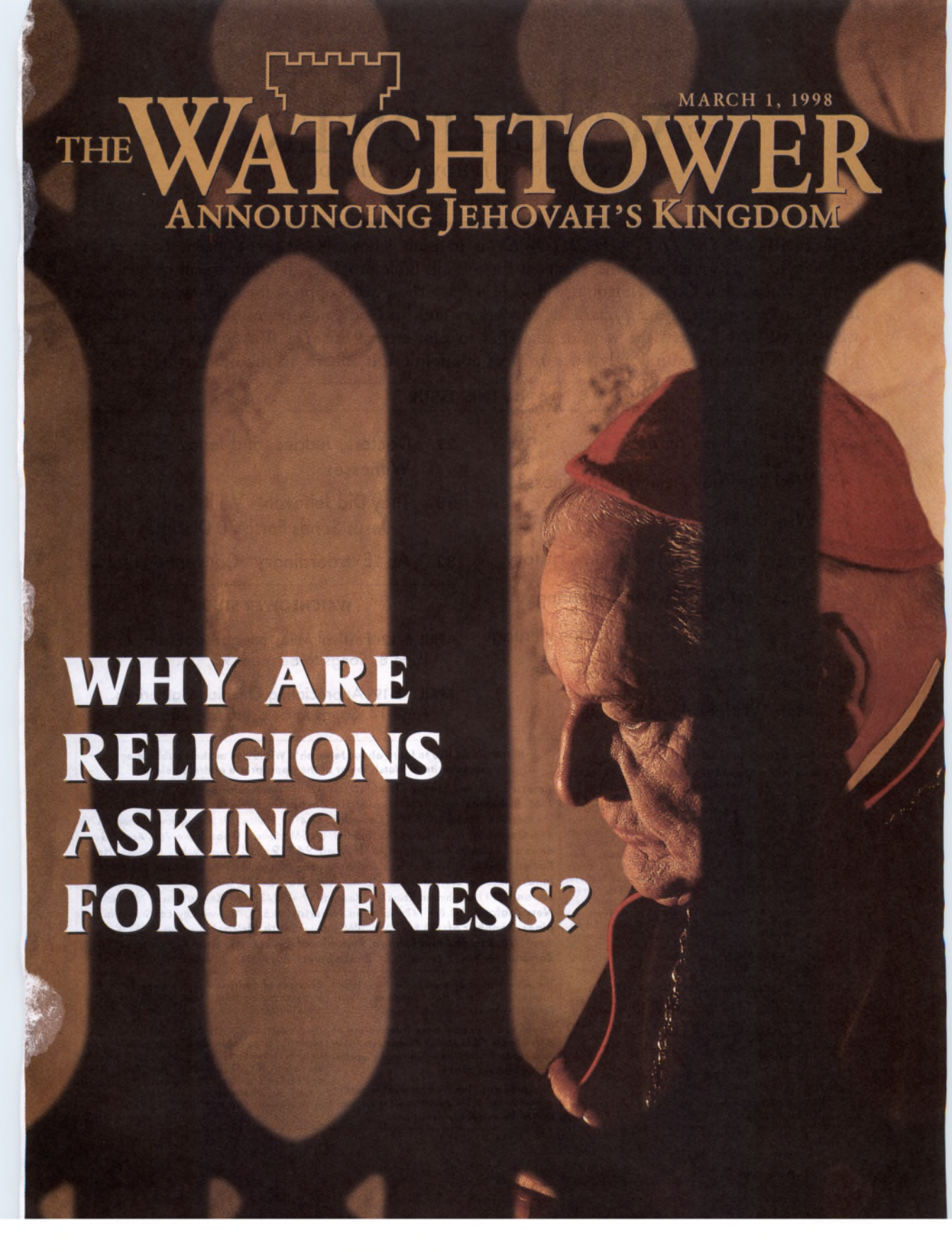




MARCH 1, 1998

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

**WHY ARE
RELIGIONS
ASKING
FORGIVENESS?**

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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The Churches Confess

"Pope Puts the Church on Trial." "Inquisition and Anti-Semitism —The Church Is Preparing Her Mea Culpa." "Mea Culpa for the Holocaust." "Methodists Apologize to the Indians of the Far West."*

HAVE you read headlines like these? It seems that with increasing frequency, churches are accepting blame and are apologizing for what they have done over the centuries. The media are constantly highlighting new mea culpas by the pope.

* Latin for "my own fault," part of a Catholic prayer (the *Confiteor* or, "I confess"), during which the faithful repeat this expression.

When the Pope Asks Forgiveness

Between 1980 and 1996, John Paul II 'recognized the Church's historic faults or asked forgiveness' at least 94 times, says Vatican commentator Luigi Accattoli in his book *Quando il papa chiede perdono* (When the Pope Asks Forgiveness). According to Accattoli, "in the Catholic Church, only the pope can rightly make a mea

culpa.” And this he has done, referring to the most controversial pages of Catholic history—the Crusades, wars, support of dictatorships, division in the churches, anti-Semitism, the Inquisitions, the Mafia, and racism. In a memorandum sent in 1994 to the cardinals (which is considered by some to be the most important document of the pontificate), John Paul II proposed “a general and millennial confession of sins.”

Several prelates have followed the pope’s example. In December 1994 the Italian newspaper *Il Giornale* reported: “Many American bishops appeared on television and publicly asked forgiveness.” For what? For underestimating the problem of pedophile priests, to the detriment of many young victims. In January 1995 the news-

paper *La Repubblica* reported on “a gesture unprecedented in the history of contemporary Catholicism”—the problem of Pope Pius XII’s silence in connection with the Holocaust was addressed. In January 1995 the same newspaper reported that the German episcopate asked forgiveness for the “many faults” of Roman Catholics who supported the crimes of the Nazis. Various Protestant churches have also subjected themselves to self-criticism.

Why?

The Bible encourages us to ask forgiveness when we are at fault, and many applaud the churches when they subject themselves to self-criticism. (James 5:16) But why are the churches doing this? How should it affect the way we view them?

Why Are They Asking Forgiveness?

THE idea that the churches should repent of their faults and reform themselves is not new. *Religioni e miti* (Religions and Myths), a dictionary of religion, says that the supposed integrity of the early church fascinated people during the Middle Ages and led many to call for reform.

In 1523, after Martin Luther’s break with Rome, Pope Adrian VI attempted to heal the split by sending this message to the Diet of Nuremberg: “We know well that for many years things deserving of abhorrence have gathered round the Holy See . . .

We shall use all diligence to reform before all things the Roman Curia, whence, perhaps, all these evils have had their origin.” That admission, however, did not succeed in healing the schism nor in countering corruption in the papal Curia.

More recently the churches have been criticized for their silence in the face of the Holocaust. They have also been accused of not discouraging their members from taking part in wars. In 1941, as World War II was raging, a priest named Primo Mazolari asked: “Why has Rome not reacted strongly to the breakdown of Catholicity as



The Complete Encyclopedia of Illustration/J. G. Heck

The churches are apologizing for atrocities like this

she used to do, and is still accustomed to do, in the case of less dangerous doctrines?" Doctrines less dangerous than what? The priest was speaking of the warmongering nationalism that at the time was tearing civilization apart.

The fact is, though, that until quite recently, admission of guilt by religions was the exception rather than the rule. In 1832, in response to some who were urging the Catholic Church to 'regenerate itself,' Gregory XVI said: "It is obviously absurd and injurious to propose a certain 'restoration and regeneration' for [the church's] safety and growth, as if she could be consid-

ered subject to defect." What of defects that were too blatant to be denied? Various strategies were adopted to explain them away. For example, some theologians have maintained that the church is both holy and sinful. The institution itself is said to be holy—preserved from error by God. Still, its members are sinful. Thus, when atrocities are committed in the name of the church, the institution itself should not be held responsible, but individuals within the church should be. Does that sound logical? Not to Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, who wrote: "There is no ideal Church floating above the human world." He explained: "The Church which has no sins to confess does not exist."

Ecumenism and Moral Standing

You might wonder what developments have led the churches to ask forgiveness now. At first, Protestants and Orthodox admitted responsibility for "past divisions" among different denominations. They did this at the "Faith and Order" ecumenical conference held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927. The Roman Catholic Church eventually followed suit. Especially since Vatican II,* high prelates, including popes, have with increasing regularity asked forgiveness for divisions within Christendom. For what purpose? Apparently, they want more unity in Christendom. Catholic historian Nicolino Sarale stated that in John Paul II's

* The 21st ecumenical council that met in four sessions in Rome from 1962-65.

"project of 'mea culpas,' there is a strategy, and that is ecumenism."

However, more than ecumenism is involved. Today, the far from exemplary history of Christendom is widely known. "The Catholic can't just shrug off all this history," says theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. "The very Church he belongs to has done or allowed to be done things that we certainly can't approve of nowadays." Hence, the pope has appointed a commission to "throw light on the church's dark pages so that . . . forgiveness may be asked." Another reason, then, for the church's willingness to engage in self-criticism appears to be a desire to regain its moral standing.

