fellow worshipers should fail, may we seek what is best for all concerned.

²¹ Instead of being overly concerned about financial matters and other less important things, may all of us incline our hearts to discernment, pray for God's guidance, and keep Kingdom interests first. In harmony with Paul's prayer, 'may our love abound with accurate knowledge and *full discernment* so that we may *make sure of the more important things* and not be stumbling others' or ourselves. Now that Christ the King is on his heavenly throne, let us show spiritual discernment in every aspect of life. And 'may we be filled with righteous fruit through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of our God,' the Sovereign Lord Jehovah. —Philippians 1:9-11.

20. What should we be determined to do as far as business matters and the congregation are concerned?

21. How can we use discernment and act in harmony with Philippians 1:9-11?

Where Can True Happiness Be Found?

MANY people feel that happiness can be found by acquiring material possessions. How about you? While material things can certainly contribute to our happiness, they do not ensure it; nor do physical comforts build faith or fill spiritual needs.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ said: "Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need, since the kingdom of the heavens belongs to them." (Matthew 5:3) Jesus also said: "Guard against every sort of covetousness, because even when a person has an abundance his life does not result from the things he possesses."—Luke 12:15.

Many seek happiness by engaging in illicit sex and other "works of the flesh." (Galatians 5:19-21) However, yielding to sensual pleasures does not bring true and lasting happiness. In fact, those practicing such things will not inherit God's Kingdom.—1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

Others turn inward in their quest for happiness by trying to build up their own self-worth. Libraries and bookstores are filled with self-help books, but such publications have not brought people lasting happiness. So, then, where can we find real happiness?

To be truly happy, we must recognize our in-born spiritual need. Jesus said: "Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need." Of course, it would do us little good to comprehend this need and then fail to do anything about it. To illustrate: What would happen to a marathon runner who after the race failed to respond to his body's craving for water? Would he not soon face dehydration and other serious consequences? Likewise, if we fail to respond to our need for



Faith and a good relationship with God will bring you true happiness

spiritual nourishment, we will eventually wither spiritually. This will lead to loss of joy and happiness.

Jesus fully recognized his spiritual need, regularly studying and meditating on God's Word. He could locate and read sections of the Holy Scriptures with ease, and he taught others to do the same. (Luke 4:16-21; compare Ephesians 4:20, 21.) Jesus also likened the doing of his heavenly Father's will to food. Doing God's will brought him much happiness.—John 4:34.

Yes, true happiness cannot be obtained by acquiring material things; nor does happiness result from catering to the fallen flesh. True happiness is a condition of the heart, based on genuine faith and a good relationship with Jehovah God. Appropriately, then, the psalmist David sang: "Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah."—Psalm 144:15b.

Counteracting False Accusations in France



JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES in France were recently the target of a barrage of false accusations. Seizing upon tragic events involving religious cults in Europe and Japan, the media spread distorted information about the Witnesses. They were wrongly portrayed as one of the largest and most dangerous cults.

In an effort to set matters straight, Jehovah's Witnesses published a tract that answered such questions as these: Who are Jehovah's Witnesses? Are they Christians? Do they accept medical care? Why do they go from door to door? How

is their work financed? How do Jehovah's Witnesses benefit the community?

The informative tract in the French language was entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses—What You Need to Know*. In order to leave the tract with as many people as possible, a campaign was organized. From May 13 to June 9, 1996, more than nine million copies were distributed.

This tract impressed many, including public officials. "The criticism leveled at Jehovah's Witnesses fills me with indignation," wrote a regional councilman after reading the tract. "Time and again I have come to appreciate the benevolent and unselfish character of your work." In response to the tract, a member of the European Parliament wrote: "The majority of the people know very well how to tell the difference between the group of Christians of which you are a part and the cults."

In Brittany a Witness presented the tract to a priest, who readily accepted it. "I commend you for what you are doing," the priest said. He then added: "I encourage my parishioners to let you into their homes and to offer you a cup of coffee. You can even tell those you meet that you have been to my home. I also want to tell you that I appreciate reading your publications."

