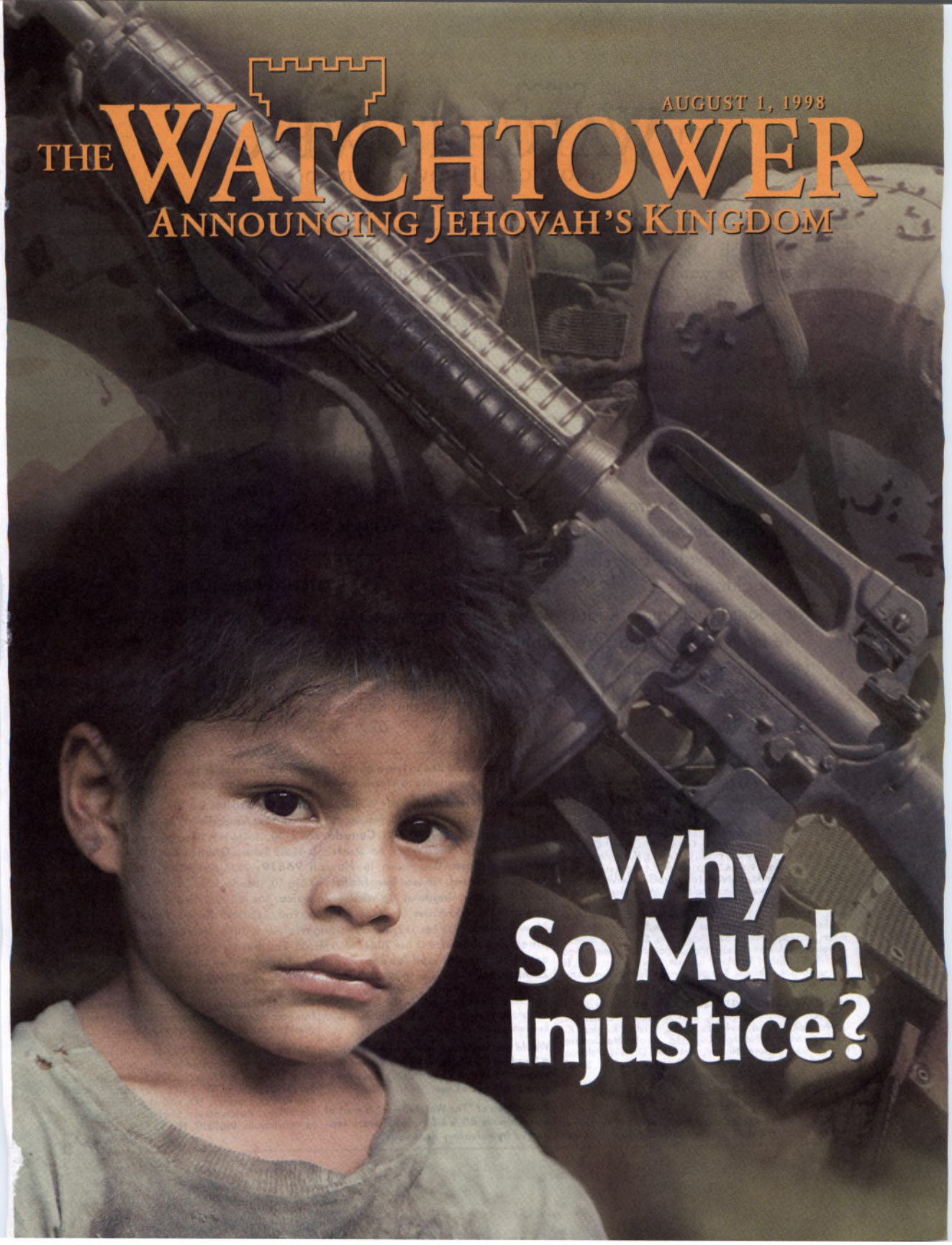
AUGUST 1, 1998

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Why So Much Injustice?

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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Is Injustice Inevitable?

"In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death."—Anne Frank.

ANNE FRANK, a young Jewish girl of 15, wrote those poignant words in her diary not long before her death. For over two years, her family had been concealed, hiding in an attic in Amsterdam. Her hopes of a better world were shattered when an informer betrayed their whereabouts to the Nazis. The next year, 1945, Anne died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Six million other Jews suffered a similar fate.

Hitler's diabolic scheme to exterminate an entire people may be the worst case of racial injustice our century has seen, but it is not the only one. In 1994 over half a million Tutsi were massacred in Rwanda, simply because they belonged to the "wrong" tribe. And during the first world war, about one million Armenians died in an ethnic purge.

The Cruel Faces of Injustice

Genocide is not the only face of injustice. Social injustice condemns about a fifth of the human race to a lifetime of grinding poverty. Worse still, the human rights group Anti-Slavery International calculates that more than 200,000,000 people are in bondage. There may well be more slaves in the world today than at any other time in history. They may not be sold at public auctions, but their working conditions are frequently worse than those of most slaves in former times.

Legal injustice robs millions of their basic rights. "Human rights atrocities are committed virtually every day, somewhere in the world," states Amnesty International in its 1996 report. "Most vulnerable are the poor and disadvantaged, especially women, children, elderly people and refugees." The report observed: "In some countries, the structures of the nation state have virtually collapsed, leaving no legal authority to protect the weak from the strong."

During 1996 tens of thousands in over a hundred countries were detained and tortured. And in recent years, hundreds of thousands of people have just disappeared, apparently abducted either by security forces or by terrorist groups. Many of them are presumed dead.

Wars, of course, are inevitably unjust, but they are getting more so. Modern warfare targets civilian populations, including women and children. And this is not just because of indiscriminate bombing of cities. Women and girls are routinely raped as part of military operations, and many insurgency groups forcibly abduct children in order to train them to be killers. Commenting on such trends, the United Nations report "Impact of Armed Conflict on Children" states: "More and more of the world is being sucked into a desolate moral vacuum."

There is no doubt that this moral vacuum has led to a world saturated with injustice—be it racial, social, legal, or military. This is nothing new, of course. Over two thousand five hundred years ago, a Hebrew

prophet lamented: "The law is weak and useless, and justice is never done. Evil men get the better of the righteous, and so justice is perverted." (Habakkuk 1:4, *Today's English Version*) Although injustice has always been rampant, the 20th century must rank as the age when the level of injustice reached new heights.

Does Injustice Matter?

It matters when you personally suffer as a result of injustice. It matters because it robs the majority of the human race of their right to happiness. And it also matters because injustice frequently ignites bloody conflicts, which, in turn, keep the flames of injustice burning.

Peace and happiness are inextricably tied to justice, but injustice dashes hope and crushes optimism. As Anne Frank tragically discovered, people cannot build up their hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. Like her, we all yearn for something better.

This desire has led sincere people to attempt to bring a measure of justice to human society. To that end, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly, states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

These are certainly noble words, but mankind is still far from realizing that cherished goal—a just society where everyone enjoys equal rights and everyone treats his fellowman as his brother. The realization of this objective, as the preamble of the UN Declaration points out, would serve as "the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world."

Is injustice so ingrained in the fabric of human society that it will never be eradicated? Or will a solid foundation for freedom, justice, and peace somehow be laid? If so, who could put it in place and make sure that all will benefit?

AT LAST—JUSTICE FOR ALL

"We will strive to listen in new ways . . . to the injured voices, the anxious voices, the voices that have despaired of being heard. . . . What remains is to give life to what is in the law: to ensure at last that as all are born equal in dignity before God, all are born equal in dignity before man."—U.S. President Richard Milhous Nixon, inaugural address, January 20, 1969.

WHEN kings, presidents, and prime ministers take office, they are wont to talk of justice. Richard Nixon, former president of the United States, was no exception. But his eloquent words lose their luster when viewed in the cold light of history. Although he pledged 'to give life to the law,' Nixon was later found guilty of lawbreaking and was forced to relinquish his office. Three decades later, 'injured, anxious, and despairing voices' keep clamoring to be heard.

Hearing such voices and addressing their grievances is no easy task, as countless well-intentioned leaders have discovered. 'Justice for all' has proved to be an elusive goal. Nevertheless, many centuries

ago, a promise was made that merits our attention —a unique promise concerning justice.

Through his prophet Isaiah, God assured His people that he would send them a "servant" that he himself would choose. "I have put my spirit in him," Jehovah told them. "Justice to the nations is what he will bring forth." (Isaiah 42:1-3) No human ruler would dare to make such a sweeping declaration, one which would mean lasting justice to every nation. Can this promise be trusted? Could such an extraordinary achievement ever be realized?

A Promise That We Can Trust

A promise is only as good as the one who makes it. In this case, it is none other than Almighty God who declares that his "servant" will establish justice worldwide. Unlike politicians, Jehovah does not make promises lightly. 'It is impossible for him to lie,' the Bible assures us. (Hebrews 6:18) "What I have determined to do will be done," God declares emphatically.—Isaiah 14:24, *Today's English Version.*

Our confidence in that promise is also reinforced by the record of God's chosen "servant," Jesus Christ. He who would establish justice must love justice and live justly. Jesus left an unblemished record as a man who 'loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.' (Hebrews 1:9) What he said, how he lived, and even how he died, all proved that he was truly a just man. At Jesus' death, a Roman army officer, who apparently witnessed both Jesus' trial and his execution, was moved to say: "Really this man was righteous."—Luke 23:47.