In a similar vein, historian Alberto Melloni, when commenting on the church's requests for forgiveness, writes: "In reality, what is sometimes asked for is a reprieve from accusations of responsibility." Yes, the Catholic Church seems to be trying to shrug off the burden of past sins in order to regain its credibility in the court of public opinion. In all honesty, though, it must be said that it seems more concerned with making peace with the world than with God.

Such behavior reminds us of Saul, the first king of Israel. (1 Samuel 15:1-12) He committed a grievous error, and when this was exposed, he first tried to justify himself—explain away his error—to Samuel, a faithful prophet of God. (1 Samuel 15:13-21) Finally, the king had to acknowledge to Samuel: "I have sinned; for I have overstepped the order of Jehovah." (1 Samuel 15:24, 25) Yes, he admitted his fault. But his next words to Samuel reveal what was uppermost on his mind: "I have sinned. Now honor me, please, in front of the older men of my people and in front of Israel." (1 Samuel 15:30) Evidently, Saul was more con-

cerned with his standing in Israel than with being reconciled with God. This attitude did not result in God's forgiveness of Saul. Do you think a similar attitude will result in God's forgiveness of the churches?

Not All Agree

Not all agree that the churches should publicly ask forgiveness. For example, a number of Roman Catholics feel uneasy when their pope asks forgiveness for slavery or rehabilitates "heretics" like Hus and Calvin. According to Vatican sources, the document sent to the cardinals proposing an "examination of conscience" over the history of the past millennium of Catholicism was criticized by cardinals attending a consistory held in June 1994. When the pope nonetheless wanted to include the substance of that proposal in an encyclical, the Italian cardinal Giacomo Biffi released a pastoral note in which he affirmed: "The Church has no sin." Nevertheless, he allowed: "Asking forgiveness for ecclesiastical errors of past centuries . . . may serve to render us less disagreeable."

"The confession of sin is one of the most controversial subjects within the Catholic Church," says Vatican commentator Luigi Accattoli. "If the pope acknowledges the errors of the missionaries, there are missionaries who in good faith resent it." Further, a Roman Catholic journalist wrote: "If the pope really has such a fearsome idea of Church history, it is hard to understand how he can now present this selfsame Church as the paladin of 'human rights,' the 'mother and teacher' that can alone guide humanity toward a truly bright third millennium."

The Bible warns against an appearance of repentance that is motivated by no more than the embarrassment of being caught in a wrong. That kind of repentance rare-

ly leads to a long-term change in the one repenting. (Compare 2 Corinthians 7:8-11.) Repentance that has value in God's eyes is accompanied by "fruits that befit repentance"—that is, evidence of the sincerity of the repentance.—Luke 3:8.

The Bible says that the one repenting and confessing must leave the wrong acts, stop doing them. (Proverbs 28:13) Has this happened? Well, after all the confessions of wrong by the Roman Catholic Church and other churches, what happened in recent civil strifes in central Africa and Eastern Europe, where large populations of "Christians" were involved? Did the churches act as a force for peace? Did all their leaders unitedly speak out against the atrocities that their members were committing? No. Why, some religious ministers even took part in the slaughter!

Divine Judgment

When speaking of the pope's repeated mea culpas, Cardinal Biffi ironically asked: "For historical sins, wouldn't it be better

for us all to wait for the universal judgment?" Well, the judgment of all mankind is imminent. Jehovah God knows well all the dark pages of the history of religion. Soon enough, he will call the guilty ones to account. (Revelation 18:4-8) In the meantime, is it possible to find a form of worship untainted by the bloodguilt, the murderous intolerance, and the other crimes that Christendom's churches are apologizing for? Yes.

How can we do that? By applying the rule stated by Jesus Christ: "By their fruits you will recognize them." The record of history, which some religions would like to be forgotten, helps us to identify not only those whom Jesus called "false prophets" but also those who have produced "fine fruit." (Matthew 7:15-20) Who are these? We invite you to find out for yourself by examining the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. See who today is really trying to follow God's Word rather than seeking to preserve a position of influence in the world.—Acts 17:11.

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

EACH year Jehovah's Witnesses around the world gather by the thousands at conventions. There, they enjoy fellowship and hear an excellent program of Bible instruction. Some make great efforts to attend these conventions. Last year, for example, in Malawi a couple in their mid-60's, along with their son and his wife and baby, traveled 50 miles by bicycle to attend a convention. They left their village at six in the morning and arrived at the convention grounds 15 hours later.

In Mozambique, a group traveled three days by bicycle to get to a convention. One night, as they camped in the open, they heard lions

roaring close by. Although they threw firewood in the direction of the animals, the lions stayed around until daybreak. Another Witness traveling to the same convention came face-to-face with a lion on the road. He stood quietly without moving until the lion went away. At the convention these Witnesses cheerfully told how they had been "delivered from the lion's mouth."—2 Timothy 4:17.

Many of Jehovah's Witnesses make great efforts to attend conventions or even weekly congregation meetings for worship. Why? The following articles will help you to understand why gathering together is so important.

FESTIVAL MILESTONES OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

"Three times in the year every male of yours should appear before Jehovah your God in the place that he will choose . . . , and none should appear before Jehovah empty-handed."—DEUTERONOMY 16:16.

WHAT comes to mind when you think of a festival? Some festivals in ancient times were marked by overindulgence and immorality. The same is true of some modern-day festivals. But the festivals outlined in God's Law to Israel were different. While they were joyful occasions, they could also be described as "holy conventions."—Leviticus 23:2.

² Faithful Israelite men—often accompanied by their families—found refreshing pleasure in traveling to Jerusalem, 'the place Jehovah chose,' and they generously contributed to three great festivals. (Deuteronomy 16:16) The book *Old Testament Word Studies* defines the Hebrew word translated "festival" at Deuteronomy 16:16 as an "occasion of great joy . . . on which some signal instances of God's favour were celebrated with sacrificing and feasting."*

The Value of the Great Festivals

³ Since theirs was an agricultural society,

* See also *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Volume 1, page 820, column 1, paragraphs 1 and 3, under "Festival."

1. What can be said about the festival occasions in Bible times?
2. (a) What were Israelite males required to do three times a year? (b) As the word is used at Deuteronomy 16:16, what is a "festival"?
3. What blessings did the three annual festivals bring to mind?

the Israelites depended on God's blessing in the form of rain. The three great festivals in the Mosaic Law coincided with the gathering of the barley harvest in early spring, the wheat harvest in late spring, and the rest of the harvest in late summer. These were occasions for great rejoicing and thankfulness to the Sustainer of the rain cycle and the Maker of the productive land. But the festivals involved much more.—Deuteronomy 11:11-14.

⁴ The first festival took place in the first month of the ancient Bible calendar, from Nisan 15 to 21, which corresponds to our late March or early April. It was called the Festival of Unfermented Cakes, and because it followed immediately after the Passover of Nisan 14, it was also called "the festival of the passover." (Luke 2:41; Leviticus 23:5, 6) This festival reminded Israel of their deliverance from affliction in Egypt, the unfermented cakes being called "the bread of affliction." (Deuteronomy 16:3) It reminded them that their flight from Egypt had been so hasty that there had been no time to add leaven to their dough and wait for it to rise. (Exodus 12:34) During this festival no leavened bread was to be found in an Israelite home. Any celebrant, including an alien resident, who ate leavened bread was to be punished by death.—Exodus 12:19.

4. What historical event was celebrated by the first festival?

⁵ The second festival took place seven weeks (49 days) after Nisan 16 and fell on the 6th day of the third month, Sivan, corresponding to our late May. (Leviticus 23:15, 16) It was called the Festival of Weeks (in Jesus' day, it was also called Pentecost, meaning "Fiftieth" in Greek), and it took place close to the same time of the year that Israel entered into the Law covenant at Mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:1, 2) During this festival faithful Israelites may have meditated on their privilege of being set apart as God's holy nation. Their being God's special people required obedience to God's Law, such as the command to show loving care for disadvantaged ones so that these too could enjoy the festival.—Leviticus 23:22; Deuteronomy 16:10-12.

⁶ The last of the three great annual festivals was called the Festival of Ingathering, or Festival of Booths. It took place in the seventh month, Tishri, or Ethanim, from the 15th to the 21st day, corresponding to our early October. (Leviticus 23:34) During this time, God's people dwelt outside their homes or on their roofs in temporary shelters (booths) made from the branches and leaves of trees. This reminded them of their 40-year journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, when the nation had to learn to rely on God for their daily needs.—Leviticus 23:42, 43; Deuteronomy 8:15, 16.