After receiving the tract, a Protestant man in Alsace wrote to the Watch Tower Society requesting a Bible study. "Having lost all confidence in my parish," he wrote, "I'm looking forward to a new start spiritually." Despite the false charges that are at times leveled against them, Jehovah's Witnesses in France—indeed, in all parts of the world—continue helping people to come to an accurate knowledge of God's purposes, as set forth in the Bible.—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

Should Your Child Go to a **BOARDING SCHOOL?**



IMAGINE that you live in a small town in a developing country. You have several children in primary school, but at the age of 12, they will progress to secondary school. In your area, secondary schools are overcrowded, ill-equipped, and poorly staffed. Strikes sometimes close the schools for weeks and months at a time.

Someone hands you a glossy brochure that describes a boarding school in the city. You see pictures of happy, smartly dressed students, studying in well-equipped classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. The students peer into computers and relax in clean, attractive dormitory rooms. You read that one of the aims of the school is to help pupils “achieve the highest academic standard of which they are capable.” You further read: “All pupils are required to abide by a code of behaviour similar to that normally expected within a family where emphasis is given to courtesy, politeness, respect for parents and elders, co-operation, tolerance, kindness, honesty and integrity.”

A smiling young man is quoted as saying: “My parents gave me the privilege of a lifetime to attend the best school.” A girl says: “School is challenging and exciting. Here learning comes naturally.” Would you send your son or daughter to such a boarding school?

Education and Spirituality

All caring parents want to give their children a good start in life, and to that end a

sound, balanced education is important. Often secular education opens doors to future employment opportunities and helps young people to develop into adults able to care for themselves and for their future families.

‘If a boarding school offers a good education along with some moral guidance, why not take advantage of it?’ you might ask. In answering that question, Christian parents should prayerfully consider a vitally important factor—the spiritual welfare of their children. Jesus Christ asked: “Really, of what benefit is it for a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36) Of course, there is no benefit in this at all. Before deciding to send their children to a boarding school, therefore, Christian parents should consider the effect that this might have on their children’s prospects for everlasting life.

The Influence of Other Students

Certain boarding schools may have impressive academic standards. But what about the moral standards of those who attend or perhaps even of some operating such schools? Concerning the sort of people that would abound in these “last days,” the apostle Paul wrote: “In the last days critical times hard to deal with will be here. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, disloyal, having no natural affection, not

open to any agreement, slanderers, without self-control, fierce, without love of goodness, betrayers, headstrong, puffed up with pride, lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, having a form of godly devotion but proving false to its power; and from these turn away.”—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

This moral and spiritual decline is global, presenting a challenge to Jehovah’s Witnesses in living by Bible principles. Students who come home every day find that even their limited association with worldly schoolmates can exert a powerful negative influence on their spirituality. Counteracting that influence can be quite a struggle for Witness children, even with daily support, counsel, and encouragement from their parents.

What, then, is the situation of children who are sent away from their homes to boarding schools? They are marooned, cut off from the regular spiritual support of loving parents. Since they live with their classmates 24 hours a day, pressure to conform to the crowd exerts a stronger influence on their young minds and hearts than it is likely to do on students who live at home. Said one student: “Morally, a boarder is living in danger from morning to night.”

Paul wrote: “Do not be misled. Bad associations spoil useful habits.” (1 Corinthians 15:33) Christian parents should not be misled into thinking that their children will suffer no spiritual harm if they are in constant association with those who do not serve God. Over a period of time, godly children can become desensitized to Christian values and can lose all appreciation for spiritual things. Sometimes this does not become evident to parents until after their children have left boarding school. Then it is often too late to correct matters.

The experience of Clement is typical. He relates: “Before going away to boarding

school, I had a love for the truth and went out in field service with the brothers. I particularly enjoyed participating in our family Bible study and the Congregation Book Study. However, once I went into boarding school at the age of 14, I left the truth completely. Throughout the five years I spent in boarding school, I never attended meetings. As a result of bad company, I got involved with drugs, smoking, and heavy drinking.”

The Influence of Teachers

In any school there can be morally corrupt teachers who abuse their position of authority. Some are cruel and harsh, while others exploit their students sexually. In boarding schools the actions of such teachers are more likely to go unreported.

However, most teachers sincerely attempt to train children to become productive members of society, to fit into the world around them, to conform. But herein lies another problem for Witness children. The values of the world do not always coincide with Christian principles. While teachers encourage students to fit into this world, Jesus said that his followers would be “no part of the world.”—John 17:16.

What if problems arise when children are following Bible principles? If the children are attending a local school and are living at home, they can discuss such matters with their parents. In turn, the parents can guide their children and possibly speak to the teacher. As a result, problems and misunderstandings are usually resolved quickly.