Apart from living righteously himself, Jesus resisted the injustice that was so rampant in his day. He did this, not by subversion or revolution, but by teaching true justice to everyone who would listen. His Sermon on the Mount is a masterful explanation of how true justice and righteousness should be practiced.—Matthew, chapters 5-7.

Jesus practiced what he preached. He did not despise unfortunate lepers, the "untouchables" of Jewish society. Rather, he spoke with them, touched them, and even cured them. (Mark 1:40-42) All the people he met, including the poor and the downtrodden, were important to him. (Matthew 9:36) "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you," he told them.—Matthew 11:28.

Above all, Jesus refused to allow the injustice around him to corrupt or embitter him. He never returned evil for evil. (1 Peter 2:22, 23) Even when in excruciating pain, he prayed to his heavenly Father in behalf of the very soldiers who impaled him. "Father, forgive them," he pleaded, "for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) Certainly, Jesus 'made clear to the nations what justice is.' (Matthew 12:18) What greater proof do we have of God's desire to establish a just world than the living example of his own Son?

Injustice Can Be Overcome

Living proof that injustice can be overcome is also available in today's world. Individually, as well as organizationally, Jehovah's Witnesses strive to subdue prejudice, partiality, racism, and violence. Consider the following example.

Pedro* believed that subversive action was the only way to bring justice to the Basque Country, the region of Spain where he lived. To this end he became a member of a terrorist organization that gave him paramilitary training in France. Once his training was completed, he was ordered to form a terrorist unit and blow up a police barracks. His team was already preparing the explosives when the

* A substitute name.

police arrested him. He spent 18 months in prison, but even behind bars he continued his political activity, participating in hunger strikes and cutting his wrists on one occasion.

Pedro thought that he was fighting for justice. Then he got to know Jehovah and his purposes. While Pedro was in prison, his wife began to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, and when he was released, she invited him to attend one of their meetings. He enjoyed the occasion so much that he asked for a Bible study, a study that led him to make great changes in his outlook and in his way of life. Finally, in 1989, both Pedro and his wife were baptized.

"I thank Jehovah that I never actually killed anyone during my years as a terrorist," Pedro says. "Now I use the sword of God's spirit, the Bible, to give people a message of true peace and justice—the good news of God's Kingdom." Not long ago Pedro, who now serves as an elder of Jehovah's Witnesses, visited the very barracks that he had intended to destroy. This time he went for the purpose of preaching a message of peace to the families who live there.

Jehovah's Witnesses make these changes because they long for a righteous world. (2 Peter 3:13) Although they trust implicitly in God's promise to bring this about, they realize that it is also their obligation to live in line with justice. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that God expects us to do our part.

Sowing Seeds of Righteousness

True, when faced with injustice, we may feel inclined to cry out: "Where is the God of justice?" That was the exclamation of the Jews of Malachi's day. (Malachi 2:17) Did God take their complaint seriously? On the contrary, it made him feel "weary" because, among other things, they themselves were dealing treacherously with their wives who had grown old, divorcing them on the flimsiest of pretexts. Jehovah expressed his concern over 'the wives of their youth, with whom they had dealt treacherously, although they were their partners and the wives of their covenant.'—Malachi 2:14.

Can we legitimately complain about injustice if we ourselves act unjustly? On the other hand, if we try to imitate Jesus by rooting out prejudice and racism from our hearts, by being impartial and loving to all, and by not returning evil for evil, we show that we truly love justice.

If we would reap justice, the Bible urges us to 'sow seed in righteousness.' (Hosea 10:12) No matter how small it may seem, every personal victory over injustice is important. As Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in his *Letter From Birmingham Jail,* "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Those who "seek righteousness" are the people God selects to inherit his righteous new world soon to come.—Zephaniah 2:3.

We cannot build our hope for justice on the shaky foundation of human promises, yet we can trust the word of our loving Creator. That is why Jesus told his followers to keep praying for God's Kingdom to come. (Matthew 6:9, 10) Jesus, the appointed King of that Kingdom, "will deliver the poor one crying for help, also the afflicted one and whoever has no helper. He will feel sorry for the lowly one and the poor one, and the souls of the poor ones he will save."—Psalm 72:12, 13.

Clearly, injustice is not permanent. Christ's rule over all the earth will conquer injustice forever, as God assures us through his prophet Jeremiah: "The time is coming when I will fulfill the promise that I made . . . At that time I will choose as king a righteous descendant of David. That king will do what is right and just throughout the land."—Jeremiah 33:14, 15, *TEV.*

JEHOVAH—THE SOURCE OF TRUE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

"The Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness, with whom there is no injustice."—DEUTERONOMY 32:4.

JUST as everyone has an inborn need for love, so we all yearn to be treated with justice. As American statesman Thomas Jefferson wrote, "[justice] is instinct and innate, . . . as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing." This is not surprising, since Jehovah created us in his own image. (Genesis 1:26) Indeed, he bestowed upon us qualities that reflect his own personality, one of which is justice. That is why we have an inherent need for justice and why we long to live in a world of true justice and righteousness.

[2] Regarding Jehovah, the Bible assures us: "All his ways are justice." (Deuteronomy 32:4) But in a world plagued with injustice, it is not easy to grasp the meaning of divine justice. Through the pages of God's Word, however, we can discern how God administers justice, and we can come to appreciate God's wonderful ways even more. (Romans 11:33) Understanding justice in the Biblical sense is important because our idea of justice may well be influenced by human concepts. From a human standpoint, justice may be considered to be nothing more than a fair application of the rule of law. Or as philosopher Francis Bacon wrote, "justice consists in giving every man what he deserves." Jehovah's justice, however, involves much more.

1. Why do we have an inherent need for justice?
2. How important is justice to Jehovah, and why do we need to grasp the meaning of divine justice?

Jehovah's Justice Is Heartwarming

[3] The breadth of God's justice can better be understood by considering how the original-language words are used in the Bible.* Interestingly, in the Scriptures there is no significant difference between justice and righteousness. In fact, the Hebrew words are sometimes used in parallel, as we see at Amos 5:24, where Jehovah exhorts his people: "Let justice roll forth just like waters, and righteousness like a constantly flowing torrent." Moreover, several times the terms "justice and righteousness" appear together for the sake of emphasis. —Psalm 33:5; Isaiah 33:5; Jeremiah 33:15; Ezekiel 18:21; 45:9.

[4] What sense is conveyed by these Hebrew

* In the Hebrew Scriptures, three principal words are involved. One of these (*mish·pat'*) is often translated "justice." The other two (*tse'dheq* and the related word *tsedha·qah'*) are in most cases rendered "righteousness." The Greek word translated "righteousness" (*di·kai·o·sy'ne*) is defined as the "quality of being right or just."

3. What can be learned by considering the original-language words used in the Bible for justice and righteousness?
4. What does it mean to exercise justice, and what is the ultimate standard of justice?

Jesus made clear the breadth of divine justice

and Greek words? To exercise justice in the Scriptural sense means to do what is right and fair. Since Jehovah is the one who establishes moral laws and principles, or what is right and fair, the way Jehovah does things is the ultimate standard of justice. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* explains that the Hebrew word rendered righteousness (*tse'dheq*) "refers to an ethical, moral standard and of course in the O[ld] T[estament] that standard is the nature and will of God." Thus, the way God applies his principles, and especially the way he deals with imperfect men, reveals the face of true justice and righteousness.

[5] The Scriptures clearly show that godly justice is heartwarming rather than harsh and unyielding. David sang: "Jehovah is a lover of justice, and he will not leave his loyal ones." (Psalm 37:28) God's justice moves him to show faithfulness and compassion toward his servants. Divine justice is sensitive to our needs and makes allowances for our imperfections. (Psalm 103:14) That does not mean that God condones wickedness, for doing so would encourage injustice. (1 Samuel 3:12, 13; Ecclesiastes 8:11) Jehovah explained to Moses that He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth." While willing to pardon error and transgression, God will not exempt from punishment those who deserve it.—Exodus 34:6, 7.

5. What qualities are bound up with God's justice?

[6] When we meditate on how Jehovah exercises justice, we should not think of him as a stern judge, concerned only with passing sentence on wrongdoers. On the contrary, we should think of him as a loving but firm father who always deals with his children in the best possible way. "O Jehovah, you are our Father," said the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 64:8) As a just and righteous Father, Jehovah balances firmness for what is right with tender compassion toward his earthly children, who need help or forgiveness as a result of difficult circumstances or fleshly weaknesses.—Psalm 103:6, 10, 13.