⁷ Let us review some festivals that proved to be milestones in the history of God's ancient people. This should be encouraging to us today, since we too are invited to gath-

5. What privilege may have been recalled by the second festival, and who were to be included in the rejoicing?

6. Of what experience did the third festival remind God's people?

7. How do we benefit from a review of festival celebrations in ancient Israel?



A sheaf of the new barley harvest was offered every year on Nisan 16, the day that Jesus was resurrected

er together regularly each week and three times a year in large assemblies and conventions.—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

In the Time of Davidic Kings

⁸ A historic celebration at the time of the Festival of Booths took place during the prosperous reign of King Solomon, David's son. "A very great congregation" gathered from the extremities of the Promised Land for the Festival of Booths and the dedication of the temple. (2 Chronicles 7:8) When it was complete, King Solomon dismissed the celebrants, who "began to bless the king and to go to their homes, rejoicing and feeling merry of heart over all the goodness that Jehovah had performed for David his

8. (a) What historic celebration was held in the days of King Solomon? (b) What grand climax of the antitypical Festival of Booths can we look forward to?



Jesus may have alluded to the festival lights when he called himself "the light of the world"

servant and for Israel his people." (1 Kings 8:66) That was indeed a festival milestone. Today, God's servants look forward to the grand climax of the antitypical Festival of Booths at the end of the Thousand Year Reign of the Greater Solomon, Jesus Christ. (Revelation 20:3, 7-10, 14, 15) At that time, people living in every corner of the earth, including resurrected ones and Armageddon survivors, will be united in the joyful worship of Jehovah God.—Zechariah 14:16.

⁹ The next outstanding festival reported

9-11. (a) What led to a festival milestone in the days of King Hezekiah? (b) What example was set by many from the northern ten-tribe kingdom, and of what does it remind us today?

in the Bible came after the rule of wicked King Ahaz, who had closed the temple and led the kingdom of Judah into apostasy. Ahaz's successor was good King Hezekiah. In the first year of his reign, at the age of 25, Hezekiah began a great program of restoration and reform. He immediately opened the temple and arranged for its repair. Then the king sent letters to Israelites living in the hostile ten-tribe kingdom of Israel in the north, inviting them to come and celebrate the Passover and the Festival of Unfermented Cakes. Many came, despite the ridicule of their fellowmen.—2 Chronicles 30:1, 10, 11, 18.

¹⁰ Was the festival a success? The Bible reports: "So the sons of Israel that were found in Jerusalem held the festival of the unfermented cakes seven days with great rejoicing; and the Levites and the priests were offering praise to Jehovah day by day with loud instruments." (2 Chronicles 30:21) What a fine example those Israelites set for God's people today, many of whom endure opposition and travel a long way to attend conventions!

¹¹ For example, consider three "Godly Devotion" District Conventions held in Poland in 1989. Among the 166,518 in attendance were large groups from the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries where the work of Jehovah's Witnesses was banned at the time. "For some who attended these conventions," reports the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*,* "it was the first time they had ever been at a large gathering of more than 15 or 20 of Jehovah's people. Their hearts welled up with appreciation as they looked out at the tens of thousands in the stadiums, joined with them in prayer,

* Published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

and united their voices in songs of praise to Jehovah.”—Page 279.

¹² After the death of Hezekiah, the Judeans again fell away to false worship under Kings Manasseh and Amon. Then came the reign of another good king, young Josiah, who acted courageously in restoring true worship. At the age of 25, Josiah ordered that the temple be repaired. (2 Chronicles 34:8) While the repair was being done, the Law written by Moses was found in the temple. King Josiah was deeply moved by what he read in God’s Law and arranged to have it read to all the people. (2 Chronicles 34:14, 30) Then, according to what was written, he organized a celebration of the Passover. The king also set a fine example by contributing generously toward the occasion. As a result, the Bible reports: “There had never been held a passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet.”—2 Chronicles 35:7, 17, 18.

¹³ The reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah parallel the marvelous restoration of true worship that has occurred among true Christians since the enthronement of Jesus Christ in 1914. As was true especially with Josiah’s reforms, this modern-day restoration has been based on what is written in God’s Word. And, paralleling the days of Hezekiah and Josiah, the modern-day restoration has been marked by assemblies and conventions where thrilling explanations of Bible prophecy and timely applications of Bible principles have been featured. Adding to the joy of these instructive occasions has been the large number who got baptized. Like the repentant Israelites in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah, newly baptized ones have turned their backs on the wick-

ed practices of Christendom and the rest of Satan’s world. In 1997 over 375,000 were baptized in symbol of their dedication to the holy God, Jehovah—an average of more than 1,000 per day.

After the Exile

¹⁴ After the death of Josiah, the nation again turned to degrading false worship. Eventually, in 607 B.C.E., Jehovah punished his people by bringing the Babylonian armies against Jerusalem. The city and its temple were destroyed, and the land was desolated. There followed 70 years of Jewish captivity in Babylon. Then God revived a repentant Jewish remnant, who returned to the Promised Land to restore true worship. They arrived at the ruined city of Jerusalem in the seventh month of the year 537 B.C.E. The first thing they did was to set up an altar to offer up regular daily sacrifices as outlined in the Law covenant. That was just in time for another historic celebration. “Then they held the festival of booths according to what is written.”—Ezra 3:1-4.

¹⁵ A great work lay ahead of these returned exiles—the rebuilding of God’s temple and of Jerusalem with its walls. There was much opposition from jealous neighbors. When the temple was being built, it was a “day of small things.” (Zechariah 4:10) The situation paralleled the condition of faithful anointed Christians in 1919. In that memorable year, they were released from spiritual captivity to Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. They numbered only a few thousand and faced a hostile world. Would God’s enemies be able to stop the advancement of true worship? The

12. What led up to the festival milestone in the reign of King Josiah?

13. Of what do the festival celebrations of Hezekiah and Josiah remind us today?

14. What led up to a festival milestone in 537 B.C.E.?

15. What work lay ahead for the restored remnant in 537 B.C.E., and how did a parallel situation exist in 1919?

A FESTIVAL LESSON FOR US TODAY

All who would lastingly benefit from Jesus' sin-atoning sacrifice must live in harmony with what is pictured by the Festival of Unfermented Cakes. This antitypical festival is the joyful celebration of anointed Christians over their deliverance from this wicked world and their release from the condemnation of sin through Jesus' ransom. (Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13, 14) The literal festival lasted seven days—a number used in the Bible to symbolize spiritual completeness. The antitypical festival lasts for

the complete duration of the anointed Christian congregation on earth and must be celebrated with "sincerity and truth." That means being constantly on the watch for figurative leaven. Leaven is used in the Bible to picture corrupt teachings, hypocrisy, and badness. True worshipers of Jehovah must show a hatred of such leaven, not allowing it to corrupt their own lives and not allowing it to spoil the purity of the Christian congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Matthew 16:6, 12.

answer to that question brings to mind the last two festival celebrations recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.

¹⁶ The temple was eventually rebuilt in the month of Adar 515 B.C.E., just in time for the Nisan spring festival. The Bible reports: "They went on to hold the festival of unfermented cakes seven days with rejoicing; for Jehovah caused them to rejoice, and he had turned the heart of the king of Assyria around toward them to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of the true God, the God of Israel."—Ezra 6:22.

¹⁷ Sixty years later, in 455 B.C.E., another milestone was reached. The Festival of Booths that year marked the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls. The Bible reports: "All the congregation of those who had come back from the captivity made booths and took up dwelling in the booths; for the sons of Israel had not done that way from the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day, so that there came to be very great rejoicing."—Nehemiah 8:17.

¹⁸ What a memorable restoration of God's

true worship in the face of fierce opposition! The situation today is similar. Despite waves of persecution and opposition, the grand work of preaching the good news of God's Kingdom has reached to the ends of the earth, and God's judgment messages have been sounded far and wide. (Matthew 24:14) The final sealing of the remaining ones of 144,000 anointed ones draws near. Over five million of their "other sheep" companions have been gathered from all the nations into "one flock" with the anointed remnant. (John 10:16; Revelation 7:3, 9, 10) What a wonderful fulfillment of the prophetic picture of the Festival of Booths! And this grand work of ingathering will continue into the new world when billions of resurrected ones will be invited to join in celebrating the antitypical Festival of Booths.—Zechariah 14:16-19.

In the First Century C.E.

¹⁹ Among the most outstanding festival celebrations recorded in the Bible were undoubtedly those attended by the Son of God, Jesus Christ. For example, consider Jesus' attendance at the Festival of Booths (or, Tabernacles) in the year 32 C.E. He used

19. What made the Festival of Booths in 32 C.E. outstanding?

16. What was significant about a festival in 515 B.C.E.?

17, 18. (a) What festival milestone was reached in 455 B.C.E.? (b) How are we in a similar situation today?

that occasion to teach important truths and backed up his teaching by quoting from the Hebrew Scriptures. (John 7:2, 14, 37-39) A regular feature of this festival was the custom of lighting four great candelabras in an inner courtyard of the temple. This contributed to the enjoyment of festival activities that continued on into the night. Apparently, Jesus alluded to these great lights when he said: "I am the light of the world. He that follows me will by no means walk in darkness, but will possess the light of life." —John 8:12.