In boarding schools it is a different matter. Such students are under the constant control of their teachers. If children take a stand for Christian principles, they must do so without the day-to-day support of their parents. At times, children manage to remain faithful to God under such circum-

stances. More often, however, they do not. A child is likely to bend to the will of a teacher.

Restricted Movement

Unlike universities, where students usually have the freedom to come and go as they please, boarding schools restrict the movement of children. Many of these schools do not allow pupils to leave the school compound except on Sunday, and some do not even permit that. An 11-year-old boarding-school student named Eru says: "The school authorities never allow us to go out to meetings, let alone in field service. Inside the school, there are services only for Catholics and Muslims. Every student must choose one of the two or face intense antagonism from both teachers and students. Students are also forced to sing the national anthem and church hymns."

When parents enroll their children in such a school, what message are they sending to their youngsters? The message could well be that secular education is more important than gathering for worship and sharing in the disciple-making work—even more important than integrity to God.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

In some boarding schools, Witness students manage to study the Bible together, but even this is often difficult. A youth named Blessing, who is 16, says this about the boarding school she attends: "Every day the so-called Christians come out to pray. We Witnesses try pleading with them so that we can have our study, but the seniors tell us that our organization is not recognized. Then they try to force us to pray with them. If we refuse, they punish us. Appealing to teachers makes matters worse. They call us all sorts of names and tell the senior students to punish us."

Standing Out as Different

When boarding-school students are clearly known as Jehovah's Witnesses, this can work to their advantage. School authorities may excuse them from participation in compulsory false religious activities, which run counter to the Witnesses' faith. Fellow students may refrain from trying to involve them in unwholesome activities and conversations. Doors may open to witness to fellow students and teachers. Furthermore, those who live by Christian principles are not likely to be suspected of gross wrongdoing, and they sometimes win the respect of teachers and fellow students.

However, things do not always work out that way. Standing out as different often makes a young person an object of persecution and ridicule from students and teachers alike. Yinka, a 15-year-old boy who attends a boarding school, says: "At school, if you are known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, you become a target. Since they know our spiritual and moral stand, they set traps to catch us."

Parental Responsibility

No teacher, school, or college can rightly try to take on the work of molding children into dedicated servants of Jehovah. That is neither their job nor their responsibility. God's Word directs that parents themselves are to care for the spiritual needs of their children. Paul wrote: "You, fathers, do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and mental-regulating of Jehovah." (Ephesians 6:4) How can parents apply this divine counsel if their children are away in a boarding school where visiting may be restricted to once or twice a month?

Circumstances vary greatly, but Christian parents strive to act in harmony with this inspired statement: "Certainly if anyone does

YOUNG WITNESSES REFLECT ON BOARDING SCHOOL

"At boarding school, Witness children are cut off from spiritual association. It is a very hostile environment with great pressure to do wrong."—Rotimi, who attended boarding school between the ages of 11 and 14.

"Attending Christian meetings was exceptionally difficult. I could attend only on Sunday, and to do that, I had to sneak off while the students queued up for church. I was never happy, for back home I had got used to attending all the congregation meetings, and I went out in the field ministry on Saturdays and Sundays. School wasn't an upbuilding experience. I missed a lot."—Esther, who was routinely caned by teachers because she would not participate in school church services.

"Witnessing to fellow students was not easy in boarding school. It's not easy to stand out as different. I wanted to follow the group. Perhaps I would have been bolder if I had been able to go to the meetings and engage in field service. But I could do that only when I was on break, which was just three times a year. If you have a lamp that is not refilled with oil, the light grows dim. It was the same thing in school."—Lara, who attended boarding school from 11 to 16 years of age.

"Now that I am no longer in boarding school, I am happy that I can attend all meetings, participate in field service, and enjoy the daily text with the rest of the family. Though staying in the school had some advantages, nothing is more important than my relationship with Jehovah."—Naomi, who convinced her father to take her out of boarding school.

not provide for those who are his own, and especially for those who are members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith."—1 Timothy 5:8.

Are There Alternatives?

What might parents do if they seem to have only two choices—boarding school or a poorly equipped local school? Some who have found themselves in this situation arrange for private lessons to supplement their children's education at a local school. Other parents set aside time to tutor their children themselves.

Sometimes parents avoid problems by planning well in advance of the time when their children are old enough to enter secondary school. If you have young children or are planning to raise a family, you might check to see if there is an adequate secondary school in your area. If there is not, it may be possible to move closer to one.