6. How does Jehovah deal with his earthly children?

Making Clear What Justice Is

[7] The compassionate nature of Jehovah's justice was highlighted with the coming of the Messiah. Jesus taught divine justice and lived in harmony with it, as foretold by the prophet Isaiah. Clearly, God's justice includes treating with tenderness people who are beaten down. Thus, they are not broken beyond recovery. Jesus, Jehovah's "servant," came to the earth to "make clear to the nations" this aspect of God's justice. He did so, above all, by giving us a living example of what divine justice means. As the "righteous sprout" of King David, Jesus was eager to 'seek justice and be prompt in righteousness.'—Isaiah 16:5; 42:1-4; Matthew 12:18-21; Jeremiah 33:14, 15.

[8] Such a clarification of the nature of Jehovah's justice was particularly necessary in the first century C.E. The Jewish elders and religious leaders—the scribes, the Pharisees, and others—proclaimed and exemplified a distorted view of justice and righteousness. As a result, the common people, who found it impossible to live up to the demands set by the scribes and Pharisees, likely imagined that God's righteousness was far out of reach. (Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46) Jesus showed that this was not the case. He chose his disciples from among these common people, and he taught them God's righteous standards.—Matthew 9:36; 11:28-30.

[9] The Pharisees, on the other hand, sought opportunities to display their "righteousness" by praying or making contributions in public. (Matthew 6:1-6) They also tried to demonstrate their righteousness by adhering to countless laws and precepts—many of which were of their own making. Such efforts led them to "pass by the justice and the love of God." (Luke 11:42) Outwardly, they may have appeared to be righteous, but inside they were 'full of lawlessness,' or unrighteousness. (Matthew 23:28) Simply put, they really knew little about God's righteousness.

[10] For that reason, Jesus warned his followers: "If your righteousness does not abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens." (Matthew 5:20) The sharp contrast between the divine justice exemplified by Jesus and the narrow-minded self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was the cause of frequent contentions among them.

Divine Justice Versus Distorted Justice

[11] During his Galilean ministry in the spring of the year 31 C.E., Jesus spotted a man with a withered hand in a synagogue. Since it was a Sabbath, the Pharisees asked Jesus: "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" Rather than feel genuine concern for this poor man's suffering, they had a desire to find a pretext for condemning Jesus, as their question revealed. No wonder Jesus was grieved at their insensitive hearts! He then pointedly threw a similar question back at the Pharisees: "Is it lawful on the sabbath to do a good deed?" When they kept silent, Jesus answered his own question by asking them if they would not rescue a sheep that had fallen into a pit on the Sabbath.*

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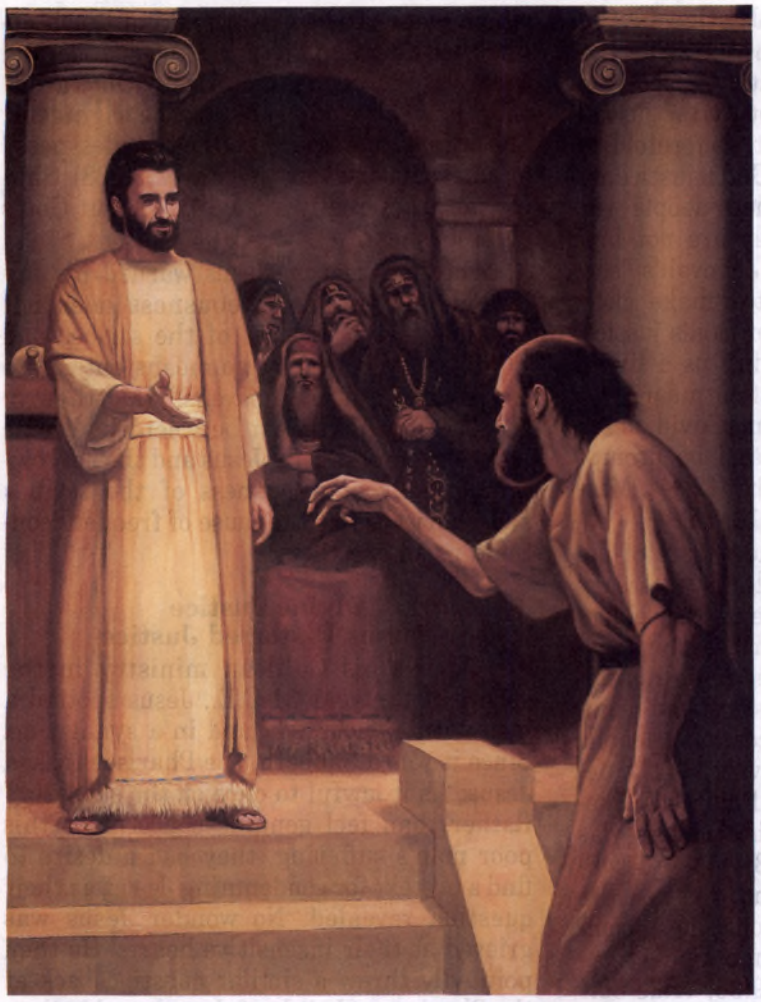
7. (a) What do we learn about divine justice from Isaiah's prophecy? (b) What role did Jesus have in teaching the nations about justice?
8. Why had true justice and righteousness become obscure in the first century?
9, 10. (a) How did the scribes and Pharisees seek to demonstrate their righteousness? (b) How and why did Jesus reveal that the practices of the scribes and Pharisees were futile?

* Jesus' example was well chosen because the oral law of the Jews specifically allowed them to render assistance to an animal in distress on the Sabbath. On several other occasions, there were confrontations on this same issue, namely, whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath.—Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 9:13-16.

11. (a) Why did the Pharisees question Jesus about curing on the Sabbath? (b) What did Jesus' answer reveal?



"Of how much more worth is a man than a sheep!" Jesus reasoned, with irrefutable logic. "So it is lawful [or, right] to do a fine thing on the sabbath," he concluded. God's justice should never be shackled by human tradition. Having made that point clear, Jesus went ahead and healed the man's hand. —Matthew 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5.

12 If the Pharisees cared little for those with physical disabilities, they cared even less for those who were impoverished spiritually. Their distorted view of righteousness led them to ignore and despise tax collectors and sinners. (John 7:49) Nevertheless, many such ones responded to Jesus' teaching, doubtless sensing his desire to help rather than to pass judgment. (Matthew 21:31; Luke 15:1) The Pharisees, however, denigrated Jesus' efforts to heal the spiritually sick. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them," they muttered reproachfully. (Luke 15:2) In reply to their accusation, Jesus again used a pastoral illustration. Just as a shepherd rejoices when he finds a lost sheep, so the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents. (Luke 15:3-7) Jesus himself rejoiced when he was able to help Zacchaeus repent from his former sinful course. "The Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost," he said.—Luke 19:8-10.

13 These confrontations clearly reveal the distinction between divine justice, which seeks to heal and to save, and self-righteousness, which seeks to exalt the few and condemn the many. Empty ritual and man-made tradition had led the scribes and Pharisees to arrogance and self-importance, but Jesus aptly pointed out that they had "disregarded the weightier matters of the Law, namely, justice and mercy and faithfulness." (Matthew 23:23) May we imitate Je-

12, 13. (a) In contrast with the scribes and Pharisees, how did Jesus show his interest in helping sinners? (b) What is the difference between divine justice and self-righteousness?

sus in exercising true justice in all that we do and also watch out for the pitfall of self-righteousness.

[14] While Jesus ignored the arbitrary rules of the Pharisees, he did keep the Mosaic Law. (Matthew 5:17, 18) In doing so, he did not allow the letter of that righteous Law to override its principles. When a woman who had suffered from a flow of blood for 12 years touched his garments and was healed, Jesus said to her: "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go your way in peace." (Luke 8:43-48) Jesus' sympathetic words confirmed that God's justice had taken into account her circumstances. Although she was ceremonially unclean and thus had technically violated the Mosaic Law by being in among the crowd, her faith deserved to be rewarded.—Leviticus 15:25-27; compare Romans 9:30-33.

Righteousness Is for Everyone

[15] Apart from emphasizing its compassionate nature, Jesus also taught his disciples that divine justice should embrace all people. It was Jehovah's will for him to 'bring forth justice to the nations.' (Isaiah 42:1) This was the point of one of Jesus' most famous illustrations, that of the neighborly Samaritan. The illustration was a reply to a question raised by a man versed in the Law who wanted to "prove himself righteous." "Who really is my neighbor?" he asked, doubtless wishing to restrict his neighborly responsibilities to Jewish people. The Samaritan in Jesus' illustration displayed godly righteousness, for he was willing to spend his time and money helping a stranger from another nation. Jesus concluded his illustration by advising his questioner: "Be doing the same yourself." (Luke 10:25-37) If we likewise do good to all people regardless of their racial or ethnic background, we will be imitating God's justice. —Acts 10:34, 35.

[16] The example of the scribes and Pharisees, on the other hand, reminds us that if we would exercise divine justice, we should not be "righteous overmuch." (Ecclesiastes 7:16) Seeking to impress others with showy displays of righteousness or attaching excessive importance to man-made rules will not bring us God's approval.—Matthew 6:1.

[17] One reason why Jesus made clear to the nations the nature of God's justice was so that all of his disciples could learn to display this quality. Why is this so important? The Scriptures exhort us to "become imitators of God," and all God's ways are justice. (Ephesians 5:1) Likewise, Micah 6:8 explains that one of Jehovah's requirements is that we "exercise justice" as we walk with our God. Furthermore, Zephaniah 2:2, 3 reminds us that if we wish to be concealed during the day of Jehovah's anger, we have to "seek righteousness" before that day arrives.

