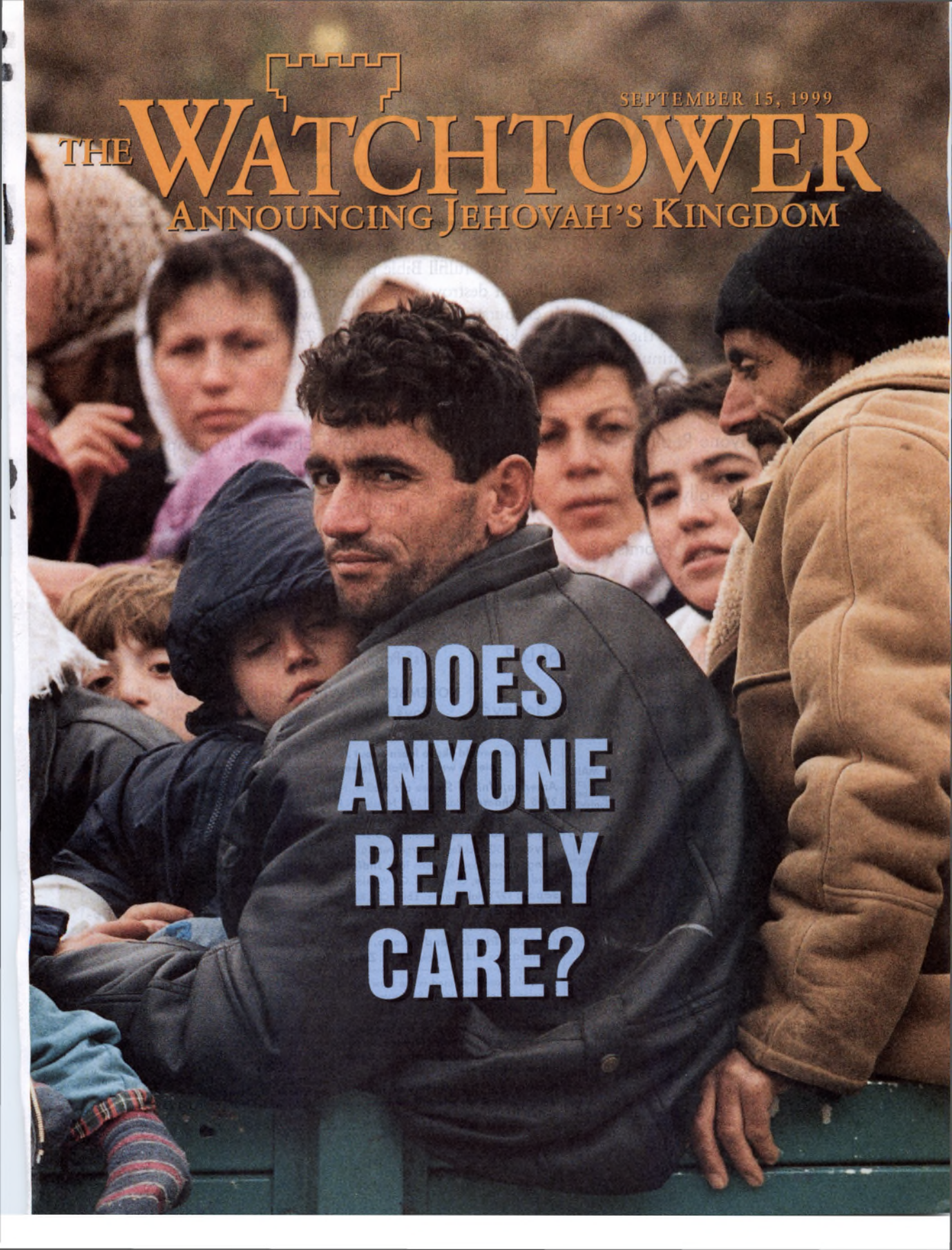




SEPTEMBER 15, 1999

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

**DOES
ANYONE
REALLY
CARE?**

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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Does Anyone Really Care?

"The tears of those being oppressed" have become a torrent.

They are shed by victims of countless "acts of oppression" all over the world. Those who have been victimized often feel that they have "no comforter"—that no one really cares about them.—Ecclesiastes 4:1.

DESPITE this torrent of tears, some are unmoved by the suffering of their fellow humans. They turn a blind eye to the pain of other people, as did the priest and the Levite in Jesus Christ's illustration about a man who was assaulted, robbed, and left half dead by the roadside. (Luke 10:30-32) As long as things are going relatively well for them and their families,

they are not concerned about others. In effect, they say, "Who cares?"

We should not be surprised at this. The apostle Paul foretold that in "the last days" many people would lack "natural affection." (2 Timothy 3:1, 3) One observer lamented the uncaring attitudes that have developed. "The old Irish philosophy and tradition of caring and sharing," he said,

"is being replaced by a new code of making and taking for ourselves." Worldwide, people make and take for themselves, with almost complete indifference to the plight of others.

A Need for Someone to Care

There surely is a need for someone to care. For example, think about the lonely man in Germany who was "found sitting in front of his television set—five years after his death at Christmas." This "divorced, disabled loner," embittered by his sad experiences in life, was not missed until the bank account that paid his rent was exhausted. No one really cared about him.

Think, too, of the helpless victims of powerful, greedy overlords. In one area, about 200,000 people (a quarter of the population) "died from repression and famine" after their land was violently seized from them. Or think of the children who were exposed to almost unbelievable savagery. Said one report: "The percentage of children in [one land] who witnessed multiple atrocities—killings, beatings, rape, some-

times committed by other adolescents, is staggering." You can understand why a victim of such injustices might tearfully ask, "Does anyone really care about me?"

According to a United Nations report, 1.3 billion people in the developing world have to survive on the equivalent of less than one U.S. dollar a day. They must wonder if anyone cares. So do thousands of refugees who, says a report in *The Irish Times*, "are faced with the unpalatable choice of staying in a wretched camp or inhospitable country or attempting to return to a homeland still riven [or, torn apart] by war or ethnic division." The same report included this chilling exercise: "Close your eyes, count to three, a child has just died. One of the 35,000 children that will die today from malnutrition or preventable disease." No wonder many cry out in distress and bitterness!—Compare Job 7:11.

Is all of this simply meant to be? Realistically, is there anyone who not only cares but also has the power to stop the suffering and to heal all the pain that people have experienced?

Someone Really Does Care

THOUSANDS of people show that they really care. They do not take the callous, selfish view that the problems of others are none of their concern. Instead, they do all that they can—sometimes even putting their own lives at risk—to alleviate suffering. This is an immense task, one that is complicated by powerful forces beyond their control.

Such factors as greed, political intrigue, wars, and natural disasters can frustrate

even "the most enlightened and determined efforts to eradicate hunger," says one aid worker. Eliminating hunger is only one of many problems that caring people face. They also battle things like disease, poverty, injustice, and the immense suffering caused by war. But are they winning?

The chief executive of one aid agency said that those who make such "enlightened and determined efforts" to alleviate hunger and pain are like the compassionate Sa-

maritan described in Jesus Christ's illustration. (Luke 10:29-37) But whatever they do, he said, the number of victims just keeps on growing. So he asked: "What should the good Samaritan do if he travels the same route every day for several years and finds another victim of the muggers each week at the roadside?"

It would be easy to succumb to what has been described as 'the deadly illness of donor fatigue' and simply give up in frustration. To their credit, those who really care do not give up. (Galatians 6:9, 10) For example, a man who wrote to Britain's *Jewish Telegraph* commended Jehovah's Witnesses, who during the time of Nazi Germany "helped thousands of Jews to survive the miseries of Auschwitz." "When food was scarce," the writer said, "they shared their bread with our [Jewish] brothers and sisters!" The Witnesses kept doing what they could with the resources they had.

Yet, the reality is that no amount of sharing of bread will bring a complete end to human suffering. This is in no way meant to devalue what compassionate people have done. Any action that properly lessens suffering is worthwhile. Those Witnesses eased the pain of fellow prisoners somewhat, and Nazism was eventually destroyed. However, the world system that causes such oppression survives, and uncaring people still abound. Indeed, "there is a generation whose teeth are swords and whose jawbones are slaughtering knives, to eat up the afflicted ones off the earth and the poor ones from among mankind." (Proverbs 30:14) Likely, you wonder why this is the case.

Why Poverty and Oppression?

Jesus Christ once said: "You always have the poor with you, and whenever you want to you can always do them good." (Mark 14:7) Did Jesus mean that poverty and op-

pression would never end? Like some people, did he believe that such suffering is part of a plan of God to give compassionate ones the opportunity to show how much they care? No! Jesus did not believe that. He was simply making the point that poverty would be part of life as long as this system of things exists. But Jesus also knew this: It was not his heavenly Father's original purpose to have such conditions on the earth.

Jehovah God created the earth to be a paradise, not a place plagued with poverty, injustice, and oppression. He showed how much he cared for the human family by making wonderful provisions that would add to the enjoyment of life. Why, consider the very name of the garden in which our first parents, Adam and Eve, found themselves! It was called Eden, meaning "Pleasure." (Genesis 2:8, 9) Jehovah did not limit humans to the bare necessities for survival in some drab, oppressive environment. At the conclusion of his creative work, Jehovah surveyed what he had made and declared that it was "very good."—Genesis 1:31.