As parents well know, it requires skill, patience, and much time to instill in a child a love for Jehovah. If this is difficult when a child is living at home, how much harder it is if the child is living far away! Since the everlasting life of a child is involved, parents must seriously and prayerfully decide whether handing their youngster over to a boarding school is worth the risk. How shortsighted it would be to sacrifice a child's spiritual interests for the benefits of a boarding-school education! This would be like dashing into a burning house to rescue a trinket—only to be consumed by the flames.

God's Word says: "Shrewd is the one that has seen the calamity and proceeds to conceal himself, but the inexperienced have passed along and must suffer the penalty." (Proverbs 22:3) Better it is to prevent a bad situation than to correct one later. It would be wise to think of that if you ask yourself, 'Should my child go to a boarding school?'

EHUD

A MAN OF FAITH AND COURAGE

MANY years had passed since the Israelites first set foot in the Promised Land. Moses and his successor, Joshua, had long been dead. In the absence of such men of faith, appreciation for pure worship plummeted. The Israelites had even begun to serve the Baals and the sacred poles.* As a result, Jehovah gave his people into the hands of the Syrians for eight years. Then the Israelites cried out to God for help. Mercifully, he listened. Jehovah raised up a judge, Othniel, to deliver His people.—Judges 3:7-11.

These events should have taught the Israelites a basic truth—obedience to Jehovah brings blessings, whereas disobedience results in maledictions. (Deuteronomy 11:26-28) However, the people of Israel failed to learn this lesson. After a 40-year period of peace, they again abandoned pure worship.—Judges 3:12.

Overtaken by Moab

This time Jehovah let his people fall into the hands of King Eglon of Moab. The Bible describes him as “a very fat man.” With the help of Ammon and Amalek, Eglon attacked Israel and set up his palace in Jericho, “the city of palm trees.” How ironic that the first Canaanite city to be conquered by Israel now housed the headquar-

* Sacred poles were likely phallic symbols. They were associated with grossly immoral sex orgies.—1 Kings 14:22-24.

ters of one who worshiped the false god Chemosh!—Judges 3:12, 13, 17.

Eglon oppressed the Israelites for the next 18 years, evidently demanding a burdensome tax from them. By requiring periodic tribute, Moab strengthened its own economic position while draining Israel's resources. Understandably, God's people cried out for relief, and once again Jehovah listened. He raised up for them another savior—this time a Benjamite named Ehud. To put an end to Eglon's tyranny over Israel, Ehud planned to take action on the day of the next payment of tribute.—Judges 3:14, 15.

To prepare for his courageous move, Ehud made a two-edged sword a cubit in length. If this was a short cubit, the weapon was about 15 inches long. Some would consider it to be a dagger. Evidently there was no crosspiece between the blade and the handle. Therefore, Ehud could conceal his small sword in the folds of his garment. Furthermore, since Ehud was left-handed, he could gird his sword on his right side—not the usual place for a weapon.—Judges 3:15, 16.

Ehud's strategy was not without its risks. For example, what if the king's attendants searched Ehud for weapons? Even if they did not, surely they would not leave their king alone with an Israelite! But if they did

* Chemosh was the chief deity of the Moabites. (Numbers 21:29; Jeremiah 48:46) In at least some cases, children were probably sacrificed to this detestable false god.—2 Kings 3:26, 27.

and Eglon could be killed, how would Ehud escape? How far could he run before Eglon's attendants discovered what had happened?

No doubt Ehud pondered such details, perhaps imagining a number of disastrous outcomes. Nevertheless, he proceeded with his plan, displaying courage and exercising faith in Jehovah.

Ehud Meets Eglon

The day for presenting the next tribute arrived. Ehud and his men entered the king's palace. Before long, they were standing before King Eglon himself. But the time had not yet arrived for Ehud to attack. After the presentation of the tribute, Ehud sent the tribute bearers on their way.—Judges 3:17, 18.

Why did Ehud delay in striking down Eglon? Did he give way to fear? By no means! To carry out his plan, Ehud needed a private audience with the king—something that was not accorded him on this initial encounter. Furthermore, Ehud would need to make a swift getaway. Escape would be far easier for one man than for the entire entourage of tribute bearers. Therefore, Ehud bided his time. The brief visit with Eglon enabled him to become familiar with the layout of the palace and to ascertain the extent of the king's security.