14. How does one of Jesus' miracles illustrate that divine justice takes into account a person's circumstances?

15, 16. (a) What does Jesus' illustration of the neighborly Samaritan teach us about justice? (b) Why should we avoid being "righteous overmuch"?

17. Why is it so important for us to display godly justice?

Can You Explain?

- ☐ What is the meaning of divine justice?
- ☐ How did Jesus teach justice to the nations?
- ☐ Why was the righteousness of the Pharisees distorted?
- ☐ Why do we need to exercise justice?

[18] These critical last days are therefore an "especially acceptable time" to exercise justice. (2 Corinthians 6:2) We can be sure that if, like Job, we make 'righteousness our clothing' and 'justice our sleeveless coat,' Jehovah will bless us. (Job 29:14) How will faith in Jehovah's justice help us to look to the future with confidence? Moreover, as we await the righteous "new earth," how does godly justice protect us spiritually? (2 Peter 3:13) The following article will answer these questions.

18. What questions will be answered in the following article?

IMITATE JEHOVAH —EXERCISE JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

"I am Jehovah, the One exercising loving-kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I do take delight."—JEREMIAH 9:24.

JEHOVAH promised that the day would come when everyone would know him. Through his prophet Isaiah, he stated: "They will not do any harm or cause any ruin in all my holy mountain; because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea." (Isaiah 11:9) What a marvelous prospect that is!

[2] What, though, does it mean to know Jehovah? To Jeremiah, Jehovah revealed what counted most: "The having of insight and the having of knowledge of me, that I am Jehovah, the One exercising loving-kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I do take delight." (Jeremiah 9:24) Thus, to know Jehovah includes knowing the way he exercises justice and righteousness. If we then exercise those qualities, he will find delight in us. How can we do so? In his Word, the Bible, Jehovah has preserved a record of his dealings with imperfect humans through the ages. By studying it, we can come to know Jehovah's way of justice and righteousness and thus imitate him.—Romans 15:4.

1. What marvelous prospect did Jehovah hold out?
2. What does knowing Jehovah include? Why?

Just yet Compassionate

[3] The divine judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah is a classic example that illustrates several aspects of Jehovah's justice. Not only did Jehovah mete out necessary punishment but he also provided salvation for the deserving ones. Was the destruction of those cities really justified? Abraham, who apparently had limited knowledge of the extent of Sodom's wickedness, did not

3, 4. Why was Jehovah justified in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah?

think so at first. Jehovah assured Abraham that if just ten righteous people could be found, he would spare that city. Clearly, Jehovah's justice is never hasty or unmerciful.—Genesis 18:20-32.

4 The inspection by the two angels provided a graphic testimony of Sodom's moral degradation. When the men of the city, "from boy to old man," learned that two men had come to stay at Lot's home, they assaulted his house with the intention of committing homosexual gang rape. Their depravity had truly sunk to a low level! Without a doubt, Jehovah's judgment on the city was a righteous one.—Genesis 19: 1-5, 24, 25.

5 After citing the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as a warning example, the apostle Peter wrote: "Jehovah knows how to deliver people of godly devotion out of trial." (2 Peter 2:6-9) Justice would not have been satisfied if righteous Lot and his family had been swept away along with the ungodly people of Sodom. Thus, Jehovah's angels warned Lot about the impending destruction. When Lot lingered, the angels "in the compassion of Jehovah" took hold of him, his wife, and his daughters by the hand and led them out of the city. (Genesis 19:12-16) We can be sure that Jehovah will show similar concern for righteous ones in the forthcoming destruction of this wicked system.

6 Although the end of this system will be a time "for meting out justice," there is no reason for us to be unduly concerned. (Luke 21:22) The judgment that God will execute at Armageddon will prove "altogether righteous." (Psalm 19:9) As Abraham learned, we humans can have implicit trust in Jehovah's justice, which is on a much higher plane than ours. Abraham asked: "Is the Judge of all the earth not going to do what is right?" (Genesis 18:25; compare Job 34: 10.) Or as Isaiah aptly put it, "who teaches [Jehovah] in the path of justice?"—Isaiah 40:14.

5. How did God deliver Lot and his family from Sodom?

6. Why should we not be unduly concerned about the forthcoming destruction of the wicked system of things?

A Righteous Act to Save Mankind

7 God's justice is not manifested only in the way he punishes wrongdoers. Jehovah describes himself as "a righteous God and a Savior." (Isaiah 45:21) Manifestly, there is a close connection between God's righteousness, or justice, and his desire to save mankind from the effects of sin. Commenting on this text, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* 1982 Edition, points out that "God's justice seeks concretely to express His mercy and to accomplish His salvation." It is not that God's justice needs to be tempered with mercy but, rather, that mercy is an expression of God's justice. God's provision of a ransom for mankind's salvation is the most striking example of this aspect of divine justice.

8 The ransom price itself—the precious life of God's only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ—was a high one because Jehovah's standards are universal, and he himself abides by them. (Matthew 20:28) A perfect life, that of Adam, had been lost, so a perfect life was needed to redeem life for Adam's descendants. (Romans 5:19-21) The apostle Paul describes Jesus' course of integrity, including the paying of the

7. What connection is there between God's justice and his mercy?

8, 9. (a) What was included in the description, "one righteous act"? Why? (b) What does Jehovah ask back from us?

ransom, as "one righteous act." (Romans 5:18, footnote) Why is that? Because from Jehovah's standpoint, to ransom mankind was the right and the just thing to do, even though it had to be done at great cost to himself. Adam's offspring were like a "bruised reed," which God did not wish to crush, or like a "smoldering flaxen wick," which he did not want to extinguish. (Matthew 12:20) God had confidence that many faithful men and women would arise from among Adam's descendants.—Compare Matthew 25:34.

[9] How should we respond to this supreme act of love and justice? One of the things Jehovah asks back from us is that we "exercise justice." (Micah 6:8) How can we do this?

Search for Justice, Pursue Righteousness

[10] First of all, we must conform to God's moral standards. Because God's standards are just and righteous, we are exercising justice when we live in harmony with them. That is what Jehovah expects of his people. "Learn to do good; search for justice," Jehovah told the Israelites. (Isaiah 1:17) Jesus gave similar counsel to his hearers in the Sermon on the Mount, when he instructed them to 'seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness.' (Matthew 6:33) Paul encouraged Timothy to "pursue righteousness." (1 Timothy 6:11) When we live in harmony with God's standards of behavior and put on the new personality, we are pursuing true justice and righteousness. (Ephesians 4:23, 24) In other words, we search for justice by doing things God's way.

10. (a) What is one way in which we exercise justice? (b) How can we seek first God's righteousness?

[11] As we are well aware, it is not always easy for imperfect humans to do what is just and right. (Romans 7:14-20) Paul encouraged the Roman Christians to fight against the mastery of sin, so that they could present their dedicated bodies to God as "weapons of righteousness," which would be useful to God in accomplishing his purpose. (Romans 6:12-14) Likewise, by regularly studying and applying God's Word, we can absorb the "mental-regulating of Jehovah" and be 'disciplined in righteousness.'—Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

[12] Second, we exercise justice when we treat others the way we want Jehovah to treat us. It is easy to have a double standard—an indulgent one for ourselves but a strict one for others. We readily make excuses for our own shortcomings, yet we are quick to criticize the failings of others, which may well be insignificant compared to our own. Jesus pointedly asks: "Why, then, do you look at the straw in your brother's eye, but do not consider the rafter in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:1-3) We should never forget that none of us could stand if Jehovah were to scrutinize our errors. (Psalm 130:3, 4) If Jehovah's justice allows him to overlook our brothers' weaknesses, who are we to judge them adversely?—Romans 14:4, 10.

[13] Third, we display godly justice when we diligently engage in the preaching activity. "Do not hold back good from those to whom it is owing, when it happens to be in the power of your hand to do it," Jehovah counsels us. (Proverbs 3:27) It would

11. Why and how should we fight against the mastery of sin?
12. What should we avoid if we are to treat others the way we want Jehovah to treat us?
13. Why does a righteous man feel obliged to preach the good news of the Kingdom?

By our preaching activity, we display godly justice

not be right to keep to ourselves the life-giving knowledge that God has so generously granted us. True, many people may reject our message, but as long as God continues to extend mercy to them, we should be willing to keep giving them the opportunity "to attain to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9) And like Jesus, we feel delighted when we are able to help someone turn to justice and righteousness. (Luke 15:7) Now is the favorable time for us to 'sow seed in righteousness.' —Hosea 10:12.

"Princes for Justice Itself"

14 All of us must walk in the path of righteousness, but elders in the Christian congregation have a special responsibility in this regard. Jesus' princely rule is 'sustained by means of justice and righteousness.' Accordingly, the standard for elders is divine justice. (Isaiah 9:7) They bear in mind what is described prophetically at Isaiah 32:1: "Look! A king will reign for righteousness itself; and as respects princes, they will rule as princes for justice itself." As spirit-appointed overseers, or 'God's stewards,' elders should do things God's way.—Titus 1:7.