Well, then, why are poverty, oppression, and other causes of suffering rampant earth wide today? The present wicked system of things exists because our original parents chose to rebel against God. (Genesis 3:1-5) This raised the question of whether it was right for God to demand obedience from his creatures. So Jehovah has allowed Adam's descendants a limited period of independence. God still cared about what happened to the human family. He made provision for undoing all the harm that rebellion against him would produce. And very soon, Jehovah will end poverty and oppression—in fact, all suffering.—Ephesians 1:8-10.

A Problem Beyond Human Solution

Through the centuries since man's creation, mankind has moved ever further

away from Jehovah's standards. (Deuteronomy 32:4, 5) In their continued rejection of God's laws and principles, humans have fought one another, and "man has dominated man to his injury." (Ecclesiastes 8:9) All efforts to bring about a truly just society, free of everything that plagues the suffering masses, have been thwarted by the selfishness of those who want to do things their own way rather than submit to God's sovereignty.

There is another problem—one that many might dismiss as superstitious nonsense. The instigator of rebellion against God is still inciting people to badness and selfishness. He is Satan the Devil, and Jesus Christ called him "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19) In the revelation given to the apostle John, Satan is identified as the predominant source of woe—the one primarily responsible for "misleading the entire inhabited earth."—Revelation 12:9-12.

Regardless of how much some people care about their fellow humans, they will never be able to remove Satan the Devil or to change this system that fosters an ever-increasing number of victims. What, then, is required to solve mankind's problems? The solution is not simply someone who cares. There is a need for someone with the will and the power to get rid of Satan and his entire unjust system.

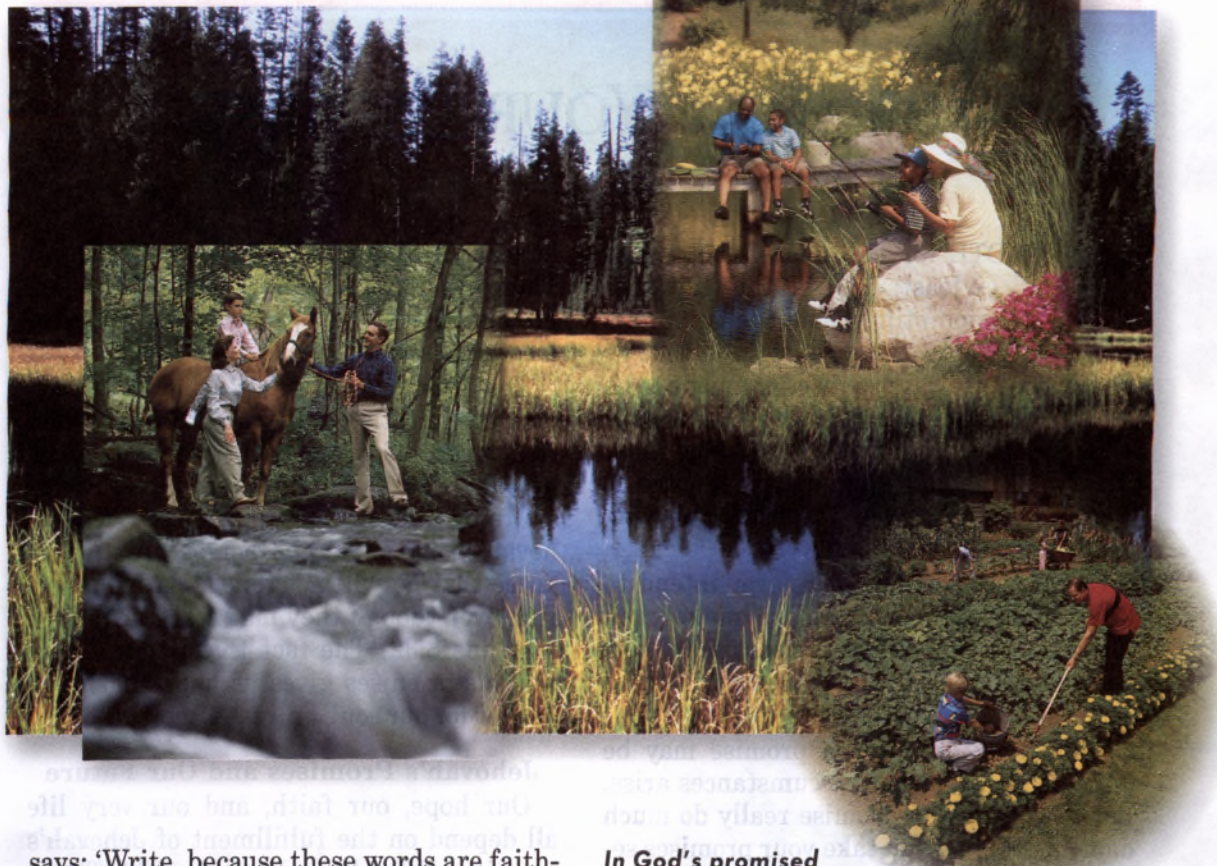
"Your Will Take Place . . . Upon Earth"

God promises to destroy this wicked system of things. He has both the will and the power needed to do so. (Psalm 147:5, 6; Isaiah 40:25-31) In the prophetic Bible book of Daniel, it is foretold: "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be brought to ruin. And the kingdom itself will not be passed on to any other people. It will crush

and put an end to all these kingdoms, and it itself will stand to times indefinite"—yes, forever. (Daniel 2:44) Jesus Christ had this lasting and benevolent heavenly government in mind when he taught his disciples to petition God in prayer: "Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth."—Matthew 6:9, 10.

Jehovah will answer such prayers because he really does care about the human family. According to the prophetic words of Psalm 72, God will authorize his Son, Jesus Christ, to bring lasting relief to the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed who support Jesus' rulership. Thus, the inspired psalmist sang: "Let him [God's Messianic King] judge the afflicted ones of the people, let him save the sons of the poor one, and let him crush the defrauder. . . . He 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. From oppression and from violence he will redeem their soul, and their blood will be precious in his eyes."—Psalm 72:4, 12-14.

In a vision involving our day, the apostle John beheld "a new heaven and a new earth," a completely new system of things established by God. What a blessing for suffering mankind! Foretelling what Jehovah would do, John wrote: "I heard a loud voice from the throne say: 'Look! The tent of God is with mankind, and he will reside with them, and they will be his peoples. And God himself will be with them. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.' And the One seated on the throne said: 'Look! I am making all things new.' Also, he



says: 'Write, because these words are faithful and true.'"—Revelation 21:1-5.

Yes, we can believe these words, for they are faithful and true. Jehovah will soon act to rid the earth of poverty, hunger, oppression, sickness, and all injustice. As this magazine has often pointed out from the Scriptures, an abundance of evidence shows that we are living in the time when these promises will be fulfilled. God's promised new world is at hand! (2 Peter 3:13) Soon, Jehovah will "swallow up death forever" and will "wipe the tears from all faces." —Isaiah 25:8.

Until that happens, we can be glad that even now there are people who genuinely care. A greater cause for gladness is that Jehovah God himself really cares. He will soon eliminate all oppression and suffering.

In God's promised new world, the earth will be free of poverty, oppression, sickness, and injustice

You can have absolute trust in Jehovah's promises. His servant Joshua certainly did. Without any reservations, he told God's ancient people: "You well know with all your hearts and with all your souls that not one word out of all the good words that Jehovah your God has spoken to you has failed. They have all come true for you. Not one word of them has failed." (Joshua 23:14) While the present system of things remains, therefore, do not let yourself be overwhelmed by the trials you may have to face. Throw all your anxiety upon Jehovah, for he really does care.—1 Peter 5:7.

WHY KEEP YOUR PROMISES?

“VOTE for the man who promises least; he’ll be the least disappointing,” said the late presidential adviser Bernard Baruch. In today’s world it seems that promises are made to be broken. They may be marriage vows, business agreements, or pledges to spend more time with the children. Widely ignored is what is implied by the traditional maxim, “A man is as good as his word.”

Of course, many people never intend to keep their promises. Others make rash pledges they cannot live up to or break their word simply because this turns out to be the easiest course to follow.

Admittedly, keeping a promise may be difficult if unforeseen circumstances arise. But does a broken promise really do much damage? Should you take your promises seriously? A brief look at Jehovah God’s example will help us to see why we should consider this matter seriously.

Jehovah Fulfills His Promises

We worship a God whose very name is bound up with the fulfillment of his promises. In Bible times a name often made a statement about the person. This is also true of the name Jehovah, which means “He Causes to Become.” Thus the divine name encompasses the thought that God will fulfill his promises and accomplish his purposes.

True to his name, Jehovah kept every promise he made to the ancient nation of Israel. Regarding these promises, King Solomon acknowledged: “Blessed be Jehovah, who has given a resting-place to his people

Israel according to all that he has promised. There has not failed one word of all his good promise that he has promised by means of Moses his servant.”—1 Kings 8:56.

The trustworthiness of Jehovah is such that the apostle Paul could reason: “When God made his promise to Abraham, since he could not swear by anyone greater, he swore by himself.” (Hebrews 6:13) Yes, Jehovah’s very name and person are a guarantee that he will not renege on his promises, even though they may cost him dearly. (Romans 8:32) The fact that Jehovah fulfills his promises gives us hope that is an anchor for our soul, or life.—Hebrews 6:19.