²⁰ Then came the Passover and Festival of Unfermented Cakes of the significant year 33 C.E. On that Passover Day, Jesus was executed by his enemies and became the antitypical Passover Lamb, who died to take away "the sin of the world." (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7) Three days later, on Nisan 16, God resurrected Jesus with an immortal spirit body. This coincided with the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest as prescribed by the Law. Thus, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ became "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep in death." —1 Corinthians 15:20.

²¹ A truly outstanding festival was Pentecost in 33 C.E. On this day many Jews and proselytes were gathered in Jerusalem, including about 120 of Jesus' disciples. While the festival was in progress, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ poured out God's holy spirit upon the 120. (Acts 1:15; 2:1-4, 33) They were thereby anointed and became God's new chosen nation through the new covenant mediated by Jesus Christ. During that festival the Jewish high priest offered to God two leavened loaves made from the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. (Le-

viticus 23:15-17) These leavened loaves picture the 144,000 imperfect humans whom Jesus 'bought for God' to serve as "a kingdom and priests . . . to rule as kings over the earth." (Revelation 5:9, 10; 14:1, 3) The fact that these heavenly rulers come from two branches of sinful mankind, Jews and Gentiles, may also be typified by the two leavened loaves.

²² When the new covenant came into operation at Pentecost 33 C.E., it meant that the old Law covenant had ceased to have value in God's eyes. (2 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 9:15; 10:16) That does not mean that anointed Christians are without law. They come under the divine law taught by Jesus Christ and written on their hearts. (Galatians 6:2) Therefore, the three annual festivals, being part of the old Law covenant, are not celebrated by Christians. (Colossians 2:16, 17) Nevertheless, we can learn much from the attitude of pre-Christian servants of God toward their festivals and other meetings for worship. In our next article, we will consider examples that will no doubt motivate all to appreciate the need to be regular in attendance at Christian gatherings.

22. (a) Why do Christians not celebrate festivals of the Law covenant? (b) What will we consider in the next article?

Review Questions

- ☐ What purpose did Israel's three great festivals serve?
- ☐ What characterized the festivals of Hezekiah and Josiah's day?
- ☐ What milestone was celebrated in 455 B.C.E., and why is it encouraging to us?
- ☐ What was significant about the Passover and Pentecost in 33 C.E.?

20. Why was the Passover in 33 C.E. outstanding?

21. What happened at Pentecost in 33 C.E.?

APPRECIATING CHRISTIAN GATHERINGS

"Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together."—HEBREWS 10:24, 25.

WHAT a privilege it is to attend a Christian gathering, whether it be made up of fewer than ten or of several thousand worshipers of Jehovah, for Jesus said: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst"! (Matthew 18:20) True, when making that promise, Jesus was discussing judicial matters that needed to be handled correctly by those taking the lead in the congregation. (Matthew 18:15-19) But can Jesus' words also be applied in principle to all Christian gatherings that are opened and closed with prayer in his name? Yes. Remember, when Jesus commissioned his followers to do the disciple-making work, he promised: "Look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things."—Matthew 28:20.

² There can be no doubt that the Head of the Christian congregation, the Lord Jesus Christ, is keenly interested in all gatherings of his faithful followers. Moreover, we can be sure that he is present with them by means of God's holy spirit. (Acts 2:33; Revelation 5:6) Jehovah God too is interested in our meeting together. The primary purpose of such meetings is for praise to be lifted up to God "among the congregated throngs."

1, 2. (a) Why is it a privilege to attend a gathering of true Christians? (b) In what sense is Jesus present at gatherings of his followers?

(Psalm 26:12) Our attending congregation meetings is an evidence of our love for him.

³ There are other good reasons why we appreciate Christian gatherings. Before he left the earth, Jesus Christ appointed his anointed disciples to act as a "faithful and discreet slave" in supplying timely spiritual food to the household of faith. (Matthew 24:45) An important way that such spiritual feeding takes place is through congregation meetings as well as larger gatherings—assemblies and conventions. The Lord Jesus Christ guides this faithful slave to provide vital information at such gatherings for all who want to survive the end of this wicked system and gain life in God's righteous new world.

⁴ Hence, no Christian can afford to develop the dangerous custom noted by the apostle Paul, who wrote: "Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as some have the custom, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as you behold the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Meditating on the privilege and benefits of attending Christian gatherings will help us loyally and wholeheartedly to support such gatherings.

3. For what important reasons do we appreciate Christian gatherings?

4. What dangerous "custom" is mentioned in the Bible, and what will help us to avoid it?

Meetings That Build Up

⁵ Since Christians pray for Jehovah's holy spirit to be active at Christian meetings, each individual attender should do his best to work in harmony with the spirit and "not be grieving God's holy spirit." (Ephesians 4:30) When the apostle Paul wrote those inspired words, he was discussing the proper use of speech. What we say should always be used "for building up as the need may be, that it may impart what is favorable to the hearers." (Ephesians 4:29) This is especially important at Christian gatherings. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul stressed the need for meetings to be upbuilding, instructive, and encouraging. (1 Corinthians 14:5, 12, 19, 26, 31) All in attendance benefit from such meetings, including new attenders, who may well conclude: "God is really among you." (1 Corinthians 14:25) For this reason, we should not delay in inviting newly interested ones to congregate with us, for doing so will speed up their spiritual progress.

⁶ All who are assigned talks, interviews, or demonstrations at a Christian meeting want to be sure that their speech is both upbuilding and in harmony with God's written Word, the Bible. In addition to uttering accurate speech, we should express feelings and emotions that are in harmony with the loving personalities of God and Christ. If all who present parts on a meeting program are conscious of reflecting 'the fruitage of God's spirit,' such as joy, long-suffering, and faith, then all in attendance will surely feel built up.—Galatians 5:22, 23.

⁷ Although only a few may have parts on the program at congregation meetings, all

5. (a) What effect should our speech have at meetings? (b) Why should we not delay in inviting interested ones to attend meetings?

6. What are some factors that help to make a meeting upbuilding?

7. How can all attenders contribute to an upbuilding gathering?

can contribute to an upbuilding gathering. Often there are opportunities for the audience to answer questions. These are occasions for publicly declaring our faith. (Romans 10:9) Never should they be used as an opportunity to promote our personal ideas, to boast of our personal achievements, or to criticize a fellow believer. Would that not grieve God's spirit? Differences with fellow believers are best handled privately in a spirit of love. The Bible states: "Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another just as God also by Christ freely forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32) What a splendid opportunity Christian gatherings give us to apply this fine counsel! To that end, many arrive at the meetings early and linger after it is over. This also helps newly interested ones, who have a special need to feel welcome. Thus all dedicated Christians have a role to play in making the meetings upbuilding by 'considering one another and inciting one another to love and fine works.'

Prepare Well

⁸ While it may be relatively easy for some to attend Christian gatherings, for others it requires an ongoing sacrifice. For example, a Christian mother who has to work secularly to help provide for the necessities of her household usually comes home from work tired. She may then have to prepare a meal and help her children get ready for the meeting. Other Christians might have long distances to travel to get to the meetings, or they may be limited by infirmities or old age. Certainly, Jehovah God understands the situation of each faithful meeting attender, just as a loving shepherd understands the special needs of individual sheep in his flock. "Like a shepherd," the

8. (a) What commendable sacrifices do some make to attend meetings? (b) What example does Jehovah set as a shepherd?

Bible states, “[Jehovah] will shepherd his own drove. With his arm he will collect together the lambs; and in his bosom he will carry them. Those giving suck he will conduct with care.”—Isaiah 40:11.

⁹ Those who have to make big sacrifices in order to be regular at meetings may be limited in the amount of time they can spend on preparing the material to be considered. Keeping up with the weekly schedule of Bible reading makes attendance at the Theocratic Ministry School more rewarding. Similarly, preparing in advance for other meetings, such as the *Watchtower* Study and the Congregation Book Study, makes these more beneficial. By reading the study material in advance and by giving consideration to at least some of the cited Bible texts, those with time-demanding family situations will be more ready to have a meaningful share in these important Bible discussions.

¹⁰ Others, whose circumstances are less limiting, can spend more time in meeting preparation. For example, they can do research on the scriptures that are cited but not quoted. Thus all can be prepared to make the most of the meetings and have a fine share in building up the congregation by their talks and comments. By being well prepared, elders and ministerial servants will set a fine example in giving short, concise answers. Out of respect for Jehovah’s provisions, those in attendance will avoid any distracting practices while meetings are in progress.—1 Peter 5:3.

¹¹ Activities and amusements that are not vital to our spiritual health may consume too much of our time. If so, we need to examine ourselves and “cease becoming un-
9. 10. How can we derive the most benefit from meetings?
11. Why is self-discipline needed to be prepared for meetings?

reasonable” in regard to the use of our time. (Ephesians 5:17) Our aim should be to ‘buy out the time’ from less important matters so as to spend more time in personal Bible study and meeting preparation, as well as in Kingdom service. (Ephesians 5:16) Admittedly, this is not always easy and requires self-discipline. Young people who give attention to this are laying a fine foundation for future progress. Paul wrote to his younger companion Timothy: “Ponder over these things [Paul’s counsel to Timothy]; be absorbed in them, that your advancement may be manifest to all persons.”—1 Timothy 4:15.