15 Jesus showed that Jehovah's justice was compassionate, merciful, and reasonable. Above all, he tried to help those who had problems and "to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10) Like the shepherd in

14. What role do elders play with regard to justice?

15, 16. (a) How do elders imitate the faithful shepherd in Jesus' illustration? (b) How do the elders feel about those who are spiritually lost?

When elders manifest godly justice, those with problems find it easier to seek their help

Jesus' illustration who searched untiringly until he found a lost sheep, elders seek out those who have strayed spiritually and endeavor to guide them back into the fold. —Matthew 18:12, 13.

16 Rather than condemn those who may have committed serious sins, elders seek to heal and to lead to repentance if that is possible. They rejoice when they can help someone who has gone astray. It saddens them, however, when a wrongdoer fails to repent. Then God's righteous standards require them to disfellowship the unrepentant one. Even then, like the father of the prodigal son, they hope that some day the erring one will 'come to his senses.' (Luke 15:17, 18) Thus, elders take the initiative to visit certain disfellowshipped ones to remind them how they can return to Jehovah's organization.*

17 Elders especially need to imitate Jehovah's justice when handling cases of wrongdoing. Sinners "kept drawing near" to Jesus because they felt that he would understand and help them. (Luke 15:1; Matthew 9:12, 13) Of course, Jesus did not condone wrongdoing. One mealtime spent

* See *The Watchtower,* April 15, 1991, pages 22-3.

17. What goal do elders have when handling a case of wrongdoing, and what quality will help them achieve that goal?

with Jesus moved Zacchaeus, a notorious extortioner, to repent and make amends for all the suffering he had brought upon others. (Luke 19:8-10) Elders today have the same goal at their judicial hearings —to lead the erring one to repentance. If they are approachable as Jesus was, many wrongdoers will find it easier to seek their help.

[18] A sensitive heart will help elders administer divine justice, which is neither harsh nor unfeeling. Interestingly, Ezra prepared his heart, not just his mind, in order to teach the Israelites justice. (Ezra 7:10) An understanding heart will enable elders to apply the appropriate Scriptural principles and to take into account the circumstances of each individual. When Jesus healed the woman who had a flow of blood, he showed that Jehovah's justice means understanding the spirit as well as the letter of the law. (Luke 8:43-48) Elders who administer justice with compassion may be likened to "a hiding place from the wind" for those who have been buffeted by their own weaknesses or by this wicked system in which we live.—Isaiah 32:2.

[19] One sister who had committed a serious sin came to appreciate divine justice firsthand. "Frankly, I was afraid to go to the elders," she admits. "But they treated me with compassion and dignity. The elders were like fathers rather than stern judges. They helped me to understand that Jehovah would not reject me if I resolved to correct my ways. I learned firsthand how he disciplines us as a loving Father. I was able to open my heart to Jehovah, in the confidence that he would hear my supplication. Looking back, I can truthfully say that that meeting with the elders seven years ago was a blessing from Jehovah. Ever since, my relationship with him has been much stronger."

18. What will enable elders to be like "a hiding place from the wind"?
19. How did one sister respond to the application of divine justice?

Keep Justice and Do What Is Righteous

[20] Thankfully, divine justice means much more than giving every man what he deserves. Jehovah's justice has moved him to grant everlasting life to those who exercise faith. (Psalm 103:10; Romans 5:15, 18) God deals with us in this way because his justice takes into account our circumstances, and it seeks to save rather than condemn. Truly, a better understanding of the breadth of Jehovah's justice draws us closer to him. And as we strive to imitate this facet of his personality, our lives and those of others will be richly blessed. Our pursuit of justice will not go unnoticed by our heavenly Father. Jehovah promises us: "Keep justice, you people, and do what is righteous. For my salvation is at hand to come in, and my righteousness to be revealed. Happy is the mortal man that does this."—Isaiah 56:1, 2.

20. What are the benefits of understanding and exercising justice and righteousness?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What does the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah teach us about Jehovah's justice?
- ☐ Why is the ransom an outstanding expression of God's justice and love?
- ☐ What are three ways in which we can exercise justice?
- ☐ In what special way can elders imitate divine justice?

KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

Humbly Conforming to Jehovah's Way

"SEEK Jehovah, all you meek ones of the earth." This invitation, proclaimed by the Hebrew prophet Zephaniah over 26 centuries ago, is still being extended to people throughout the earth today. (Zephaniah 2:3) What does it mean to seek Jehovah? Doing this starts with taking in knowledge of the only true and living God, Jehovah.—Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3.

Taking in knowledge, however, does not in itself lead to an approved standing before God. To gain God's favor, a person must also apply this knowledge. How? By humbly conforming his thinking and conduct to God's standards, as illustrated by the following experience from Suriname.—Ephesians 4:22-24.

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Eddy, a schoolteacher in his mid-30's, longed for satisfying answers to such questions as: 'What role does religion play in today's society?' and 'Does the Bible, an ancient book, agree with modern science?' When Jehovah's Witnesses called and offered Bible-based answers to these questions, Eddy listened carefully. He even took notes in order to check the Witnesses' explanations.

Previously, Eddy had associated with a religion that taught him that humans were the end result of God's modification of apes. So when the Witnesses offered him the publication *Life—How Did It Get Here? By Evolution or by Creation?* he readily accepted it. The book's clear explanation of the Bible's creation account impressed him. Through his study of the Bible, he became convinced that he had found the truth!

But now he faced a test. Eddy lived in a house in which thievery and dishonesty were a way of life. Thus, he was presented with a choice: either follow his roommates' corrupt way of life or reject such conduct in favor of a life-style that glorifies God. Wisely, Eddy chose the latter. He cut off all bad association and moved out of the house. —1 Corinthians 15:33, 34.

Eddy made rapid progress after he began to attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall. He also made improvements in his dress and grooming and started to speak to his friends and relatives about what he was learning. Later, his joy was increased when he was approved to share in preaching the "good news" publicly. (Matthew 24:14; Acts 20:20) In December 1996 the long-awaited day came when he symbolized his dedication to Jehovah by means of water baptism.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of honest-hearted people respond to the invitation to "seek Jehovah." In so doing, they experience the truthfulness of Proverbs 22:4, which says: "The result of humility and the fear of Jehovah is riches and glory and life." Yes, by humbly conforming to Jehovah's way, lovers of truth enjoy such blessings now, and confidently look forward to eternal blessings right here on earth.—Psalm 37:29.

'WE HAVE DONE WHAT WE OUGHT TO HAVE DONE'

AS TOLD BY GEORGE COUCH

After we had spent the morning in the house-to-house ministry, my companion brought out two sandwiches. When we finished eating, I pulled out a cigarette to smoke. "How long have you been in the truth?" he asked. "Last night was the first meeting I ever attended," I told him.

The Magazine Department

Pioneering in Baltimore, 1946

At Trailer City with Fern in 1950

Trailer City, 1950

...HOVAH.—Isa. 43:12

I WAS born March 3, 1917, on a farm about 30 miles east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., near the small town of Avonmore. There my parents raised my four brothers, a sister, and me.

We did not have a whole lot of religious training. At one time my parents went to church, but they quit attending when we children were still young. We believed in the Creator, though, and our family life followed basic principles that are found in the Bible.

The finest training I received from my parents was regarding responsibility—how to take it on and fulfill it. That was what farm life was all about. But our life was not all work. We enjoyed wholesome recreation, such as playing basketball and baseball, riding horses, and swimming. Money was scarce in those days, yet life on the farm was pleasant. We attended school in a one-room schoolhouse while in grade school and went to school in town during our high school years.

One night I was walking in town with a friend of mine. A nice-looking girl came out of her house to say hello to my friend. He introduced me to Fern Prugh. Conveniently, she lived on the block where the high school was located. Often when I passed by her house, Fern was outside taking care of chores. Obviously, she was a hard worker, which impressed me. We developed a close friendship and love for one another and got married in April of 1936.

Contact With Bible Truth

Before I was born, there was an elderly woman whom people in town mistreated because of her religion. My mother visited her on Saturdays when going to town to shop. Mother cleaned her house and helped her with errands, doing so until the woman died. I believe Jehovah blessed Mother because she was so kind to this woman, who was a Bible Student, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then called.

Sometime afterward, my aunt's young daughter died suddenly. The church didn't give my aunt much comfort, but a neighbor who was a Bible Student did. The Bible Student explained to her what happens when a person dies. (Job 14:13-15; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) This was a source of great comfort. My aunt, in turn, talked to Mother about the resurrection hope. This sparked Mother's interest, since her parents died when she was young and she was anxious to know what happens to a person at death. That experience impressed upon me the importance of always taking advantage of opportunities to witness informally.

In the 1930's, Mother began listening to the Sunday morning radio broadcasts of Joseph F. Rutherford, then president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. During those years, the Witnesses also began house-to-house work where we lived. They would set up a portable phonograph in the yard under a shady tree and play Brother Rutherford's recorded sermons. Those recordings and the *Watchtower* and *Golden Age* (now *Awake!*) magazines kept Mother's interest alive.