Jehovah’s Promises and Our Future

Our hope, our faith, and our very life all depend on the fulfillment of Jehovah’s promises. What hope do we cherish? “There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to [God’s] promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell.” (2 Peter 3:13) The Scriptures also give us a basis for faith that “there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Acts 24:15) And we can be sure that there is something more than this present life. Indeed, what the apostle John calls “the promised thing” is “the life everlasting.” (1 John 2:25) But the promises of Jehovah in his Word are not limited to the future. They give meaning to our everyday lives right now.

The psalmist sang: “Jehovah is near to all those calling upon him, . . . and their cry for help he will hear.” (Psalm 145:18, 19) God also assures us that “he is giving to the

tired one power; and to the one without dynamic energy he makes full might abound.” (Isaiah 40:29) And what a comfort it is to know that ‘God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear, but along with the temptation he will also make the way out!’ (1 Corinthians 10:13) If we have personally experienced the fulfillment of any of these promises, we know that Jehovah can be trusted absolutely. In view of the benefits we derive from the many promises that God makes and keeps, how should we view our promises to him?

Keeping Our Promises to God

Our dedication to God is undoubtedly the most important promise we can make. By taking this step, we demonstrate that we want to serve Jehovah forever. While God’s commandments are not burdensome, it may not always be easy to do his will, living as we do in this wicked system of things. (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 John 5:3) But once we have ‘put our hand to the plow’ and have become dedicated servants of Jehovah and disciples of his Son, Jesus Christ, we should never look back at the things of the world that we have left behind.—Luke 9:62.

When we pray to Jehovah, we may feel moved to promise him that we will fight to overcome a weakness, cultivate a Christian quality, or increase some aspect of our theocratic activity. What will help us follow through on these promises?—Compare Ecclesiastes 5:2-5.

Sincere promises stem from the heart as well as the mind. Therefore, let us back up our promises to Jehovah by opening our hearts to him in prayer, honestly expressing our fears, desires, and weaknesses. Praying about a promise will strengthen our resolve to keep it. We could look on our promises to God as debts. When debts are large, payment has to be made gradual-

ly. Likewise, many promises we make to Jehovah will take time to fulfill. But by regularly giving him what we can, we show that we mean what we say, and he will bless us accordingly.

We can demonstrate that we take our promises seriously by praying about them often, perhaps each day. This will show our heavenly Father that we are sincere. It will also serve as a regular reminder. David left us a fine example in this regard. In song, he beseeched Jehovah: “Do hear, O God, my entreating cry. Do pay attention to my prayer. . . . I will make melody to your name forever, that I may pay my vows day after day.”—Psalm 61:1, 8.

Keeping Our Promises Builds Trust

If promises to God should not be taken lightly, the same can be said about those we make to fellow Christians. We should not treat Jehovah one way and our brothers another way. (Compare 1 John 4:20.) In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Just let your word *Yes* mean *Yes*, your *No*, *No*.” (Matthew 5:37) Making sure that our word is always trustworthy is one way to ‘work what is good toward those related to us in the faith.’ (Galatians 6:10) Every promise we keep builds trust.

The damage done by breaking a promise is often magnified when money is involved. Whether paying back a loan, performing a service, or fulfilling a commercial agreement, a Christian should honor his word. This pleases God and cements the mutual trust that is so essential if brothers are to “dwell together in unity.”—Psalm 133:1.

Failure to abide by agreements, however, can harm the congregation as well as the individuals directly involved. A traveling overseer observes: “Business disputes—invariably caused by agreements that at least one party considers dishonored—often

Jephthah kept his promise, even though doing so was painful

become public knowledge. As a result, brothers take sides, and the atmosphere in the Kingdom Hall may become tense.” How important it is to consider carefully whatever agreement we make and put the matter in writing!*

Caution should also be exercised when selling costly products or recommending investments, especially if we personally profit from the transaction. Likewise, there is a need to be very careful not to exaggerate the benefits of certain articles or health products or to promise unrealistic returns on investments. Love should move Christians to explain fully any risks involved. (Romans 12:10) Since most brothers have limited business experience, they may trust our advice simply because we are related to them in the faith. How tragic it would be if this trust were undermined!

As Christians, we cannot adopt business practices that are dishonest or that ignore the legitimate interests of others. (Ephesians 2:2, 3; Hebrews 13:18) To have Jehovah’s favor as ‘guests in his tent,’ we must be trustworthy. ‘Even if we have sworn to what is bad for us, we do not alter.’—Psalm 15:1, 4.

Judge Jephthah of Israel vowed that if God gave him victory over the Ammonites, he would give to Jehovah as a burnt offering the first one who met him after returning from battle. That one turned out to be Jephthah’s only child, but he did not go back on his word. With his daughter’s heartfelt agreement, he offered her for permanent service at God’s sanctuary—a sacrifice that

* See the article “Put It in Writing!” in *Awake!* of February 8, 1983, pages 13-15.



undoubtedly was painful and costly in various ways.—Judges 11:30-40.

Especially do congregation overseers have a responsibility to abide by their agreements. According to 1 Timothy 3:2, an overseer should be “irreprehensible.” This is the rendering of a Greek term meaning “not able to be taken hold of, irreproachable, beyond reproach.” It “implies not only that the man is of good report, but that he is deservedly so.” (*A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*) Since an overseer must be irreprehensible, his promises should always be reliable.

Other Ways to Keep Our Promises

How should we view promises we make to those who are not fellow Christians? “Let your light shine before men,” said Jesus, “that they may see your fine works and give glory to your Father who is in the heavens.” (Matthew 5:16) By proving that we honor our word, we may attract others to our Christian message. Despite the worldwide decline in standards of honesty, most people still value integrity. Keeping our promises is one way to display love for God and neighbor and to appeal to lovers of righteousness.—Matthew 22:36-39; Romans 15:2.

During their 1998 service year, Jehovah’s Witnesses spent over a billion hours public-



***If you have promised to return,
prepare well to do so***

ly declaring the good news of God's Kingdom. (Matthew 24:14) Some of this preaching may have fallen on deaf ears if we have not kept our word in business dealings or in other matters. Since we represent the God of truth, people rightly expect us to act honestly. By being trustworthy and honest, we "adorn the teaching of our Savior, God, in all things."—Titus 2:10.

In our ministry, we have opportunities to keep our word when we return to visit those who express interest in the Kingdom message. If we say that we will call back, we should do so. Returning as we have promised is a way 'not to hold back good from those to whom it is owing.' (Proverbs 3:27) One sister explained the matter this way: "On several occasions, I have met interested individuals who said that a Witness had promised to call back but had not done so. Of course, I know that the householders may not have been at home or that circumstances may have made it impossible to return. But I wouldn't like anyone to say that of me, so I do my utmost to find the person at home again. I believe that if I let someone down, it will reflect badly on Jehovah and my brothers as a whole."

In some cases, we may not feel inclined to return because we conclude that the per-

son is not really interested. The same sister explains: "I don't try to judge the amount of interest. My own experience has taught me that first impressions are often wrong. So I try to be positive, viewing each person as a potential brother or sister."

In the Christian ministry and in many other areas, we need to show that our word can be trusted. True, some things are more easily said than done. The wise man noted: "A multitude of men will proclaim each one his own loving-kindness, but a faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6) With determination, we can be faithful and true to our word.

Rich Blessings From God

Deliberately making an empty promise is dishonest and might be likened to writing a check without having funds in the bank to cover it. But what rewards and blessings we receive for keeping our promises! One blessing for being trustworthy is a good conscience. (Compare Acts 24:16.) Instead of nagging feelings of remorse, we feel satisfied and at peace. Moreover, by keeping our word, we contribute to the unity of the congregation, which depends on mutual trust. Our "truthful speech" also recommends us as ministers of the God of truth.—2 Corinthians 6:3, 4, 7.

Jehovah is true to his word, and he hates "a false tongue." (Proverbs 6:16, 17) By imitating our heavenly Father, we draw closer to him. Surely, then, we have good reason for keeping our promises.

GAIN WISDOM AND ACCEPT DISCIPLINE



JEHOVAH GOD is the Grand Instructor of his people. He educates them not only about himself but also about life. (Isaiah 30:20; 54:13; Psalm 27:11) To the nation of Israel, for example, Jehovah gave prophets, Levites—especially the priests—and other wise men to serve as teachers. (2 Chronicles 35:3; Jeremiah 18:18) The prophets taught the people about God's purposes and attributes and outlined the right course to take. The priests and Levites had the responsibility of teaching Jehovah's Law. And the wise men, or elders, provided sound counsel on the matter of day-to-day living.

Solomon, son of David, was outstanding among the wise men of Israel. (1 Kings 4:30, 31) Upon seeing his glory and riches, one of his most distinguished visitors, the queen of Sheba, confessed: "I had not been told the half. You have surpassed in wisdom and prosperity the things heard to which I listened." (1 Kings 10:7) What was the secret of Solomon's wisdom? When he became king of Israel in 1037 B.C.E., Solomon prayed for "wisdom and knowledge." Being pleased with his request, Jehovah gave him knowledge, wisdom, and an understanding heart. (2 Chronicles 1:10-12; 1 Kings 3:12) No wonder Solomon came to "speak three thousand proverbs"! (1 Kings 4:32) Some of these, along with "the words of Agur" and those of "Lemuel the king," were recorded in the Bible book of Proverbs. (Proverbs

30:1; 31:1) The truths expressed in these proverbs reflect God's wisdom and are eternal. (1 Kings 10:23, 24) To anyone desiring a happy and successful life, they are as indispensable today as they were when first uttered.