Examples From God’s Word

¹² Consider the fine example set by Samuel’s family, who regularly participated in arrangements for gathering with fellow worshipers when God’s tabernacle was located in Shiloh. Only males were required to make annual visits to festival celebrations. But Samuel’s father, Elkanah, took his whole family along as he “went up out of his city from year to year to prostrate himself and to sacrifice to Jehovah of armies in Shiloh.” (1 Samuel 1:3-5) Samuel’s hometown, Ramathaim-zophim, was possibly situated near the coast at modern-day Rentis in the foothills of “the mountainous region of Ephraim.” (1 Samuel 1:1) Thus the journey to Shiloh would have involved a trip of about 20 miles, a fatiguing trek in those days. This is what Elkanah’s family loyally did “year by year, as often as [they] went up into the house of Jehovah.”—1 Samuel 1:7.

¹³ Jesus also grew up as part of a large family. Every year the family traveled from Nazareth about 60 miles southward to attend the Passover festival in Jerusa-

12. What outstanding example was set by Samuel’s family?

13. What example was set by faithful Jews during Jesus’ time on earth?

THEY APPRECIATE WEEKLY MEETINGS

Millions of people live in cities plagued by poverty and crime. Despite such circumstances, true Christians among them show commendable appreciation for Christian gatherings. Reports an elder serving in one of the Soweto congregations of Gauteng, South Africa: "In a congregation with 60 Witnesses and unbaptized publishers, we have between 70 and 80, and sometimes more, attending our meetings. Although the brothers and sisters do not travel far to attend, the situation in this part of Soweto is rough. One brother was stabbed in the back while walking to a meeting. At least two sisters were grabbed in an attempt to rob them. But this does not stop them from coming. On Sundays, we have a short song practice after we have closed the meeting with prayer. At least 95 percent regularly stay behind and sing all the songs to be used in meetings the following week. This helps newly interested ones to learn the songs and sing along."

Rural dwellers have other obstacles, such as

long distances that they have to travel in order to attend meetings three times a week. One interested couple live nine miles from the Kingdom Hall in Lobatse, Botswana. For the past year, they have attended meetings regularly with their two children. The husband repairs shoes to support the family. The wife sells small items to supplement the family income so that they can pay for transport to and from the meetings.

On a recent summer evening, after a meeting with the circuit overseer, this family found themselves stranded at a bus stop at 9:00 p.m. The buses had stopped early because of bad weather. A police officer stopped in his van and asked what they were doing. On hearing about their plight, he took pity on them and drove them the nine-mile journey home. The wife, who is an unbaptized publisher, said to her husband: "See, if we put the meetings first, Jehovah always provides." Now the husband has expressed a desire to become a preacher of the good news too.

Jerusalem. There are two possible routes they may have taken. The more direct route involved a descent into the Valley of Megiddo and then an ascent of about 2,000 feet up through Samaritan territory and on to Jerusalem. The other popular route was the one taken by Jesus on his last trip to Jerusalem in 33 C.E. This involved walking down the Jordan Valley to below sea level until he reached "the frontiers of Judea . . . across the Jordan." (Mark 10:1) From this point, "the road up to Jerusalem" is a distance of some 20 miles, involving an ascent of more than 3,700 feet. (Mark 10:32) Regularly, crowds of faithful festival celebrants made the arduous trip from Galilee to Jerusalem. (Luke 2:44) What a fine example for Jehovah's servants in affluent lands today, many of whom can attend Christian gatherings with relative ease, thanks to modern forms of transportation!

¹⁴ Another example is that of the 84-year-old widow Anna. The Bible states that she "was never missing from the temple." (Luke 2:37) Moreover, Anna showed a loving interest in others. On seeing the babe Jesus and learning that he was the promised Messiah, what did she do? She thanked God and began "speaking about the child to all those waiting for Jerusalem's deliverance." (Luke 2:38) What a fine attitude, a model for Christians today!

¹⁵ Yes, attendance and participation at our meetings should be such a delight that, like Anna, we never want to be missing. Many new ones cannot help feeling this way. Having come out of the darkness into God's wonderful light, they want to learn all they can, and many express great enthusiasm

14, 15. (a) What example did Anna set? (b) What can we learn from the fine attitude displayed by some new meeting attenders?



Witnesses such as these in Romania set a fine example of appreciation for Christian gatherings

for Christian meetings. On the other hand, those longer in the truth must guard against 'leaving the love they had at first.' (Revelation 2:4) Serious health problems or other factors beyond a person's control may at times limit meeting attendance. But never should we allow materialism, recreation, or lack of interest to cause us to be unprepared, passive, or irregular meeting attendees.—Luke 8:14.

The Finest Example

¹⁶ Jesus set an outstanding example in showing appreciation for spiritual gather-

16, 17. (a) What was Jesus' attitude toward spiritual gatherings? (b) What good custom should all Christians try to follow?

ings. At the young age of 12, he demonstrated his love for God's house in Jerusalem. His parents lost track of him but eventually found him discussing God's Word with teachers in the temple. In response to his parents' concern, Jesus respectfully asked: "Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?" (Luke 2:49) Submissively, the young Jesus returned with his parents to Nazareth. There he continued to show his love for meetings of worship by regular attendance at the synagogue. Thus, when he began his ministry, the Bible reports: "He came to Nazareth, where he had been reared; and, according to his custom on the sabbath day, he entered into the synagogue, and he stood up to read." After Jesus read and explained Isaiah 61:1, 2, the audience began "to marvel at the winsome words proceeding out of his mouth."—Luke 4:16, 22.

¹⁷ Christian meetings today follow this same basic pattern. After the meeting is opened with a song of praise and a prayer, verses from the Bible (or verses quoted in Bible study material) are read and explained. True Christians are under obligation to imitate the good custom of Jesus Christ. As far as their circumstances permit, they find delight in being regular in attendance at Christian gatherings.

Modern-Day Examples

¹⁸ In less affluent parts of the earth, many of our brothers and sisters set a fine example of appreciation for Christian gatherings. In Mozambique it took a district overseer, Orlando, and his wife, Amélia, 45 hours to walk some 55 miles over a high mountain to serve an assembly. Then they had to make the same trip back to serve the next assembly. Orlando modestly reported: "We felt that we had done nothing when we met up with the brothers from the Bawa Congregation. To attend the assembly and return to their homes involved a six-day journey of about 250 miles on foot, and among them was a brother 60 years old!"

¹⁹ What about appreciation for weekly congregation meetings? Kashwashwa Njam-ba is a frail sister in her 70's. She lives in Kaisososi, a small village about three miles from the Kingdom Hall in Rundu, Namibia. To attend the meetings, she walks a round trip of six miles through the bush. Others have been mugged along this route, but Kashwashwa keeps coming. Most of the meetings are conducted in languages she does not understand. So how does she benefit from attending? "By following the scriptures," says Kashwashwa, "I try to work out

18, 19. What splendid examples have brothers in less affluent countries set respecting meetings, assemblies, and conventions?

what the talk is about." But she is illiterate, so how does she follow the scriptures? "I listen for the scriptures I know by heart," she answers. And over the years, she has stored quite a number of scriptures in her memory. To improve her ability to use the Bible, she attends a literacy class arranged by the congregation. "I love to attend the meetings," she says. "There are always new things to be learned. I love to associate with the brothers and sisters. Even though I can't speak to all of them, they always come and greet me. And most important, I know that by attending the meetings, I am making Jehovah's heart glad."

²⁰ Like Kashwashwa, millions of Jehovah's worshipers throughout the earth show commendable appreciation for Christian gatherings. As Satan's world heads toward its destruction, we cannot afford to forsake the gathering of ourselves together. Rather, let us remain spiritually awake and show deep appreciation for meetings, assemblies, and conventions. That not only will make Jehovah's heart glad but will richly benefit us as we partake of divine teaching that leads to eternal life.—Proverbs 27:11; Isaiah 48:17, 18; Mark 13:35-37.

20. Why must we not forsake our Christian gatherings?

Review Questions

- ☐ Why is it a privilege to attend Christian gatherings?
- ☐ How can all in attendance contribute to an upbuilding meeting?
- ☐ What outstanding example did Jesus Christ set?
- ☐ What lesson can be learned from brothers in less affluent lands?



GRATEFUL FOR A STRONG CHRISTIAN HERITAGE

AS TOLD BY GWEN GOOCH

At school I sang a hymn
with the words, 'the Great Jehovah
enthroned in his glory.' I often wondered,
'Who is this Jehovah?'

MY GRANDPARENTS were God-fearing. Early in this century, they associated with the Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known. My father did well in business but did not at first pass on to his three children the Christian heritage he had been offered.