A few years later, in 1938, a postcard was sent to *Watchtower* subscribers inviting them to a special meeting in a private home about 15 miles away. Mother wanted to attend, so Fern and I and two of my brothers accompanied her. John Booth and Charles Hessler, traveling overseers of Jehovah's Witnesses, gave talks to about a dozen of us. Afterward, they began organizing a group to share in the ministry the next morning. No one volunteered to go with them, so Brother Hessler picked me out and asked, "Why don't you go with us?" I did not know exactly what they were going to do, but I could think of no reason why I should not help them.

We went from house to house until about noon, and then Brother Hessler brought out two sandwiches. We sat down on the church steps and started eating. It was after I pulled out that cigarette that Brother Hessler learned that I had attended only one meeting. He invited himself for supper that very evening and asked us to invite our neighbors for a Bible discussion. Following supper, he held a Bible study with us and gave a talk to the group of about ten that had come. He told us that we should have a Bible study every week. Though our neighbors did not agree to this, Fern and I arranged to have a weekly home Bible study.

Progress in the Truth

Soon afterward, Fern and I went out in the field ministry. We were in the back seat of the car, and we had just lit up cigarettes when my brother turned to us and said: "I just found out that the Witnesses do not smoke." Immediately, Fern threw her cigarette out the window—I finished mine. Even though we had enjoyed smoking, we never picked up a cigarette again.

After our baptism in 1940, Fern and I were at a meeting where we studied an article that encouraged pioneering, as the full-time preaching work is called. On our way home, a brother asked: "Why don't you and Fern go pioneering? You have nothing to hold you back." We could not disagree with him, so we made ourselves available. I turned in a 30-day notice at my place of employment, and we made arrangements to pioneer.

We conferred with the Watch Tower Society about where we should serve, and then we moved to Baltimore, Maryland. There a home for pioneers was maintained, and the cost for room and board was $10 a month. We had some savings that we thought would easily last us to Armageddon. (Revelation 16:14, 16) After all, we always thought that Armageddon was just around the corner. So when we started to pioneer, we gave up our home and dropped everything else.

We pioneered in Baltimore from 1942 to 1947. Opposition to the work of Jehovah's Witnesses was at a high point during those years. Instead of driving our car to our Bible students' homes, we at times had someone drop us off. That way our car tires would not get slashed. No one likes such opposition, but I can say that we always enjoyed the field ministry. In fact, we looked forward to a little bit of excitement in doing the Lord's work.

We had soon spent all the money we had saved. Our car tires wore out, and so did our clothes and shoes. We got sick two or three times for long periods. It was not easy to keep going, but we never gave a thought to quitting. We never even talked about it. We cut back on other things in life so that we could stay in the pioneer work.

Changes of Assignment

In 1947 we went to the convention in Los Angeles, California. While there, my brother William and I were each given a letter that assigned us to the traveling work to visit and help congregations. We did not get any special training for that work back then. We just went. During the next seven years, Fern and I served in Ohio, Michigan,

In Our Next Issue

Jehovah Should Be Our Confidence

Living and Preaching in the Shadow of a Volcano

The Huguenots' Flight to Freedom

With Audrey and Nathan Knorr

Indiana, Illinois, and New York. In 1954 we were invited to attend the 24th class of Gilead, a school for training missionaries. While there, Fern contracted polio. Happily, she recovered well, and we were assigned to the traveling work in New York and Connecticut.

While we were serving in Stamford, Connecticut, Nathan H. Knorr, then president of the Watch Tower Society, asked us to spend the weekend with him and his wife, Audrey. They fed us a nice steak supper with all the trimmings. We had become acquainted with them earlier, and I knew Brother Knorr well enough to realize that he had something on his mind besides our association and supper. Later that evening he asked me, "How would you like to come to Bethel?"

"I'm not really sure; I don't know a whole lot about Bethel life," I replied.

After thinking about this for several weeks, we told Brother Knorr that we would come if he wanted us to. The next week, we received a letter to report to Bethel on April 27, 1957, our 21st wedding anniversary.

That first day at Bethel, Brother Knorr gave me clear direction on what was expected. He told me: "You're not a circuit servant anymore; you are here to work at Bethel. This is the most important work that you have to do, and we want you to put your time and energy into applying the training you receive here at Bethel. We want you to stay."

Life at Bethel Meaningful

The first assignment I had was in the Magazine and Mailing Departments. Later, after about three years, Brother Knorr sent word for me to report to his office. He informed me then that the real reason I was brought to Bethel was to work in the home. His instructions were very direct, "You are here to run the Bethel Home."

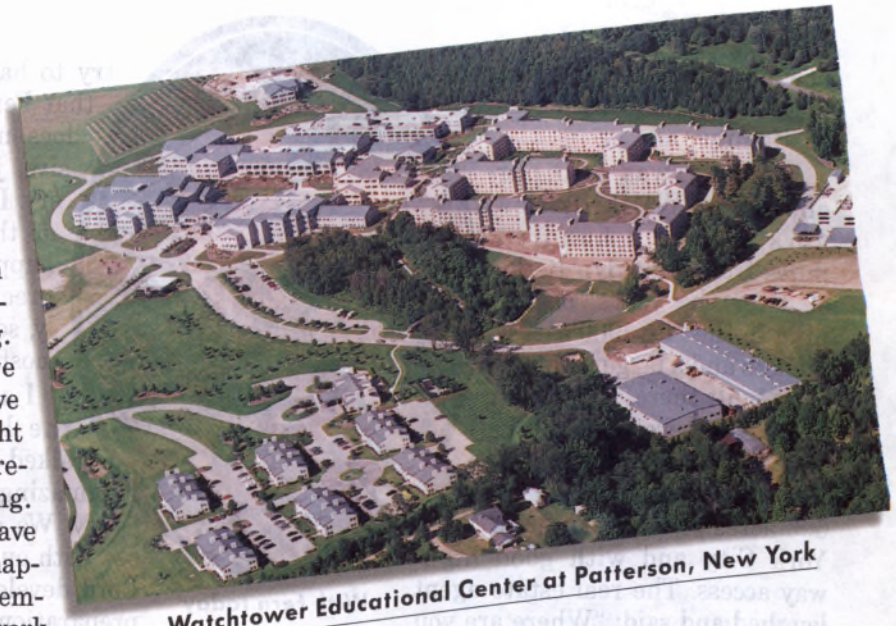
Managing the Bethel Home reminded me of lessons my parents had taught me while I was growing up on the farm. A Bethel Home is much like a regular family household. There are clothes to be cleaned, meals to be prepared, dishes to be washed, beds to be made, and so forth. The home organization tries to make Bethel a comfortable place to live, one that a person can call his home.

I believe that there are a lot of lessons that families can learn from how Bethel operates. We wake up early in the morning and start off our day on a spiritual note by considering a daily Bible text. We are expected to work hard and live a balanced but busy life. Bethel is not like a monastery, as some may think. We accomplish much because of our scheduled way of life. Many have said that the training they received here later helped them to accept responsibilities in their families and in the Christian congregation.

Young men and women who come to Bethel may be assigned to do cleaning, laundry, or work in the factory. The world may have us believe that such physical work is demeaning and beneath us. Yet, young ones at Bethel come to appreciate that such work as-

signments are necessary for our family to function properly and happily.

The world may also promote the thought that you need position and prestige to be truly happy. That is wrong. When we do what we are assigned to do, we are 'doing what we ought to be doing,' and we receive Jehovah's blessing. (Luke 17:10) We can have real contentment and happiness only if we remember the purpose of our work —to do Jehovah's will and advance Kingdom interests. If we keep that in mind, any assignment can be enjoyable and satisfying.



Watchtower Educational Center at Patterson, New York

A Privileged Share in Expansion

At the Cleveland, Ohio, convention in 1942, more than a decade before we came to Bethel, Brother Knorr gave the talk "Peace —Can It Last?" He made it clear that World War II, then in progress, would end and that there would be a time of peace that would provide an opportunity for an expanded preaching campaign. The Gilead School to train missionaries and the Theocratic Ministry School to improve the public speaking abilities of the brothers were established in 1943. Large conventions were also organized. Especially prominent during the 1950's were those at Yankee Stadium, New York. In connection with the conventions there in 1950 and 1953, I had the opportunity to help arrange for the huge Trailer City that accommodated tens of thousands for the eight days of each of those conventions.

After those conventions, including the largest one of all in 1958, there were big increases in Kingdom publishers. This directly affected our work at Bethel. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, we found ourselves quite desperate for space and rooms to house workers. To accommodate our growing family, we had to have more bedrooms, kitchens, and dining rooms.

Brother Knorr asked Brother Max Larson, the factory overseer, and me to locate suitable property for expansion. In 1957, when I came to Bethel, our family of about 500 was accommodated in one large residence building. But over the years, the Society purchased and renovated three large nearby hotels—the Towers, the Standish, and the Bossert—as well as many smaller apartment buildings. In 1986 the Society bought the property where the Hotel Margaret had stood and turned the beautiful new building put up there into a home for about 250 persons. Then in the early 1990's, a 30-story residence was built to house an additional 1,000 workers. Brooklyn Bethel can

now accommodate and feed the more than 3,300 members of our family.