Success and Moral Cleanness—How?

The objective of the book of Proverbs is explained in its opening words: "*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel, for one to know wisdom and discipline, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline that gives insight, righteousness and judgment and uprightness, to give to the inexperienced ones shrewdness, to a young man knowledge and thinking ability.*" —Proverbs 1:1-4.

What a lofty purpose "the proverbs of Solomon" are to serve! They are "for one to know wisdom and discipline." Wisdom involves seeing things as they are and using that knowledge to solve problems, attain goals, avoid or avert dangers, or help others to do so. "In the Book of Proverbs," states one reference work, "'wisdom' signifies skillful living—the ability to make wise choices and live successfully." How important it is to acquire wisdom! —Proverbs 4:7.

The proverbs of Solomon also provide discipline. Do we need this training? In the Scriptures, discipline conveys the sense of correction, reproof, or chastisement. Ac-

cording to one Bible scholar, it “denotes the training of the moral nature, involving the correcting of waywardness toward folly.” Discipline, whether self-imposed or administered by others, not only restrains us from engaging in wrongdoing but also motivates us to change for the better. Yes, we do need discipline if we want to remain morally clean.

The purpose of the proverbs then is twofold—to impart wisdom and to provide discipline. Moral discipline and mental ability have numerous facets. Righteousness and justice, for instance, are moral qualities, and they help us to adhere to Jehovah’s high standards.

Wisdom is a blend of many factors, including understanding, insight, shrewdness, and thinking ability. Understanding is the ability to see into a matter and discern its composition by grasping the connections between its parts and the whole, thus getting the sense of it. Insight calls for knowledge of reasons and an appreciation for why a certain course is right or wrong. For example, a man of understanding can discern when someone is heading in a wrong direction, and he may instantly warn him of the danger. But it takes insight on his part to comprehend why the person is gravitating in that direction and to come up with the most effective way to rescue him.

Shrewd people are prudent—not gullible. (Proverbs 14:15) They are able to foresee evil and prepare for it. And wisdom enables us to formulate wholesome thoughts and ideas that give purposeful direction in life. The study of the Biblical proverbs is indeed rewarding because they were recorded so that we may know wisdom and discipline. Even “inexperienced ones” who pay attention to the proverbs will gain shrewdness, and “a young man,” knowledge and thinking ability.

Proverbs for the Wise

The Biblical proverbs, however, are not only for the inexperienced and the young. They are for anyone wise enough to listen. “A wise person will listen and take in more instruction,” says King Solomon, “and a man of understanding is the one who acquires skillful direction, to understand a proverb and a puzzling saying, the words of wise persons and their riddles.” (Proverbs 1:5, 6) A person who has already acquired wisdom will increase his learning by giving attention to the proverbs, and a man of understanding will sharpen his ability to steer his life successfully.

A proverb often expresses a profound truth in very few words. A Biblical proverb may take the form of a puzzling saying. (Proverbs 1:17-19) Some proverbs are riddles—perplexing and knotty statements that require unraveling. A proverb may also contain similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech. Understanding these takes time and meditation. Solomon, the composer of so many proverbs, certainly grasped the nuances of understanding a proverb. In the book of Proverbs, he undertakes the task of imparting that ability to his readers, something to which a wise person would want to pay attention.

The Beginning That Leads to the Goal

Where does one begin the pursuit of wisdom and discipline? Solomon answers: “The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge. Wisdom and discipline are what mere fools have despised.” (Proverbs 1:7) Knowledge begins with the fear of Jehovah. Without knowledge there can be no wisdom or discipline. The fear of Jehovah, then, is the start of wisdom and discipline.—Proverbs 9:10; 15:33.

The fear of God is not a morbid dread of him. Rather, it is a profound reverence and awe. There can be no true knowledge without this fear. Life is from Jehovah God, and life is, of course, essential for our having any knowledge. (Psalm 36:9; Acts 17:25, 28) Furthermore, God created all things; so all human knowledge is based on a study of his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1, 2; Revelation 4:11) God also inspired his written Word, which is "beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Thus, the focal point of all true knowledge is Jehovah, and a person seeking it must have a reverential fear of him.

Of what value are human knowledge and worldly wisdom without the fear of God? The apostle Paul wrote: "Where is the wise man? Where the scribe? Where the debater of this system of things? Did not God make the wisdom of the world foolish?" (1 Corinthians 1:20) Lacking godly fear, a worldly-wise person draws wrong conclusions from known facts and ends up a 'mere fool.'

A "Necklace to Your Throat"

The wise king next addresses the youth: *"Listen, my son, to the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother. For they are a wreath of attractiveness to your head and a fine necklace to your throat."*—Proverbs 1:8, 9.

In ancient Israel, parents had the God-given responsibility of teaching their children. Moses exhorted fathers: "These words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6: 6, 7) Mothers too had considerable influence. Within the framework of her husband's au-

thority, a Hebrew wife could enforce family law.

Throughout the Bible, in fact, the family is the basic unit for imparting education. (Ephesians 6:1-3) For children to obey their believing parents is for them to be figuratively adorned with a decorative wreath of attractiveness and a necklace of honor.

"It Takes Away the Very Soul of Its Owners"

Before sending him to the United States for higher education, an Asian father advised his 16-year-old son not to get involved with bad people. This advice echoes Solomon's warning: *"My son, if sinners try to seduce you, do not consent."* (Proverbs 1:10) Solomon, however, pinpoints the lure they use: *"They keep saying: 'Do go with us. Do let us lie in ambush for blood. Do let us lie in concealment for the innocent men without any cause. Let us swallow them down alive just like Sheol, even whole, like those going down into a pit. Let us find all sorts of precious valuables. Let us fill our houses with spoil. Your lot you ought to cast in among us. Let there come to be just one bag belonging to all of us.'"*—Proverbs 1:11-14.

The lure clearly is riches. On the basis of making quick profits, "sinners" seduce others into involvement in their violent or unjust schemes. For material gain these wicked ones do not hesitate to shed blood. They 'swallow their victim down alive just like Sheol, even whole,' robbing him of everything he has, just as the grave receives the whole body. Their invitation is to a career in crime—they want to 'fill their houses with spoil,' and they want the inexperienced one to 'cast in his lot with them.' What a timely warning this is for us! Do not youth gangs and drug dealers use similar recruiting methods? Is not the promise of quick

riches the temptation of many questionable business propositions?

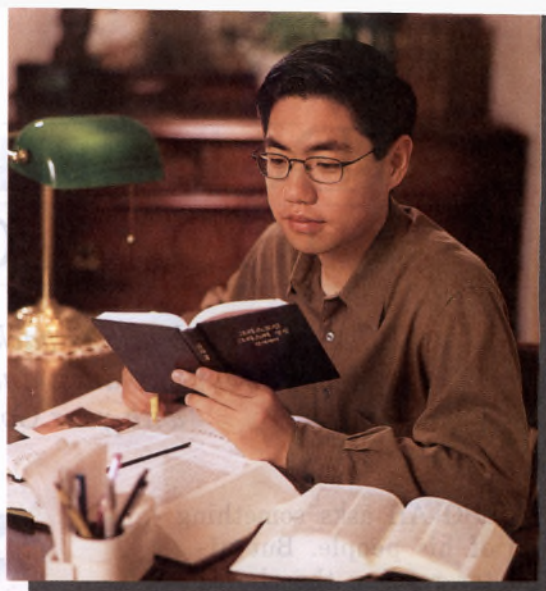
“My son,” advises the wise king, “do not go in the way with them. Hold back your foot from their roadway. For their feet are those that run to sheer badness, and they keep hastening to shed blood.” Predicting their disastrous end, he adds: “For it is for nothing that the net is spread before the eyes of anything owning wings. Consequently they themselves lie in ambush for the very blood of these; they lie in concealment for their souls. Thus are the paths of everyone making unjust profit. It takes away the very soul of its owners.”—Proverbs 1:15-19.

“Everyone making unjust profit” will perish in his own course. The very ambush that the wicked lay for others will become a trap for themselves. Will deliberate evil-doers change their course? No. A net may be in full view, but birds—creatures “owning wings”—fly right into it anyway. In a similar way, the wicked, blinded by their greed, go ahead with their criminal acts, even though sooner or later they will be caught.

Who Will Listen to the Voice of Wisdom?

Are sinners actually aware that their course is disastrous? Have they been warned of the outcome of their ways? Ignorance is no excuse, for a very pointed message is proclaimed in public places.

Solomon declares: *“True wisdom itself keeps crying aloud in the very street. In the public squares it keeps giving forth its voice. At the upper end of the noisy streets it calls out. At the entrances of the gates into the city it says its own sayings.”* (Prov-



erbs 1:20, 21) In a loud and clear voice, wisdom is crying out in public places for all to hear. In ancient Israel the older men gave wise counsel and rendered judicial decisions at the city gates. For us, Jehovah has caused true wisdom to be recorded in his Word, the Bible, which is widely available. And his servants today are busy publicly declaring its message everywhere. God indeed has wisdom proclaimed before all.