After reaching "the quarries that were at Gilgal," Ehud left his men and journeyed back to Eglon's palace. The walk of approximately one mile gave Ehud a little time to think about his mission and to pray for Jehovah's blessing.—Judges 3:19.

Ehud Returns

Ehud was apparently welcomed back into the palace. Perhaps the generous tribute

that he presented earlier put Eglon in a mellow mood. It may be that although the initial visit was brief, it gave Ehud sufficient opportunity to establish a rapport with the king. Whatever the case, Ehud was back in Eglon's presence.

"I have a secret word for you, O king," said Ehud. The fact that he had come this far was an indication that Jehovah was guiding him. Yet, there was a problem. The "secret word" that Ehud carried could not be spoken in the presence of the king's attendants. If Jehovah was going to intervene, Ehud needed that help immediately. "Keep silence!" the king commanded. Since Eglon did not want this "secret word" to be overheard, he dismissed his attendants. Imagine Ehud's relief!—Judges 3:19.

Eglon was sitting in his roof chamber when Ehud came to him and said: "A word of God I have for you." By mentioning "God," was Ehud referring to Chemosh? Eglon may have thought so. Intrigued, he hoisted his weight off his throne and stood expectantly. Ehud approached, likely moving carefully so as not to arouse the king's suspicion of an attack. Then, with a swift movement, "Ehud thrust in his left hand and took the sword off his right thigh and plunged it into [Eglon's] belly. And the handle kept going in also after the blade so that the fat closed in over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly, and the fecal matter began to come out."—Judges 3:20-22.

Lingering nearby, the king's attendants did not stir. But Ehud was still in danger. At any moment Eglon's servants might rush in and discover the corpse of their fallen king. Ehud needed to get away quickly! Locking the doors, he made his escape through the air hole of the roof chamber.—Judges 3:23, 24a.

Discovery and Defeat

Soon Eglon's servants became curious. Yet, they dared not risk the king's displeasure by interrupting his private meeting. Then they noticed that the roof chamber doors were locked. "He is just easing nature in the cool interior room," they reasoned. As time passed, however, mere curiosity was replaced by a wave of anxiety. Eglon's attendants could wait no longer. "At this they took the key and opened [the doors of the roof chamber], and, look! their lord

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Ehud and his men presented tribute to King Eglon

was fallen to the earth dead!"—Judges 3: 24b, 25.

Meanwhile, Ehud had escaped. He passed the quarries at Gilgal and eventually reached Seirah, a place in the mountainous region of Ephraim. Ehud called together the men of Israel and led them in a united attack on the Moabites. The account relates

that "they went striking down Moab, about ten thousand men, every one robust and every one a valiant man; and not a single one escaped." With Moab subdued, the land of Israel had no further disturbance for 80 years.—Judges 3:26-30.

Learning From Ehud's Example

Faith in God motivated Ehud. Hebrews chapter 11 does not specifically mention him as one "who through faith defeated kingdoms in conflict, . . . became valiant in

war, routed the armies of foreigners." (Hebrews 11: 33, 34) Nevertheless, Jehovah supported Ehud as he acted in faith and delivered Israel from King Eglon's tyrannical power.

Courage was one of Ehud's qualities. He had to be courageous to wield a literal sword with telling effect. As God's present-day servants, we do not take up such a sword. (Isaiah 2:4; Matthew 26:52) Yet, we do make use of "the sword of the spirit," God's Word. (Ephesians 6:17) Ehud was proficient in the use of his weapon. We too need to be skillful in using God's Word as

we preach the good news of the Kingdom. (Matthew 24:14) Personal study of the Bible, regular presence at Christian meetings, zealous participation in the ministry, and prayerful reliance on our heavenly Father will help us to imitate the qualities displayed by Ehud, truly a man of faith and courage.

MILLIONS ARE GOING Are You?

Going where? To the annual observance of the death of Jesus Christ. In 1996 a worldwide total of 12,921,933 attended.

Why do people go? Because of what the death of Jesus means for humankind. It means relief from sickness, suffering, and death. Even dead loved ones will be resurrected to life on an earth restored to Paradise.

How can the death of Jesus Christ bring such blessings? You are invited to find out. Jehovah's Witnesses welcome you to meet with them during this important event.

Attend at the Kingdom Hall nearest to your home. This year the date is Sunday, March 23, after sunset. Check with Jehovah's Witnesses locally for the exact time.