It was only when Father gave my brother, Douglas, my sister, Anne, and me the booklets entitled *His Works* and *Who Is God?* that I learned that Jehovah is the name of the true God. (Psalm 83:18) I was thrilled! But what had rekindled Father's interest?

In 1938, when he saw the nations poised for war, Father realized that it would take more than human efforts to remedy world

problems. Grandmother gave him the book *Enemies*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses. From reading it, he learned that the real enemy of mankind is Satan the Devil and that only God's Kingdom can bring world peace.*—Daniel 2:44; 2 Corinthians 4:4.

As war approached, our family started attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Wood Green, North London. In June 1939 we went to nearby Alexandra Palace to hear the public address, "Government and Peace," delivered by Joseph F. Rutherford, then president of the Watch Tower Society. Rutherford's speech

* The life story of my father, Ernest Beavor, appeared in *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1980.

in New York City's Madison Square Garden was relayed by radio to London and other major cities. We could hear the talk so clearly that when a rowdy mob in New York caused a disturbance, I looked around to see if it was occurring in our auditorium!

Father's Zeal for Bible Truth

Father insisted that every Saturday evening our whole family share together in a Bible study. Our study centered on the Bible subject in *The Watchtower* scheduled for discussion the following day. Illustrating the impact these studies had, to this day the account about Joshua and the siege of the city of Ai discussed in *The Watchtower* of May 1, 1939, is still vivid in my mind. I was so intrigued by that account that I checked all the references to it in my own Bible. I found such research fascinating—and still do.

Sharing with others what we were learning sounded Bible teachings down into my heart. One day Father gave me a phonograph with a recorded Bible sermon, a booklet we used for Bible study, and the address of an elderly lady. He then asked me to call on her.

"What am I going to say, and what do I do?" I inquired.

"It's all there," Father replied. "Just play the record, read the questions, have the householder read the answers, and then read the scriptures."

I did as he told me, and in this way I learned to conduct a Bible study. By thus using the Scriptures in my ministry, I came to understand them better.

Challenge of the War Years

World War II broke out in 1939, and the following year I was baptized in symbol of my dedication to serve Jehovah. I was only 13. I decided then to become a pioneer, as full-time ministers are called. I left

school in 1941 and at the Leicester convention joined Douglas in the full-time preaching activity.

The following year, Father was imprisoned for his conscientious objection to warfare. We children rallied around our mother, helping her care for our home during that difficult time of war. Then, no sooner was Father released from prison than Douglas was called up for military service. A local newspaper headline read, "Why Son Like Father Chose Prison." A good witness resulted, as opportunity was provided to explain why true Christians do not share in killing their fellow humans.—John 13:35; 1 John 3:10-12.

During those war years, many Witnesses in the full-time ministry were regular visitors to our home, and their upbuilding Bible-based discussions left a lasting impression. Among these faithful Christian brothers were John Barr and Albert Schroeder, who are now members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. My parents were truly hospitable, and they taught us to be the same.—Hebrews 13:2.

Ready to Provide an Answer

Soon after I started pioneering, I met Hilda in the door-to-door ministry. She angrily declared: "My husband is out fighting for the likes of you! Why aren't you doing something toward the war effort?"

"How much do you know about what I am doing?" I asked. "Do you know *why* I have come to you?"

"Well," she replied, "you had better come in and tell me."

I was able to explain that we were providing true hope to people who were suffering because of the horrible deeds that were being done—often in the name of God. Hilda listened with appreciation, and she became my first regular Bible student. She has been an active Witness now for over 55 years.

At the end of the war, I received a new pioneer assignment in Dorchester, a town in southwest England. This was the first time I had lived away from home. Our small congregation met in a restaurant, a 16th-century building called "The Old Tea House." We had to rearrange the tables and chairs for each of our meetings. It was very different from the Kingdom Hall I was used to. Nevertheless, the same spiritual food and loving association of Christian brothers and sisters were present.

My parents meanwhile moved to Tunbridge Wells, south of London. I returned home so that Father, Anne, and I could pioneer together. Our congregation soon grew from 12 to 70 Witnesses, so our family was asked to move to Brighton on the south coast, where the need for Kingdom proclaimers was greater. Many zealously joined in preaching with our pioneer family, and we saw Jehovah richly bless our work. The one congregation soon became three!

An Unexpected Invitation

In the summer of 1950, our family was among the 850 delegates from Britain who attended the Theocracy's Increase International Assembly in New York City's Yankee Stadium. Many pioneers who would come to that convention from overseas were sent an application to attend the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, located near South Lansing, New York. Douglas, Anne, and I were among them! I remember thinking when I dropped my filled-out application into the mailbox, 'Now I have really done it! What direction will my life take?' Yet my determination was: "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8) I was thrilled when I received an invitation to remain after the convention to attend the 16th class of Gilead, together with Douglas and Anne. We were all well aware that we could be sent as missionaries to any part of the world.

After enjoying the convention together as a family, the time came for our parents to return to England—alone. The three of us children waved good-bye as they sailed home on the *Mauritania*. What an emotional parting that was!

Missionary Assignments

The 16th class of Gilead was made up of 120 students from all parts of the world, including some who had suffered in Nazi concentration camps. Since our class was taught Spanish, we expected to be assigned to some Spanish-speaking country in South America. Imagine our surprise on graduation day to learn that Douglas was assigned to Japan and Anne and I to Syria. So we girls had to learn Arabic, and this remained true even when our assignment was changed to Lebanon. While waiting for our visas, we received Arabic lessons twice a week from George Shakashiri, the Watch Tower Society's typesetter for the Arabic *Watchtower*.

How exciting it was to be going to a Bible land that we had studied about in class! Keith and Joyce Chew, Edna Stackhouse, Olive Turner, Doreen Warburton, and Doris Wood accompanied us there. What a happy missionary family we became! A local Witness visited our missionary home to assist us further with the language. During our daily instruction period, we would practice a brief presentation, after which we would go out and use it in our preaching work.

We spent our first couple of years in Tripoli, where there was an established congregation. Joyce, Edna, Olive, Doreen, Doris, Anne, and I assisted the wives and daughters of local Witnesses to share in meetings as well as in the public ministry. Up until then, our Christian brothers and sisters, following local custom, did not sit together at meetings, and rarely did these Christian sisters share in the ministry from house



Clockwise starting top left:
Gwen at age 13
demonstrating a model study
at the Enfield Kingdom Hall

Missionary family in
Tripoli, Lebanon, 1951

Gwen with her late
husband, Wilf



to house. We needed their assistance with the language in our public preaching, and we encouraged them to share in this work themselves.

Anne and I were next assigned to help the small group of Witnesses in the ancient city of Sidon. Not long afterward, we were asked to return to the capital, Beirut. Seeds of Bible truth had been sown among the Armenian-speaking community there, so we learned that language to help them.

Changes of Assignment

I had met Wilfred Gooch before leaving England. He was a zealous, caring brother who had served in the London Bethel.

Wilf was a member of the 15th class of Gilead, which graduated during the 1950 Yankee Stadium convention. His missionary assignment was the Watch Tower Society's branch office in Nigeria, and for some time we corresponded. In 1955 we both attended the "Triumphant Kingdom" convention in London, and shortly thereafter we became engaged. The following year, we were married in Ghana, and I joined Wilf in his missionary assignment in Lagos, Nigeria.

After I left Anne in Lebanon, she married a fine Christian brother who had learned Bible truth in Jerusalem. My parents were unable to attend our weddings, since Douglas,

Anne, and I were married in different parts of the world. Still, they were content to know that we all were happily serving our God, Jehovah.

Work in Nigeria

At the branch office in Lagos, I was assigned to clean the rooms of the eight members of our branch family as well as prepare their meals and do their laundry. It seemed to me I had gained not only a husband but an instant family too!

Wilf and I learned brief Bible presentations in the Yoruba language, and we were rewarded for our efforts. A young student we contacted now has a son and a daughter who serve in Nigeria's large Bethel family of about 400 members.

In 1963, Wilf received an invitation to attend a ten-month course of special instruction in Brooklyn, New York. After finishing it, he was unexpectedly assigned back to England. I had remained in Nigeria and was given only 14 days' notice to meet Wilf in London. I left with mixed feelings, since Nigeria had been such a happy assignment. After serving 14 years abroad, it took time to adjust to life in England again. However, we were grateful to be close to our aging parents once more and to be able to help care for them.

Sustained by Our Hope

From 1980, I was privileged to accompany Wilf as he traveled to many countries as zone overseer. I especially looked forward to our return visits to Nigeria. Later we also went to Scandinavia, the West Indies, and the Middle East—including Lebanon. It was a *special* thrill to relive happy memories and to see those I had known as young teenagers who were serving as Christian elders.

Tragically, my dear husband died in the spring of 1992. He was only 69. It was an especially hard blow as it happened so suddenly. After 35 years of marriage, it has taken time to adjust. But I have received much help and love from my worldwide Christian family. I have had so many happy experiences upon which to reflect.