What does true wisdom say? This: *“How long will you inexperienced ones keep loving inexperience, and how long must you ridiculers desire for yourselves outright ridicule . . . ? I have called out but you keep refusing, I have stretched out my hand but there is no one paying attention.”* Foolish ones give no heed to the voice of wisdom. Consequently, *“they will eat from the fruitage of their way.”* Their own *‘renegading and easygoingness will destroy them.’* —Proverbs 1:22-32.

What, though, of the one who has taken the time to listen to the voice of wisdom? *“He will reside in security and be undisturbed from dread of calamity.”* (Proverbs 1:33) May you be among those who gain wisdom and accept discipline by paying attention to the Biblical proverbs.

DOES JEHOVAH ASK TOO MUCH OF US?

"What is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?"—MICAH 6:8.

JEHOVAH asks something of his people. But after reading the above words as quoted from Micah's prophecy, you may well conclude that God's requirements are reasonable. Nevertheless, many do not serve our Grand Creator, and some who once served him have ceased to do so. Why? Because they think that God asks too much of us. Does he? Or might there be a problem with a person's attitude toward what Jehovah requires? A historical account provides insight into this matter.

² The Syrian military chief Naaman was afflicted with leprosy, but he was advised that in Israel there was a prophet of Jehovah who could cure him. So Naaman and his entourage traveled to Israel and eventually came to the home of God's prophet Elisha. Instead of leaving his house to greet his distinguished visitor, Elisha sent a servant to tell Naaman: "You must bathe seven times in the Jordan that your flesh may come back to you; and be clean."—2 Kings 5:10.

1. What may be the reason why some do not serve Jehovah?
2. Who was Naaman, and what did Jehovah's prophet ask him to do?



³ If Naaman complied with the requirement stated by God's prophet, he would be healed of a loathsome disease. Therefore, was Jehovah asking too much of him? Not really. Yet, Naaman was not going to do what Jehovah had required. "Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" he protested.

"Can I not bathe in them and certainly be clean?" With that, Naaman went away in a rage.—2 Kings 5:12.

⁴ What really was Naaman's problem? It was not that the requirement was so difficult to meet. Naaman's servants tactfully said: "Had it been a great thing that the prophet himself had spoken to you, would you not do it? How much more, then, since he said to you, 'Bathe and be clean?'" (2 Kings 5:13) The problem was Naaman's attitude. He felt that he had not been treated with the dignity he deserved and that he had been asked to do something he apparently considered ineffectual and humili-

3. Why did Naaman at first refuse to do what Jehovah asked?

4, 5. (a) What was the reward for Naaman's obedience, and how did he respond upon receiving it? (b) What will we now consider?

ating. However, Naaman responded to the tactful counsel of his servants and plunged into the Jordan River seven times. Imagine his joy when “his flesh came back like the flesh of a little boy and he became clean”! He was filled with gratitude. Moreover, Naaman declared that from that time on, he would worship no other god but Jehovah. —2 Kings 5:14-17.

⁵ Throughout human history, Jehovah has asked people to comply with various regulations. We invite you to consider a number of these. As you do, ask yourself how you would have responded if Jehovah had required that you do such things. Later, we will examine what Jehovah asks of us today.

What Jehovah Required in the Past

⁶ Jehovah instructed the first human pair, Adam and Eve, to rear children, subdue the earth, and have animal life in subjection. The man and his wife were also blessed with a spacious parklike home. (Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:9-15) But there was a restriction. They were not to eat of a certain tree, one among the many fruit-bearing trees in the garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:16, 17) That was not asking too much, was it? Would you not have enjoyed carrying out such an assignment, with the prospect of living forever in perfect health? Though a tempter appeared in the garden, would you not have rejected his argument? And would you not agree that Jehovah had the right to impose the one simple restriction?—Genesis 3:1-5.

⁷ Later, Jehovah asked Noah to construct an ark as a means of preservation through a global flood. In view of the ark’s huge size, the job was not easy and was probably car-

6. What was the first human pair asked to do, and how would you have responded to such instructions?

7. (a) What assignment was Noah given, and what opposition did he experience? (b) How do you view what Jehovah asked of Noah?



ried out in the face of much ridicule and hostility. Yet, what a privilege it was for Noah to be able to save his household, not to speak of the many animals! (Genesis 6:1-8, 14-16; Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5) If given such an assignment, would you have worked hard to fulfill it? Or would you have concluded that Jehovah was asking too much of you?

⁸ God asked Abraham to do something very difficult, telling him: “Take, please, your son, your only son whom you so love, Isaac, and make a trip to the land of Moriah and there offer him up as a burnt offering.” (Genesis 22:2) Since Jehovah had promised that the then childless Isaac would have offspring, Abraham’s faith in God’s ability to restore Isaac to life was tested. When

8. What was Abraham asked to do, and what was illustrated as a result of his compliance?

Man-made rules, such as elaborate cleansing, have made worship burdensome

Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac, God preserved the young man. This incident illustrated that God would offer his own Son for mankind and would later resurrect him.—Genesis 17:19; 22:9-18; John 3:16; Acts 2:23, 24, 29-32; Hebrews 11:17-19.

⁹ Some may think that Jehovah God was asking too much of Abraham. But was he? Is it really unloving for our Creator, who can resurrect the dead, to ask us to be obedient to him even if this should result in our sleeping temporarily in death? Jesus Christ and his early followers did not think so. They were willing to suffer physical abuse, even death itself, in order to do God's will. (John 10:11, 17, 18; Acts 5:40-42; 21:13) If circumstances called for it, would you be willing to do the same? Consider some of the things that Jehovah required of those who agreed to be his people.

Jehovah's Law to Israel

¹⁰ Abraham's descendants through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, or Israel, grew into the nation of Israel. Jehovah delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. (Genesis 32:28; 46:1-3; 2 Samuel 7:23, 24) Soon thereafter, they promised to do whatever God asked of them. They said: "All that Jehovah has spoken we are willing to do." (Exodus 19:8) In keeping with the desire of the Israelites to be governed by him, Jehovah provided the nation with more than 600 laws, including the Ten Commandments. In time, these laws of God, given through Moses, came to be known simply as the Law.—Ezra 7:6; Luke 10:25-27; John 1:17.

9. Why was Jehovah not asking too much of Abraham?

10. Who promised to do all that Jehovah asked, and what did he give them?



¹¹ One purpose of the Law was to safeguard the Israelites by providing wholesome regulations governing such matters as sexual morality, business transactions, and child care. (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:6-18, 22-24; 19:35, 36; Deuteronomy 6:6-9) Rules were provided on how to treat fellow humans as well as one's animals. (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 22:4, 10) Requirements that pertained to annual festivals and meeting together for worship helped to safeguard the people spiritually.—Leviticus 23:1-43; Deuteronomy 31:10-13.

¹² A major purpose of the Law was noted by the apostle Paul, who wrote: "It was added to make transgressions manifest, until the seed [Christ] should arrive to whom the promise had been made." (Galatians 3:19) The Law reminded the Israelites that they were imperfect. Logically, then, they needed a perfect sacrifice that could complete—

11. What was one purpose of the Law, and what are some regulations that served to accomplish it?

12. What was the major purpose of the Law?

ly remove their sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4) So the Law was intended to prepare the people to accept Jesus, who was the Messiah, or Christ. Paul wrote: "The Law has become our tutor leading to Christ, that we might be declared righteous due to faith."—Galatians 3:24.

Was Jehovah's Law Burdensome?

¹³ Though the Law was "holy and righteous and good," many considered it burdensome. (Romans 7:12) Because the Law was perfect, the Israelites could not meet its high standard. (Psalm 19:7) That is why the apostle Peter called it "a yoke that neither our forefathers nor we were capable of bearing." (Acts 15:10) Of course, the Law itself was not burdensome, and obeying it benefited the people.

¹⁴ Under the Law, for example, a thief was not imprisoned but had to work to pay double or more to cover what he had stolen. The victim thus suffered no loss, nor was a burden imposed upon hardworking people to support a prison system. (Exodus 22:1, 3, 4, 7) Unsafe foods were prohibited. Pork, if not cooked well, can carry trichinosis, and rabbit can carry tularemia. (Leviticus 11:4-12) Similarly, the Law was a protection by forbidding the handling of carcasses. If a person touched a corpse, he was required to wash himself as well as his garments. (Leviticus 11:31-36; Numbers 19:11-22) Excrement was to be buried, protecting the people against the spread of germs, the existence of which was discovered by scientists only in recent centuries.—Deuteronomy 23:13.

¹⁵ The Law did not ask too much of the people. But the same cannot be said of men

who assumed the role of interpreters of the Law. Regarding the rules they imposed, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by James Hastings, notes: "Every biblical commandment was surrounded by a network of petty regulations. . . . An attempt was thus made to bring every conceivable case within the scope of the Law, and with merciless logic to regulate the whole of human conduct by strict rule of thumb. . . . The voice of conscience was stifled; the living power of the Divine word was neutralized and smothered beneath a mass of external rules."