Property was also purchased in Wallkill, New York, nearly a hundred miles from Brooklyn Bethel. Over the years, beginning in the late 1960's, residences and a large printery were built there. Now, about 1,200 members of our Bethel family live and work there. In 1980 a search began for about 600 acres of land nearer to New York City and with good highway access. The real estate agent laughed and said: "Where are you going to find that kind of property? It is just not possible." But the next morning he called back and said: "I've found your property." Today, it is known as the Watchtower Educational Center at Patterson, New York. There schools are operated and there is a family of more than 1,300 ministers.

With Fern today

Lessons I Have Learned

I have learned that a good overseer is one who can draw valuable information from others. Most of the ideas that I have been privileged to put into operation as the Bethel overseer have come from others.

When I came to Bethel, many were older, as I am today. Most are now gone. Who replaces those who grow old and die? It is not always the ones with the most ability. It is those who are here, working faithfully at the job, making themselves available.

Another important matter to remember is the value of a good wife. The support of my dear wife, Fern, has been a great help to me in fulfilling my theocratic assignments. Husbands have the responsibility of making sure their wives enjoy their assignments. I try to have something planned that Fern and I like to do. It does not have to be expensive, just a change of scenery. It is up to a husband to do things to make his wife happy. His time with her is precious and goes by quickly, so he needs to make the most of it.

I am glad to be living in the last days that Jesus talked about. This is the most amazing time in all human history. We are able to watch and see with our eyes of faith how the Lord develops his organization in preparation for the advent of the promised new world. As I look back over my lifetime in Jehovah's service, I can see that Jehovah is the one who is running this organization—not men. We are just his servants. As such, we must always look to him for direction. Once he lays out what we are to do, we should just jump in and do it together.

Give of yourself to the organization, and you are guaranteed to have a full, happy life. Whatever you are doing—whether it is pioneering, circuit work, serving with a congregation as a publisher, Bethel service, or missionary work—follow the direction outlined, and value your assignment. Try your best to enjoy every assignment and each day of work in Jehovah's service. You will get tired, and you may get overworked or feel down at times. That is when you have to remember the purpose of dedicating your life to Jehovah. It is to do his will, not your own.

There has not been a day that I have come to work and not enjoyed what I did. Why? Because when we give of ourselves whole-souled to Jehovah, we have the satisfaction of knowing that 'we have done what we ought to have done.'

Highly Esteeming Privileges of Sacred Service

ASSIGNMENTS of sacred service are not to be lightly esteemed. When priests in ancient Judah showed an indifferent attitude toward their privileges in connection with Jehovah's temple, he strongly reproved them. (Malachi 1:6-14) And when some in Israel urged the Nazirites to treat lightly the responsibilities that they had accepted in connection with their sacred service, Jehovah rebuked those sinful Israelites. (Amos 2:11-16) True Christians also engage in sacred service, and they take it seriously. (Romans 12:1) This sacred service has many facets, all of them important.

While Jesus was still on earth with his followers, he trained them to be proclaimers of God's Kingdom. In time, their message would reach to the ends of the earth. (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8) This preaching has taken on even greater urgency during the final days of the present system of things.

All of Jehovah's Witnesses share in this work. Hundreds of thousands find joy in being able to do so as pioneers. In order to fill important needs in the worldwide work, thousands have made themselves available for special full-time service at Bethel, in the traveling work as circuit and district overseers, or in missionary service. What may this involve on the part of those who want to continue in such special service?

When There Are Pressing Family Needs

Before taking up special full-time service, a person usually must make some adjustments in his circumstances. Not

They have made themselves available for special full-time service

everyone can do this. Scriptural obligations that a person already has may make it impossible. What happens, though, when urgent family needs, perhaps involving elderly parents, confront those who are already in special service? Bible principles and counsel such as the following give needed direction.

Our entire life should be built around our relationship with Jehovah. (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Mark 12:28-30) Sacred things entrusted to our care are to be highly esteemed. (Luke 1:74, 75; Hebrews 12:16) On one occasion, a man who needed to change his priorities was told by Jesus that he ought to get fully occupied in declaring the Kingdom of God. Evidently, the man was intending to postpone such activity until after his father had died. (Luke 9:59, 60) On the other hand, Jesus exposed the wrong thinking of anyone who claimed to have dedicated everything to God and then did not "do a single thing for his father or his mother." (Mark 7:9-13)

The apostle Paul also showed the serious responsibility of providing for 'those who are one's own,' including parents and grandparents.—1 Timothy 5:3-8.

Does this mean that when urgent needs arise, those in special service ought to leave their assignments in order to become caregivers? Many factors have a bearing on the answer. The decision is a personal one. (Galatians 6:5) Not a few have felt that, much as they loved their assignment, it would be wise to be with their parents to give them needed help. Why? The need may have been critical, there may have been no other family member who could help, or the local congregation may not have been able to do what was needed. Some have been able to pioneer while giving such help. Others have again been able to take up special full-time service after the family situation was cared for. However, in many cases, it has been possible to handle the situation in other ways.

Shouldering Their Responsibility

When pressing needs have arisen, some in special full-time service have been able to give attention to those needs without leaving their assignments. Consider just a few out of many examples.

One couple serving at the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses entered Bethel service in 1978, after already having shared in circuit and district work. The brother's assignment involves a heavy load of responsibility in the theocratic organization. But his parents have also needed help. This Bethel couple have made three or four visits each year—some 2,200 miles round trip—to care for the parents. They personally built a home to fill the parents' needs. There have been trips to care for medical emergencies. They have used virtually all their vacation time for some 20 years to care for this responsibility. They love and honor the parents, but they also treasure their privileges of sacred service.

Another brother had been in the traveling work for 36 years when confronted with what he describes as one of the most challenging situations in his life. His 85-year-old mother-in-law, a faithful servant of Jehovah, needed to live with someone who could help her. At the time, most of her children felt that it would not be convenient to have her live with them. One of the relatives told the traveling overseer that he and his wife ought to leave that service and, in behalf of the family, take care of the mother. But the couple did not give up their precious service, nor did they slight the needs of the mother. For the next nine years, she was with them most of the time. At first they lived in a mobile home, then in various apartments provided by the circuits. For extended periods, the brother, who was then a district overseer, kept traveling to care for his assignments while his wife stayed with her mother to provide loving full-time care. Each week after meetings on Sunday, the husband made long trips back to help them. Many who were aware of the situation expressed deep appreciation for what this couple were doing. In time, other family members also felt moved to provide some help. Thousands of Jehovah's people continue to benefit from the service of that self-sacrificing couple because they held on to their privilege of special full-time service.

With Family Cooperation

When various family members appreciate the value of special full-time service, they may cooperate so that at least some of them can share in it.

Such a spirit of family cooperation has been helpful to a Canadian couple who serve as missionaries in West Africa. They did not

wait until an emergency arose, simply hoping that nothing would happen. Before they went to the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, in preparation for foreign service, the husband discussed with his younger brother the care of their mother in the event she became ill or disabled. Showing love for their mother as well as appreciation for the value of missionary work, the younger brother said: "I have a family and children now. I can't go very far and do the things you can. So if anything happens to Mom, I'll care for her."

A couple serving in South America received much cooperation from the wife's family in caring for her aging mother. One of her sisters and the sister's husband cared for the mother until that sister was stricken with a fatal illness. Then what? To allay any concern, the brother-in-law wrote: "As long as I and the children are alive, you will never have to leave your missionary service." Further family help came when another sister and her husband gave up their home and moved to where the mother lived in order to care for her, and they did so until her death. What a fine spirit of cooperation! All of them were helping to support the missionary service.

Parents Who Give Freely to Jehovah

Outstanding appreciation for sacred service is often shown by parents. Among the most valuable of their possessions with which they could honor Jehovah are their own children. (Proverbs 3:9) Many Christian parents encourage their children to get into the full-time service. And some of them feel like Hannah, who gave her son Samuel to Jehovah for his service "to time indefinite," that is, for "all the days that he does happen to be."—1 Samuel 1:22, 28.

One such parent wrote to her daughter in Africa: "We thank Jehovah for the wonderful privilege that you have. We couldn't have hoped for better." And on another occasion she said: "It is true that we must make the sacrifice of being separated, but what a joy it is to see how Jehovah cares for you!"

After reviewing the various situations that had arisen in providing needed care for his elderly parents, a missionary in Ecuador wrote: "I think that the greatest assistance that my wife and I may have received was my father's prayers. After his death, my mother told us: 'A day never passed without your father's praying to Jehovah to allow both of you to remain in your assignment.'"

An elderly couple in California, U.S.A., were pleased to have one of their sons in full-time service. That son and his wife were in Spain when the mother died. Other members of the family felt that arrangements needed to be made to care for the father. Because they were busy with secular work and raising their children, they did not feel that they could take on that responsibility. Instead, they strongly urged the couple who were in special full-time service to return home and care for the father. However, the father, though 79 years of age, still enjoyed good health, and he also had clear spiritual vision. At a family meeting, after various ones had expressed themselves, the father stood up and said firmly: "I want them to return to Spain and continue working." They did, but they also helped him in tangible ways. Their current assignment is in the circuit work in Spain. Since that family meeting, other family members have shown appreciation for what the couple in foreign service are doing. After a number of years, one of the other sons took the father into his home to care for him until he died.