Both my parents set a splendid example of Christian integrity. Mother died in 1981 and Father in 1986. Douglas and Anne continue to serve Jehovah faithfully. Douglas and his wife, Kam, are back in London, where they have remained after caring for Father. Anne and her family are in the United States. All of us greatly appreciate our God-given hope and heritage.

We continue to "show a waiting attitude," looking forward to the time when the living, along with their resurrected loved ones, will serve forever together as members of Jehovah's earthly family.—Lamentations 3:24.



KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

God Makes It Grow in Alaska

BENEATH a mantle of snow and ice, a tiny seed awaits the opportunity to develop to maturity. Within the three short months that make up the Alaskan summer, a cabbage seed one eighth of an inch in diameter may grow to nearly 90 pounds! Yes, this land that was once thought by many to be a barren, glacial wasteland can produce abundant fruitage.

This is especially true of the spiritual field in Alaska. There, in the land of long winters, Jehovah's Witnesses continue to sow Kingdom seed. As in other parts of the earth, God makes the seed grow in fertile hearts.—1 Corinthians 3:6, 7.

● While on a school bus, a young Witness named Vanessa observed a fellow student, Ann, who always sat by herself. Ann appeared sad, so Vanessa invited Ann to sit next to her. No wonder Ann was sad! Her mother had died from a heart attack, and a short time later, her father died from cancer. That is why Ann was living with relatives in Alaska.

Vanessa stopped by the home of her new acquaintance while in field service one Saturday and left her the brochure *Does God Really Care About Us?* The following Monday at school, Ann sought out the young Witness. Ann had many Bible questions, which Vanessa was able to answer. "Where do you have your services?" she inquired. That evening Ann attended her first meeting at the Kingdom Hall.

It did not take long for this 17-year-old orphan to find many 'fathers' and 'mothers,' just as Jesus promised. (Matthew 19:29) And what a joyful occasion it was to see a happy and smiling Ann symbolize her dedication to Jehovah by water baptism at the "Messengers of Godly Peace" District Convention!

● In the remote areas of the vast Alaskan Arctic region—where villages are separated by hundreds of miles of wilderness—the Watch Tower Society's twin-engine airplane has been used to sow Kingdom seed in over 150 communities. But spiritual growth through a regular study of the Bible de-



pends upon correspondence. Since letter writing is a challenge for many, a Bible teacher needs to be creative in order to keep the student's interest alive. How might this be accomplished?

Kathy conducted a progressive Bible study with Edna, although they lived more than 400 miles apart! Rather than just copying the questions in the study aid, Kathy made up a work sheet with questions and provided space for writing in the answers. After Edna filled in the answers, Kathy replied and inserted comments as needed to clarify a point. Kathy states: "I set aside Wednesday evening for our 'study,' and I tried to hold to it as I would any other Bible study appointment. I also sent Edna a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Since it took two weeks for mailing time, a study through correspondence appeared somewhat slow."

Imagine the thrill when Kathy and Edna met face-to-face at the district convention in Anchorage after ten months of studying through the mail! The Witnesses were also glad to have in attendance Bible students and other interested ones from several isolated villages in Alaska.

Although growth may at times appear to be slow, some "seedlings" germinate rapidly when exposed to the light of truth. On the average, more than one hundred new praisers of Jehovah are baptized each year in Alaska! We say, "Thank you, Jehovah," for making it grow!

Men "With Feelings Like Ours"



HE WAS a king and a prophet but also a loving father. One of his sons grew up to become vain and proud. In a determined attempt to usurp the throne, this son launched a civil war, intent on his father's death. But in the battle that followed, it was the son who was killed. When the father learned of his son's death, he went alone to a roof chamber and wept: "My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! O that I might have died, I myself, instead of you, Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 18:33) The father was King David. Like other prophets of Jehovah, he was "a man with feelings like ours."—James 5:17.

In Bible times the men and women who spoke for Jehovah were from every walk of life and were seen in everyday settings. Like us, they had problems and suffered from imperfections. Who were some of these prophets, and how were their feelings like ours?

Moses Went From Overconfidence to Meekness

A prominent prophet of pre-Christian times was Moses. Even at 40 years of age, however, he was not ready to serve as Jehovah's spokesman. Why? While his brothers were oppressed by Pharaoh of Egypt, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's household and was "powerful in his words and deeds." The record tells us: "He was supposing his brothers would grasp that God was giving them salvation by his hand." Overconfident, he acted aggressively in defense of a Hebrew slave, killing an Egyptian.—Acts 7:22-25; Exodus 2:11-14.

Now Moses was forced to flee, and he spent the next four decades as a shepherd in distant Midian. (Exodus 2:15) At the end of that time, Moses, now 80 years of age, was commissioned by Jehovah as a prophet. But Moses was no longer overconfident. He felt so unqualified that he questioned Jehovah's

commissioning him as prophet, using such expressions as, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" and, "What shall I say?" (Exodus 3:11, 13) With Jehovah's loving reassurance and assistance, Moses went on to perform his assignment with great success.

Have you, like Moses, ever allowed overconfidence to lead you to do or say things that proved unwise? If so, accept further training with humility. Or have you felt unqualified to perform certain Christian responsibilities? Rather than declining, accept the help offered by Jehovah and his organization. The One who helped Moses can also assist you.

Elijah Had Feelings Like Ours in a Time of Discipline

"Elijah was a man with feelings like ours, and yet in prayer he prayed for it not to rain; and it did not rain upon the land for three years and six months." (James 5:17) Elijah's prayer was in harmony with Jehovah's will to discipline a nation that had turned away from Him. Yet, Elijah knew that the drought he was praying for would cause human suffering. Israel was largely agricultural; dew and rain were the life of the people. Continuous drought would bring extreme distress. Vegetation would wither; crops would fail. Domestic animals used for work and food would die, and some families would be threatened with starvation. Who would suffer most? The common people. A widow later told Elijah that she was reduced to a handful of flour and a little oil. She fully expected that she and her son would soon starve to death. (1 Kings 17:12) For Elijah to pray as he did, he had to have firm faith that Jehovah would care for His servants—rich or poor—who had not abandoned true worship. As the record shows, Elijah was not disappointed.—1 Kings 17:13-16; 18:3-5.

Three years later, when Jehovah indicated that he would soon bring rain, Elijah's earnest desire to see the drought end is seen in his repeated, intense prayers while he was "crouching to the earth and keeping his face put between his knees." (1 Kings 18:42) Repeatedly, he urged his attendant: "Go up, please. Look in the direction of the sea" for some indication that Jehovah heard his prayers. (1 Kings 18:43) What joy he must have felt when finally, in response to his prayers, "the heaven gave rain and the land put forth its fruit"—James 5:18.

If you are a parent or an elder in the Christian congregation, you may have to wrestle with deep feelings when administering correction. However, such human emotions need to be tempered with the conviction that discipline is necessary at times and that when it is administered with love, it "yields peaceable fruit, namely, righteousness." (Hebrews 12:11) The results of obeying Jehovah's laws are always desirable. Like Elijah, we pray from the heart that they be carried out.

Jeremiah Showed Courage Despite Discouragement

Of all the Bible writers, Jeremiah was perhaps the one who wrote the most about his personal feelings. As a young man, he was reluctant to accept his commission. (Jeremiah 1:6) He nonetheless proceeded with great courage to declare God's word, only to collide with fierce opposition from fellow Israelites—from king to commoner. That opposition sometimes brought him to anger and tears. (Jeremiah 9:3; 18:20-23; 20:7-18) On different occasions he was mobbed, struck, fastened to a pillory, imprisoned, threatened with death, and left to die in the mud at the bottom of an empty cistern. At times even Jehovah's message hurt, as illustrated by his words: "O my intestines, my intestines! I am

in severe pains in the walls of my heart.”
—Jeremiah 4:19.

Still, he loved Jehovah’s word, saying: “Your word becomes to me the exultation and the rejoicing of my heart.” (Jeremiah 15:16) At the same time, frustration led him to cry out to Jehovah: “You positively became to me like something deceitful, like waters that have proved untrustworthy,” as those of a brook that easily dry up. (Jeremiah 15:18) Nevertheless, Jehovah understood his conflicting feelings and continued to support him so that he could fulfill his commission. —Jeremiah 15:20; see also 20:7-9.

Do you, like Jeremiah, face frustration or opposition in carrying out your ministry? Look to Jehovah. Continue to follow his direction, and Jehovah will reward your efforts as well.

Jesus Had Feelings Like Ours

The greatest prophet of all time was God’s own Son, Jesus Christ. Although he was a perfect man, he did not suppress his emotions. We often read of his inner feelings, which must have been evident in his face and in his reaction to others. Jesus was often “moved with pity,” and he used the same expression in describing characters in his illustrations.—Mark 1:41; 6:34; Luke 10:33.

In Our Next Issue

Reliving Jesus’ Last Days on Earth

Dedication and Freedom of Choice

Constantine the Great—A Champion of Christianity?