¹⁶ Jesus Christ denounced religious leaders who imposed a mass of rules, saying: "They bind up heavy loads and put them upon the shoulders of men, but they themselves are not willing to budge them with their finger." (Matthew 23:2, 4) He pointed out that their burdensome man-made rules and traditions, including elaborate cleansings, made "the word of God invalid." (Mark 7:1-13; Matthew 23:13, 24-26) Even before Jesus was on earth, though, religious teachers in Israel were misrepresenting what Jehovah really requires.

What Jehovah Is Really Asking

¹⁷ Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah said: "I have had enough of whole burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed animals; and in the blood of young bulls and male lambs and he-goats I have taken no delight." (Isaiah 1:10, 11) Why was God displeased with offerings that he himself had called for in the Law? (Leviticus 1:1-4:35) Because the people treated him disrespectfully. Therefore, they were admonished: "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the badness of your dealings from in front of my eyes; cease to do bad. Learn to

16. What did Jesus say about the burdensome rules and traditions of religious leaders?

17. Why was Jehovah not pleased with the burnt offerings of the faithless Israelites?

13. (a) How did imperfect humans consider the Law, and why? (b) Was the Law really burdensome?

14. What are a few examples showing that the Law served a highly beneficial purpose for the Israelites?

15. What proved to be a burden to the Israelites?

do good; search for justice; set right the oppressor; render judgment for the fatherless boy; plead the cause of the widow.” (Isaiah 1:16, 17) Does this not help us to appreciate what Jehovah wants from his servants?

¹⁸ Jesus showed what God really wants. He did so when he was asked the question, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this, ‘You must love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40; Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:4-6) The prophet Moses made the same point when he asked: “What is Jehovah your God asking of you but to fear Jehovah your God, so as to walk in all his ways and to love him and to serve Jehovah your God with all your heart and all your soul; to keep the commandments of Jehovah and his statutes?”—Deuteronomy 10:12, 13; 15:7, 8.

¹⁹ Despite their wrongdoing, the Israelites wanted to appear holy. Though the Law re-

18. What was Jehovah really asking of the Israelites?

19. How did the Israelites try to appear holy, but what did Jehovah say to them?

Can You Answer?

- ☐ Why may some decline to serve Jehovah?
- ☐ How have Jehovah’s requirements varied throughout the years?
- ☐ What purposes were served by the Law?
- ☐ Why is what Jehovah asks of us not too much?

quired fasting only on the annual Atonement Day, they began to fast often. (Leviticus 16:30, 31) But Jehovah rebuked them, saying: “Is not this the fast that I choose? To loosen the fetters of wickedness, to release the bands of the yoke bar, and to send away the crushed ones free, and that you people should tear in two every yoke bar? Is it not the dividing of your bread out to the hungry one, and that you should bring the afflicted, homeless people into your house? That, in case you should see someone naked, you must cover him, and that you should not hide yourself from your own flesh?”—Isaiah 58:3-7.

²⁰ Those self-righteous Israelites had a problem similar to that of the religious hypocrites to whom Jesus said: “You give the tenth of the mint and the dill and the cummin, but you have disregarded the weightier matters of the Law, namely, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These things it was binding to do, yet not to disregard the other things.” (Matthew 23:23; Leviticus 27:30) Do not Jesus’ words help us to appreciate what Jehovah really wants from us?

²¹ To clarify what Jehovah does and does not require of us, God’s prophet Micah asked: “With what shall I confront Jehovah? With what shall I bow myself to God on high? Shall I confront him with whole burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of torrents of oil? Shall I give my firstborn son for my revolt, the fruitage of my belly for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O earthling man, what is good. And what is Jehovah asking back from you but to exercise justice and to love kindness and to be modest in walking with your God?”—Micah 6:6-8.

20. For what did Jesus rebuke the religious hypocrites?

21. How did the prophet Micah sum up what Jehovah does and does not ask of us?

²² So, then, what did Jehovah particularly require of those who lived under the Law? Of course, they were to love Jehovah God. Furthermore, the apostle Paul said: "The entire Law stands fulfilled in one saying, namely: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:14) Similarly, Paul told Christians in Rome: "He that loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. . . . Love is the law's fulfillment."—Romans 13:8-10.

It Is Not Too Much

²³ Are we not impressed by what a lov-

22. What did Jehovah particularly want from those under the Law?

23, 24. (a) Why should it never be too much for us to do what Jehovah asks? (b) What will we next consider?

ing, thoughtful, merciful God Jehovah is? His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth to magnify God's love—to let people know how precious they are to Jehovah. Illustrating God's love, Jesus said regarding lowly sparrows: "Not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's knowledge." So he concluded: "Have no fear: you are worth more than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31) Surely, it should never be too much for us to do whatever such a loving God asks!

²⁴ However, what does Jehovah ask of us today? And why do some seem to think that God asks too much? By examining these questions, we should be able to see why it is a marvelous privilege to do whatever Jehovah asks.

WHAT DOES JEHOVAH ASK OF US TODAY?

"A voice out of the cloud [said]: 'This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him.'"—MATTHEW 17:5.

JEHOVAH gave the nation of Israel the Law, with its many features. Regarding them, the apostle Paul wrote: "They were legal requirements pertaining to the flesh and were imposed until the appointed time to set things straight." (Hebrews 9:10) When the Law led a remnant of Israelites to accept Jesus as the Messiah, or Christ, it had fulfilled its purpose. Thus, Paul declared: "Christ is the end of the Law."—Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:19-25; 4:4, 5.

1. When did the Law fulfill its purpose?

² Does this mean that the Law is not binding upon us today? Actually, the vast majority of humankind never were under the Law, as the psalmist explained: "[Jehovah] is telling his word to Jacob, his regulations and his judicial decisions to Israel. He has not done that way to any other nation; and as for his judicial decisions, they have not known them." (Psalm 147:19, 20) When God established the new covenant on the basis of

2. Who were under the Law, and when were they released from it?

Jesus' sacrifice, even the nation of Israel was no longer under obligation to obey the Law. (Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:13, 14, 16) If, then, the Law is no longer binding, what does Jehovah ask of those who desire to serve him today?

What Jehovah Asks

³ During the final year of Jesus' ministry, his apostles Peter, James, and John accompanied him to a high mountain, possibly a spur of Mount Hermon. There they saw a prophetic vision of Jesus in magnificent glory and heard God's own voice declare: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him." (Matthew 17:1-5) Basically, that is what Jehovah is asking of us—to listen to his Son and follow his example and teachings. (Matthew 16:24) Thus, the apostle Peter wrote: "Christ suffered for you, leaving you a model for you to follow his steps closely."—1 Peter 2:21.

⁴ Why should we follow Jesus' steps closely? Because by imitating him, we imitate Jehovah God. Jesus knew the Father intimately, having spent untold billions of years with him in heaven before coming to the earth. (Proverbs 8:22-31; John 8:23; 17:5; Colossians 1:15-17) While on earth, Jesus loyally represented his Father. He explained: "Just as the Father taught me I speak these things." In fact, Jesus imitated Jehovah so exactly that he could say: "He that has seen me has seen the Father also."—John 8:28; 14:9.

⁵ What is involved in listening to Jesus and imitating him? Does it mean being under a law? Paul wrote: "I myself am not under law." He was here referring to "the old covenant," the Law covenant made with Is-

rael. Paul did acknowledge that he was "under law toward Christ." (1 Corinthians 9:20, 21; 2 Corinthians 3:14) With the end of the old Law covenant, a "new covenant" came into force with its "law of the Christ" that all servants of Jehovah today are obligated to obey.—Luke 22:20; Galatians 6:2; Hebrews 8:7-13.

⁶ Jehovah did not have "the law of the Christ" put down in the form of a code, organizing it into various categories, as was done with the old Law covenant. This new law for Christ's followers does not include an extensive list of dos and don'ts. In his Word, however, Jehovah did preserve four comprehensive accounts of the life and teachings of his Son. Moreover, God inspired some of Jesus' early followers to provide written instructions regarding personal behavior, congregational affairs, conduct within the family, and other matters. (1 Corinthians 6:18; 14:26-35; Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 10:24, 25) When we conform our lives to the example and teachings of Jesus Christ and heed the counsel of inspired first-century Bible writers, we are obeying "the law of the Christ." Jehovah asks this of his servants today.

The Importance of Love

⁷ While love was important under the Law, it is the very heart, or essence, of the law of the Christ. This fact was stressed by Jesus when he met with his apostles to celebrate the Passover of 33 C.E. According to the apostle John's summary of what took place that night, Jesus' heartfelt words included 28 references to love. This emphasized to his apostles the substance, or spirit, of his law. Significantly, John introduced his coverage of the events of that momen-

6. How might "the law of the Christ" be described, and how do we obey it?

7. How did Jesus emphasize the substance of his law during the last Passover with his apostles?

3, 4. (a) What basically does Jehovah ask of us today? (b) Why should we follow Jesus' steps closely?

5. What law are Christians under, and when did that law come into force?



What lesson did Jesus teach by washing the feet of his apostles?

tous evening by saying: "Because he knew before the festival of the passover that his hour had come for him to move out of this world to the Father, Jesus, having loved his own that were in the world, loved them to the end."—John 13:1.

⁸ Jesus loved his apostles, even though he had tried without apparent success to help them overcome their inordinate desire for power and position. Months before their arrival in Jerusalem, 'they had argued among themselves who was greater.' And just before they came to the city for the Passover, the dispute over position erupted again. (Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45) That this was an ongoing problem is indicated by what occurred shortly after the apostles entered the upper room to share what was to be

their final Passover together. At that time no one seized the opportunity to render the customary, hospitable service of washing the feet of the others. To teach them a lesson in humility, Jesus himself washed their feet.—John 13:2-15; 1 Timothy 5:9, 10.