In Pennsylvania, U.S.A., an anointed brother who had pioneered for about 40 years was over 90 years of age when his wife got seriously ill and died. He had a son and

three daughters, besides numerous spiritual children. One of his daughters had been in full-time service for over 40 years, having served with her husband as a missionary, in the traveling work, and at Bethel. She helped to make arrangements so that suitable care would be given to her father. The local brothers also helped in taking him to meetings at the Kingdom Hall. Later, after her husband had died, she asked her father if he wanted her to leave Bethel to care for him. He highly esteems sacred things, and he felt that his needs could be cared for in other ways. So he replied: "That would be the worst thing you could do, and it would even be worse if I let you do it."

Supportive Congregations

Some congregations have been very helpful in caring for the aging parents of those in special full-time service. They especially appreciate those who have devoted many years to such service. While they cannot relieve them of their Scriptural responsibilities, these congregations do much to make the load light enough so that it may not be necessary for the children to leave their special assignments.

A couple from Germany had been in their foreign assignment for about 17 years, much of that time in the traveling work, when the needs of his elderly mother escalated. Each year they used their vacation to help her. Witness neighbors also provided loving assistance. Then when the couple in full-time service were with his mother during a critical period, the elders of the local congregation arranged to meet with them. They were well aware of what the couple were regularly doing for the mother. They also appreciated the value of the special service in which that couple were sharing. So the elders outlined a proposed program of care for the mother and then said: "You are not able to care for her more than what you are doing; we will help you so that you can remain in your assignment in Spain." For the past seven years, these elders have continued to do so.

Similarly, a brother who has been serving in Senegal since 1967 received much loving support from the congregation where his father was located. When a crisis arose, the husband, with the willing cooperation of his loving wife, traveled alone to the United States to help his parents. He found it necessary to remain there for several months. The situation was difficult, but when he had done what he could, the congregation stepped in and helped so that he could continue his missionary service. Over a period of some 18 years, the congregation provided loving help in countless ways, first for the father (even though he no longer recognized many of them) and then for the mother. Did that free the son of responsibility? No; he often traveled from Senegal and used his vacation to provide all the help he could. But many in that congregation had the pleasure of knowing that they were having a share in keeping a hardworking couple in special full-time service in Senegal.

Jesus said that those who left all for the sake of the good news would come to have brothers, sisters, mothers, and children a hundredfold. (Mark 10:29, 30) That is certainly true among Jehovah's servants. A couple now serving in Benin, West Africa, experienced this in a special way when two Witnesses in their parents' congregation told them not to worry about the parents. They added: "Your parents are our parents too."

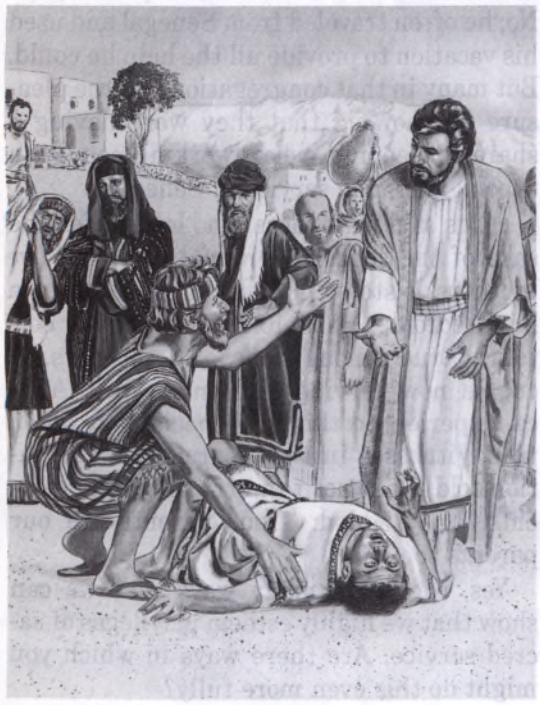
Yes, there are many ways that we can show that we highly esteem privileges of sacred service. Are there ways in which you might do this even more fully?

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

According to Matthew 17:20, the apostles were unable to cure an afflicted boy 'because of their little faith.' At Mark 9: 29, however, their inability is linked to a need for prayer. Why are different reasons given in different Gospel accounts?

Actually, the two accounts are supplemental, not in conflict. First, look at Matthew 17:14-20. A man reported that his son was an epileptic and that Jesus' disciples could not cure the lad. Jesus then cured the boy by expelling a demon who was afflicting him. The disciples asked why they could not expel the demon. According to Matthew's account, Jesus replied: "Because of your *little faith.* For truly I say to you, If you have faith the size of a mustard grain, you will say to this mountain, 'Transfer from here to there,' and it will transfer, and nothing will be impossible for you."

Now turn to Mark 9:14-29, where we find more details. For example, Mark 9:17 supplies the detail that *in this case* the epileptic-type seizures were caused by an evil spirit. It is worth noting that the Bible says elsewhere that Jesus cured epileptic *and* demonized people. (Matthew 4:24) In this unique situation, the seizures were caused by a "speechless and deaf spirit," that is, a wicked spirit, which physician Luke confirms. (Luke 9:39; Colossians 4:14) Note at Mark 9:18 the phrase, "Wherever it [the demon] seizes him." So the boy was not continuously harassed by the demon, only occasionally. Still, the disciples could not expel the demon and thus cure the lad. When they asked why, Jesus replied: "This kind cannot get out by anything except by prayer."



A careful reading of Mark's account, though, shows that there is no conflict with what Matthew recorded. At Mark 9:19, we read that Jesus bemoaned the faithlessness of that generation. And in verse 23, it is recorded that he told the boy's father: "All things can be to one if one has faith." So Mark too stresses the importance of faith. It is just that in verse 29, Mark provides an additional detail. Mark adds what Jesus said about prayer, which neither Matthew nor Luke included.

What, then, can we say? On other occasions both the 12 apostles and the 70 disciples cast out wicked spirits. (Mark 3:15; 6:13; Luke 10:17) But in this instance the disciples could not expel the demon. Why? If we combine the details mentioned in the various accounts, we must conclude that they were not prepared to do so in this case. Perhaps part of the problem was the sort of demon involved, since it seems that demons may have differing personalities, interests, and even abilities. With this one, particularly strong faith and fervent prayer for God's help were needed. Of course, Jesus had such faith. He also had the backing of the Hearer of prayer, his Father. (Psalm 65:2) Not only could Jesus heal the afflicted boy by casting out the demon but he did so.

Did Mary Die From Natural Causes?

ACCORDING to the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano,* the Catholic doctrine of the Assumption states: "The Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over." This teaching has led some Catholic theologians to claim that Mary "did not die and was immediately raised from earthly life to heavenly glory," says the paper.*

Recently, Pope John Paul II cast a different light on the matter. At the General Audience at the Vatican on June 25, 1997, he said: "The New Testament provides no information on the circumstances of Mary's death. This silence leads one to suppose that it happened naturally, with no detail particularly worthy of mention. . . . The opinions that wish to exclude her from death by natural causes seem groundless."

Pope John Paul's statement opens a deep crack in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. If Jesus' mother was "preserved free from all stain of original sin," how could Mary die from "natural causes," which result from sin passed on by sinful Adam? (Romans 5:12) This theological dilemma is due to the Catholic Church's distorted view of Jesus' mother. Little wonder that division and confusion have arisen within the Catholic Church over the matter.

While the Bible portrays Mary as being humble, faithful, and devout, it does not ascribe these qualities to an "immaculate conception." (Luke 1:38; Acts 1:13, 14) The Bible simply says: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Yes, Mary inherited sin and imperfection as did the rest of humankind, and there is no evidence that she died from anything other than natural causes.—Compare 1 John 1:8-10.

* See the article "The Assumption—A Dogma Revealed by God?" in the February 15, 1994, *Watchtower,* pages 26-9.

Who Is to Blame?

Many blame God for their troubles. A Bible proverb states: "A man's own folly wrecks his life, and then he bears a grudge against the Lord." (Proverbs 19:3, *The New English Bible*) Yet, holding God responsible for man's woes is like blaming a car manufacturer for the prevalence of drunk-driving accidents.

God has given mankind valuable guidance in his Word, the Bible. By studying this divine library and living by the laws and principles it sets forth, we can avoid many of life's pitfalls. In contrast, acting contrary to God's guidance is disastrous. For example, those who overeat, smoke, overdrink, or commit immorality often suffer tragic health consequences. (Luke 21:34; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Corinthians 7:1) The Christian apostle Paul wrote: "Whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap; because he who is sowing with a view to his flesh will reap corruption from his flesh, but he who is sowing with a view to the spirit will reap everlasting life from the spirit."—Galatians 6:7, 8.

How much better it is to live by God's laws and principles! If we do so, we will experience the reality of God's promise spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk. O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." —Isaiah 48:17, 18.