He must have raised his voice when he drove salesmen and animals from the temple with the words: “Take these things away from here!” (John 2:14-16) Peter’s suggestion, “Be kind to yourself, Lord,” drew the forceful response, “Get behind me, Satan!” —Matthew 16:22, 23.

Jesus had special affection for certain ones who were especially close to him. The apostle John was described as the “disciple whom Jesus used to love.” (John 21:7, 20) And we read: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”—John 11:5.

Jesus could also be hurt. Feeling the tragedy of Lazarus’ death, “Jesus gave way to tears.” (John 11:32-36) Revealing the pain of heart caused by his betrayal by Judas Iscariot, Jesus quoted a poignant expression from the Psalms: “He that used to feed on my bread has lifted up his heel against me.” —John 13:18; Psalm 41:9.

Even while experiencing excruciating pain on the stake, Jesus showed his depth of feeling. He tenderly entrusted his mother to “the disciple whom he loved.” (John 19:26, 27) When he saw evidence of repentance in one of the evildoers impaled alongside him, Jesus compassionately said: “You will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43) We can feel the burst of emotion in his cry: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) And his dying words breathe heartfelt love and trust: “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.”—Luke 23:46.

What reassurance all of this gives us! “For we have as high priest, not one who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one [Jesus] who has been tested in all respects like ourselves, but without sin.”—Hebrews 4:15.

Jehovah’s Confidence

Jehovah never regretted his choice of spokesmen. He knew their loyalty to him, and he compassionately overlooked the

weaknesses of those who were imperfect. Yet he expected them to fulfill their commission. With his help they were able to do so.

Let us patiently show confidence in our loyal brothers and sisters. They will always be imperfect in this system of things, as will we. Still, we should never judge our brothers as unworthy of our love and attention. Paul wrote: "We, though, who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those not strong, and not to be pleasing ourselves."—Romans 15:1; Colossians 3:13, 14.

Doctors, Judges, and Jehovah's Witnesses

BACK in March 1995, Jehovah's Witnesses sponsored two seminars in Brazil. The purpose? To seek the cooperation of medical and legal personnel when a hospital patient is one of Jehovah's Witnesses and cannot accept a blood transfusion.—Acts 15:29.

Sadly, in some cases doctors had ignored the wishes of Witness patients and had sought to obtain court orders to force a blood transfusion. In such situations the Witnesses used whatever legal means were available to protect themselves. Nevertheless, they preferred cooperation to confrontation. Thus, the seminars emphasized that there are many alternatives to homologous blood transfusion therapy and that Jehovah's Witnesses *gladly accept these*.*

A meeting of the Regional Council of Medicine of São Paulo had already support-

The prophets of Jehovah experienced all the emotions that we experience. Nevertheless, they trusted in Jehovah, and Jehovah brought them through. More than that, Jehovah gave them reasons for joy—a good conscience, realization of his favor, loyal companions who sustained them, and the assurance of a happy future. (Hebrews 12:1-3) Let us also stick to Jehovah with full confidence as we imitate the faith of the prophets of old, men "with feelings like ours."

ed the Witnesses' position. In January 1995 it decided that if there is an objection to a doctor's recommended treatment, the patient has the right to refuse it and to choose another doctor.

Commendably, there are now hundreds within Brazil's medical community who are willing to administer nonblood treatment to their patients who request it. Since the March 1995 seminars, cooperation between doctors, judges, and Jehovah's Witnesses in Brazil has improved remarkably. In 1997 the Brazilian medical magazine *Âmbito Hospitalar* published an article that insisted on the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses to have their stand on the blood issue respected. It is now widely recognized that, as stated by the Regional Councils of Medicine for the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, "the doctor's duty to protect his patient's life should not transcend his duty to defend the patient's right of choice."

* For more information, see the brochure *How Can Blood Save Your Life?*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

Jesus Sends Forth 70 Disciples

IT WAS the autumn of 32 C.E. Only six months remained before Jesus' death. Hence, in order to speed up the preaching work and further the training of some of his followers, he designated 70 disciples and "sent them forth by twos in advance of him into every city and place to which he himself was going to come."—Luke 10:1.*

Jesus sent forth his disciples "in advance of him" so that the people would be able to decide more quickly whether they were for or against the Messiah when Jesus himself later arrived. But why did he send them "by twos"? Evidently, in order that they might be an encouragement to each other when faced with opposition.

Stressing the urgency of their preaching work, Jesus told his followers: "The harvest, indeed, is great, but the workers are few. Therefore beg the Master of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2) The analogy to a harvest was appropriate, for any delay at harvesttime could result in the waste of valuable crops. Likewise, if the disciples were to neglect their preaching assignment, precious lives could be lost!—Ezekiel 33:6.

Undistracted Ministers

Jesus further instructed his disciples: "Do not carry a purse, nor a food pouch, nor sandals, and do not embrace anybody in greeting along the road." (Luke 10:4) It was customary for a traveler to carry not only a pouch and food but also an extra pair of sandals, for soles could wear out and laces could break. But Jesus' disciples were not to worry about such things. Rather, they were to trust that Jehovah would care for them by means of fellow Israelites, among whom hospitality was a custom.

* Some Bibles and ancient Greek manuscripts say that Jesus sent forth "seventy-two" disciples. However, there is abundant manuscript support for the reading "seventy." This technical variation should not detract from the main point, that Jesus sent forth a large group of his disciples to preach.

But why did Jesus tell his disciples not to embrace anyone in a greeting? Were they to be cold, even rude? Not at all! The Greek word *a-spa'-zo-mai*, meaning to embrace in a greeting, may mean more than a polite "hello" or "good-day." It may also include the customary kisses, embraces, and long conversation that would ensue when two acquaintances met. One commentator observes: "Salutations among the Orientals did not consist, as among us, of a slight bow, or extension of the hand, but was performed by many embraces, and inclinations, and even prostrations of the body on the ground. All this required much time." (Compare 2 Kings 4:29.) Jesus thus helped his followers to avoid unnecessary, though customary, distractions.

Finally, Jesus told his disciples that when they entered a house and were welcomed, they should "stay in that house, eating and drinking the things they [would] provide." But if they entered a city and were not well received, they should "go out into its broad ways and say, 'Even the dust that got stuck to our feet from your city we wipe off against you.'" (Luke 10:7, 10, 11) Wiping or shaking the dust off one's feet would signify that the disciples were peacefully leaving the unreceptive house or city to the consequences that would eventually come from God. But those who received Jesus' disciples with kindness put themselves in line for blessings. Jesus told his apostles on another occasion: "He that receives you receives me also, and he that receives me receives him also that sent me forth. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water to drink because he is a disciple, I tell you truly, he will by no means lose his reward."—Matthew 10:40, 42.



Lessons for Us

The commission to preach the good news of God's Kingdom and to make disciples is now being carried out by well over 5,000,000 Witnesses of Jehovah worldwide. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) They realize that their message is urgent. Therefore, they make the most of their time, avoiding distractions that would prevent them from giving full attention to their important assignment.

Jehovah's Witnesses strive to be cordial with all they meet. Nevertheless, they do not simply engage in idle chatter, nor do they get caught up in debates over social issues or the failing attempts of this world to correct injustices. (John 17:16) Rather, they focus their discussion on the only long-term solution to man's problems—God's Kingdom.

Most often, Jehovah's Witnesses are seen working in pairs. Could not more be accomplished if each of them worked alone? Perhaps. Still, Christians today recognize the benefit of working side by side with a fellow believer. It affords a measure of protection when witnessing in dangerous areas. Working with a partner also enables newer ones to benefit from the skill of more experienced publishers of the good news. Really, both can contribute toward an interchange of encouragement.—Proverbs 27:17.

Without doubt, the preaching work is the most urgent work being carried out in these "last days." (2 Timothy 3:1) Jehovah's Witnesses are happy to have the support of a worldwide brotherhood in which they work "side by side for the faith of the good news."—Philippians 1:27.

An "Extraordinary" Convention Praised

A RADIO announcer in Lima, Peru, had serious reservations about Jehovah's Witnesses. After attending one of their district conventions, however, his attitude changed dramatically. In fact, he was so impressed that he made some favorable comments to his radio audience. The following are excerpts from what he said:

"The convention was simply extraordinary. There was not a piece of paper on the floor nor a vendor around. There were no traffic jams. Five thousand two hundred people went to the stadium at their own expense, each armed with bucket, rag, duster, dustpan, broom, hand brush, gloves, and detergent to wash and scrub the place.



"There was not a piece of paper on the floor"

Where paint was needed, they went ahead and painted. And who comes up with the money? They come up with it themselves! When they are informed about something that needs to be done, all of them immediately reach into their pockets to give. I tell you, the Catholic Church is falling asleep when it comes to such matters. I want to

congratulate Jehovah's Witnesses and the coordinators of this event. And I want to say to them from the bottom of my heart, May God help you and bless you."

In the cities around the world this year, Jehovah's Witnesses will enjoy the "God's Way of Life" District Convention. Will you be present?