⁹ Despite that lesson, after the Passover was observed and Jesus instituted the Memorial of his approaching death, note what took place yet again. Says Luke's Gospel account: "There also arose a heated dispute among them over which one of them seemed to be greatest." Instead of getting angry with the apostles and berating them, Jesus kindly counseled them about the need to be different from the power-hungry rulers of the world. (Luke 22:24-27) He then provided what might be called the cornerstone of the law of the Christ, saying: "I am giving

8. (a) What indication was there of an ongoing dispute among the apostles? (b) How did Jesus teach his apostles a lesson in humility?

9. How did Jesus deal with the situation that occurred following the last Passover?

you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”—John 13:34.

¹⁰ Later that evening Jesus pointed out how far Christlike love should go. He said: “This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his soul in behalf of his friends.” (John 15:12, 13) Was Jesus saying that his followers should be willing to die in behalf of fellow believers if the occasion called for this? That was the understanding of John, an eyewitness on this occasion, for he later wrote: “By this we have come to know love, because that one [Jesus Christ] surrendered his soul for us; and we are under obligation to surrender our souls for our brothers.”—1 John 3:16.

¹¹ So, then, we do not fulfill the law of the Christ simply by teaching others about him. We must also live and behave as Jesus did. True, Jesus used beautiful, well-chosen words in his discourses. Yet, he also taught by example. Even though Jesus had been a mighty spirit creature in heaven, he seized the opportunity to serve his Father’s interests on earth and to show how we should live. He was humble, kind, and considerate, helping those burdened down and oppressed. (Matthew 11:28-30; 20:28; Philipians 2:5-8; 1 John 3:8) And Jesus urged his followers to love one another, just as he loved them.

¹² What place does love for Jehovah—the Law’s greatest commandment—have in the law of the Christ? (Matthew 22:37, 38; Galatians 6:2) Second place? By no means! Love

10. What commandment did Jesus give his disciples, and what did it involve?

11. (a) How do we fulfill the law of the Christ? (b) What example did Jesus provide?

12. Why can it be said that the law of the Christ does not minimize the need to love Jehovah?

for Jehovah and love for our fellow Christians are inextricably linked. One cannot truly love Jehovah without also loving his brother, for the apostle John noted: “If anyone makes the statement: ‘I love God,’ and yet is hating his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot be loving God, whom he has not seen.”—1 John 4:20; compare 1 John 3:17, 18.

¹³ When Jesus gave his disciples the new commandment to love one another just as he loved them, he described the effect this would have. “By this all will know that you are my disciples,” he said, “if you have love among yourselves.” (John 13:35) According to Tertullian, who lived more than a hundred years after Jesus’ death, the brotherly love of early Christians had that very effect. Tertullian quoted non-Christians as saying of Christ’s followers: ‘See how they love one another and how they are even ready to die for one another.’ We might ask ourselves, ‘Do I show such love for fellow Christians that it proves that I am one of Jesus’ disciples?’

How We Prove Our Love

¹⁴ It is vital that Jehovah’s servants manifest Christlike love. But do you find it hard to love fellow Christians who display selfish traits? Well, as we have seen, even the apostles argued and tried to promote their own interests. (Matthew 20:20-24) The Galatians too bickered among themselves. After pointing out that neighbor love fulfilled the Law, Paul warned them: “If, though, you keep on biting and devouring one another, look out that you do not get annihilated by one another.” After contrasting the

13. What was the effect of the disciples’ obedience to Jesus’ new commandment?

14, 15. What may make it difficult to obey the law of the Christ, but what can help us to do so?



Despite opposition, sharing the good news is a delightful privilege

¹⁶ We should remember that we prove our love by what we do, not merely by what we say. Even Jesus once found an aspect of God's will difficult to accept because of all that was involved. "Father, if you wish, remove this cup from me," Jesus prayed. But he quickly added: "Nevertheless, let, not my will, but yours take place." (Luke 22:42) Despite all that Jesus suffered, he did God's will. (Hebrews 5:7, 8) Obedience is a proof of our love and shows that we recognize God's way to be best. "This is what the love of God means," says the Bible, "that we observe his commandments." (1 John

works of the flesh with the fruitage of God's spirit, Paul added the admonition: "Let us not become egotistical, stirring up competition with one another, envying one another." Then the apostle urged: "Go on carrying the burdens of one another, and thus fulfill the law of the Christ."—Galatians 5:14-6:2.

¹⁵ By requiring obedience to the law of the Christ, is Jehovah asking too much of us? Although it may be difficult to be kind to those who have, in effect, snapped at us and torn us apart emotionally, we are obligated to "become imitators of God, as beloved children, and go on walking in love." (Ephesians 5:1, 2) We need to continue to look at the example of God, who "recommends his own love to us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) By taking the initiative to help others, including those who have mistreated us, we can enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that we are imitating God and are obedient to the law of the Christ.

5:3) And Jesus told his apostles: "If you love me, you will observe my commandments." —John 14:15.

¹⁷ Besides commanding his followers to love one another, what special commandment did Christ give them? He commanded that they do the preaching work for which he had trained them. Peter said: "He ordered us to preach to the people and to give a thorough witness." (Acts 10:42) Jesus had specifically commanded: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8) Jesus revealed that such instructions would also apply to his followers now in "the time of the end," for he said: "This good

16. How do we prove our love for God and Christ?

17. What special commandment did Jesus give his followers, and how do we know that it applies to us today?

news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come.” (Daniel 12:4; Matthew 24:14) Of course, it is God’s will that we preach. Yet, some may think that requiring that we do this work is too much for God to ask of us. But is it really?

Why It May Seem to Be Hard

¹⁸ As we have seen, Jehovah has asked people to comply with various requirements throughout history. And just as what they have been asked to do has varied, so has the nature of the trials they have experienced. God’s dear Son underwent the most difficult trials, eventually being killed in the cruelest manner because of doing what God asked. But when we suffer for doing what Jehovah asks of us, we should remember that he is not responsible for our trials. (John 15:18-20; James 1:13-15) Satan’s rebellion ushered in sin, suffering, and death, and he is the one who has created the circumstances that have often made it very difficult to do what Jehovah asks of his servants.—Job 1:6-19; 2:1-8.

¹⁹ Through his Son, Jehovah has directed

18. What should we remember when we suffer for doing what Jehovah asks?

19. Why is it a privilege to do what God has asked of us through his Son?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ What does Jehovah ask of us today?
- ☐ During his last evening with his apostles, how did Christ emphasize the importance of love?
- ☐ How can we prove that we love God?
- ☐ Why is it a privilege to do what Jehovah asks of us?

that in this time of the end, His servants make an earth-wide proclamation that the only remedy for all human suffering is Kingdom rule. This government of God will eliminate all problems on earth—war, crime, poverty, old age, sickness, death. The Kingdom will also usher in a glorious earthly paradise, into which even the dead will be resurrected. (Matthew 6:9, 10; Luke 23:43; Acts 24:15; Revelation 21:3, 4) What a privilege it is to declare the good news of such things! Clearly, then, there is no problem with what Jehovah asks us to do. We encounter opposition, but Satan the Devil and his world are responsible for this.

²⁰ How can we successfully meet any challenge presented by Satan? By bearing in mind these words: “Be wise, my son, and make my heart rejoice, that I may make a reply to him that is taunting me.” (Proverbs 27:11) Jesus provided Jehovah with an answer to Satan’s taunting by leaving the security of heavenly life to do his Father’s will on earth. (Isaiah 53:12; Hebrews 10:7) As a human, Jesus endured every trial thrust upon him, even death on a torture stake. If we follow him as our Exemplar, we too can endure sufferings and do what Jehovah asks of us.—Hebrews 12:1-3.

²¹ What love God and his Son have shown for us! Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, obedient mankind has the prospect of living forever in Paradise. So let us allow nothing to obscure our hope. Instead, let us personally take to heart what Jesus made possible, as did Paul, who said: “The Son of God . . . loved *me* and handed himself over for *me*.” (Galatians 2:20) And may we show heartfelt gratitude to our loving God, Jehovah, who never asks too much of us.

20. How can we meet any challenge presented by the Devil?

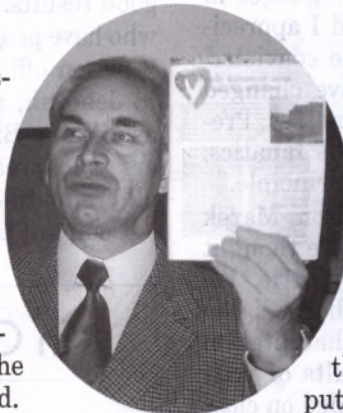
21. How do you feel about the love shown by Jehovah and his Son?



"YOU HAVE CHANGED MY IMPRESSION OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES"

THAT is how one Polish prison official reacted to an article about the work of Jehovah's Witnesses, as reported on in our October 15, 1998, issue. The article, "When Hearts of Stone Turn Responsive," documented the success that Jehovah's Witnesses have had in working with the prison inmates in Wołów, Poland.

Before the release of the above-mentioned *Watchtower* magazine to the public, a special meeting to provide it for the inmates was arranged on September 13, 1998, at the Wołów penitentiary. Those invited to attend included local Witnesses, baptized and other interested prisoners, and a number of penitentiary officials. The fol-



lowing are some of the observations made by those in attendance.

Jerzy, one of Jehovah's Witnesses who was baptized in prison more than five years ago, said: "I am very happy, as I can read today about how much effort the brothers from the nearby congregations have put forth to help us." He added: "I keep striving to improve myself, and I can see how Jehovah has been molding me."

Another prisoner, named Zdzisław, said regarding the witnessing work in prison: "At present, four convicts are preparing for baptism, and newly interested ones continue to attend the meetings at our hall. This article is a powerful motivation to us for



Three Witnesses and an inmate at the magazine presentation in the prison lecture hall

further activity in this field." What a positive attitude, considering that Zdzisław still has 19 years to serve in prison!

After reading the article on the Wołów penitentiary, one prison official said: "We have been especially honored. I never thought that this penitentiary would receive such positive publicity in 130 languages in the world. I like you people, and I appreciate your efforts in behalf of the convicts." Another official added: "You have changed my impression of Jehovah's Witnesses. Previously, I viewed you as religious fanatics. Now I see that you are people of principle."

The director of the Wołów prison, Marek Gajos, smiled and said: "At first we thought that you would accomplish very little. We thought that you were just another religion with aspirations for Biblical rehabilitation of the convicts. Seeing the results of your initial activity, however, we decided on close cooperation. You have been coming here untiringly for nine years now, and I appreciate very much what you have done so far."

How, though, was the article received by the general prison population at Wołów? Interest among inmates was so high that the Witnesses in prison exhausted their supply of the magazine. Prison officials also showed

interest by requesting 40 extra copies for themselves. To meet the increased demand, local congregations helped out and provided 100 extra copies for the brothers in prison. At the same time, meeting attendance in prison increased.

Piotr Choduń, a prison official who has cooperated closely with Jehovah's Witnesses,

said: "We decided to have this article displayed in all the showcases in our penitentiary. We hope that all of the inmates who are not yet studying the Bible with you will read the magazine."

The Witnesses' fine example and their determined preaching efforts continue to have good results. In addition to the 15 prisoners who have progressed to the point of baptism, 2 prison officials have dedicated their lives to Jehovah, and another prison official has asked for a Bible study. Of course, the brothers who preach in the Wołów prison give all credit to Jehovah God for their success. —Compare 1 Corinthians 3:6, 7.

In Our Next Issue

Why So Little Time?

Giving Jehovah What He Deserves

Fortified to Say No to Wrongdoing

TIMOTHY

"A Genuine Child in the Faith"

TIMOTHY was comparatively young when the Christian apostle Paul chose him as a traveling companion. This began a partnership that was to continue for some 15 years. The relationship that developed between the two men was such that Paul could call Timothy "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" and "a genuine child in the faith."—1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:2.

What was there about Timothy's personality that made Paul so fond of him? How did Timothy come to be such a valuable associate? And what profitable lessons can we learn from the inspired record of Timothy's activities?

Chosen by Paul

Paul found the young disciple Timothy when the apostle visited Lystra (in modern-day Turkey) on his second missionary journey in about 50 C.E. Likely in his late teens or early 20's, Timothy was well spoken of by Christians in Lystra and Iconium. (Acts 16:1-3) He lived up to his name, which means "One Who Honors God." From childhood, Timothy had been taught from the Holy Scriptures by his grandmother Lois and his mother, Eunice. (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14, 15) They had probably embraced Christianity during Paul's first visit to their city a couple of years earlier. Now, through the operation of holy spirit, a certain prediction indicated what Timothy's future would be. (1 Timothy 1:18) In harmony with that direction, Paul and the older men of the con-

gregation laid their hands upon the young man, thereby setting him apart for a particular service, and the apostle chose him as a missionary companion.—1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6.

Since his father was an unbelieving Greek, Timothy had not been circumcised. Of course, this was not a Christian requirement. To remove a stumbling block for the Jews they would be visiting, however, Timothy submitted to this painful procedure.—Acts 16:3.

Was Timothy previously considered a Jew? Some scholars argue that according to rabbinic authorities, "the status of the offspring of intermarriage is determined by its mother, not its father." That is, "a Jewish woman bears Jewish children." Yet, writer Shaye Cohen questions whether such "rabbinic law of persons was already in existence in the first century C.E." and whether it was observed by the Jews of Asia Minor. After considering the historic evidence, he concludes that when Gentile men married Israelite women, "the children of these marriages were considered Israelite only if the family lived among the Israelites. Lineage was matrilineal when it was matrilineal. When the Israelite woman moved abroad to join her Gentile husband, her children were considered Gentile." In any case, Timothy's mixed parentage must have been an asset in the preaching work. He would have had no problems relating to Jews or to Gentiles, perhaps enabling him to bridge gaps between them.

Paul's visit to Lystra signaled a turning point in Timothy's life. The young man's willingness to follow the guidance of holy spirit and humbly cooperate with Christian elders led to great blessings and privileges of service. Whether he realized it at the time or not, under Paul's direction Timothy would later be used in important theocratic assignments, taking him as far from home as Rome, the capital of the empire.

Timothy Promoted Kingdom Interests

We possess only a partial record of Timothy's activities, but he traveled widely to promote Kingdom interests. Timothy's first journey with Paul and Silas in 50 C.E. took him through Asia Minor and into Europe. There he shared in preaching campaigns in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea. After opposition caused Paul to move on to Athens, Timothy and Silas were left behind in Beroea to look after the group of disciples that had been formed there. (Acts 16: 6-17:14) Later, Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen the new congregation there. Timothy bore good news on its progress when he met Paul in Corinth.—Acts 18: 5; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-7.

The Scriptures do not say how long Timothy stayed with the Corinthians. (2 Corinthians 1:19) Probably in about 55 C.E., however, Paul considered sending him back to them because he had received disturbing news about their situation. (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10) Later, with Erastus, Timothy was sent from Ephesus to Macedonia. And when Paul wrote to the Romans from Corinth, Timothy was with him again.—Acts 19:22; Romans 16:21.

Timothy and others left Corinth with Paul when he set out for Jerusalem, and they accompanied the apostle at least as far as Troas. Whether Timothy continued on to Jerusalem is unknown. But he is named in

the introductions of three letters Paul wrote from prison in Rome in about 60-61 C.E.* (Acts 20:4; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1) Paul was planning to send Timothy from Rome to Philippi. (Philippians 2: 19) And after Paul's release from prison, Timothy remained in Ephesus at the apostle's direction.—1 Timothy 1:3.

Since first-century travel was neither easy nor comfortable, Timothy's willingness to undertake many journeys for the sake of the congregations was truly commendable. (See *The Watchtower*, August 15, 1996, page 29, box.) Consider just one of his prospective trips and what this tells us about Timothy.

Light on Timothy's Personality

Timothy was with Paul in Rome when the imprisoned apostle wrote to persecuted Christians in Philippi and said: "I am hoping in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I may be a cheerful soul when I get to know about the things pertaining to you. For I have no one else of a disposition like his who will genuinely care for the things pertaining to you. For all the others are seeking their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know the proof he gave of himself, that like a child with a father he slaved with me in furtherance of the good news."—Philippians 1:1, 13, 28-30; 2:19-22.

Those words emphasized Timothy's concern for fellow believers. Unless he went by boat, such a trip called for a 40-day journey on foot from Rome to Philippi, with a short crossing of the Adriatic Sea, and then another 40 days to return to Rome. Timothy was ready to do all of that to serve his brothers and sisters.

Although Timothy traveled extensively, at times he was not in good health. He evi-

* Timothy is also mentioned in four of Paul's other letters.—Romans 16:21; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1.

dently had some kind of stomach trouble and experienced “frequent cases of sickness.” (1 Timothy 5:23) Yet he exerted himself for the sake of the good news. No wonder Paul had such a close relationship with him!

Under the apostle’s tutelage and through their experiences together, Timothy apparently came to reflect Paul’s personality. Thus, Paul could tell him: “You have closely followed my teaching, my course of life, my purpose, my faith, my long-suffering, my love, my endurance, my persecutions, my sufferings, the sort of things that happened to me in Antioch, in Iconium, in Lystra, the sort of persecutions I have borne.” Timothy shed tears with Paul, was in his prayers, and slaved by his side to promote Kingdom interests.—2 Timothy 1:3, 4; 3:10, 11.

Paul encouraged Timothy to ‘let no man ever look down on his youth.’ This may indicate that Timothy was somewhat shy, hesitant in asserting his authority. (1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Corinthians 16:10, 11) However, he could stand alone, and Paul could confidently send him on responsible missions. (1 Thessalonians 3:1, 2) When Paul recognized the need for strong theocratic oversight in the congregation in Ephesus, he urged Timothy to remain there to “*command* certain ones not to teach different doctrine.” (1 Timothy 1:3) Though entrusted with many responsibilities, however, Timothy was modest. And despite any shyness he may have had, he was courageous. For instance, he went to Rome to assist Paul, who was on trial because of his faith. In fact, Timothy himself suffered a period of imprisonment, likely for the same reason.—Hebrews 13:23.



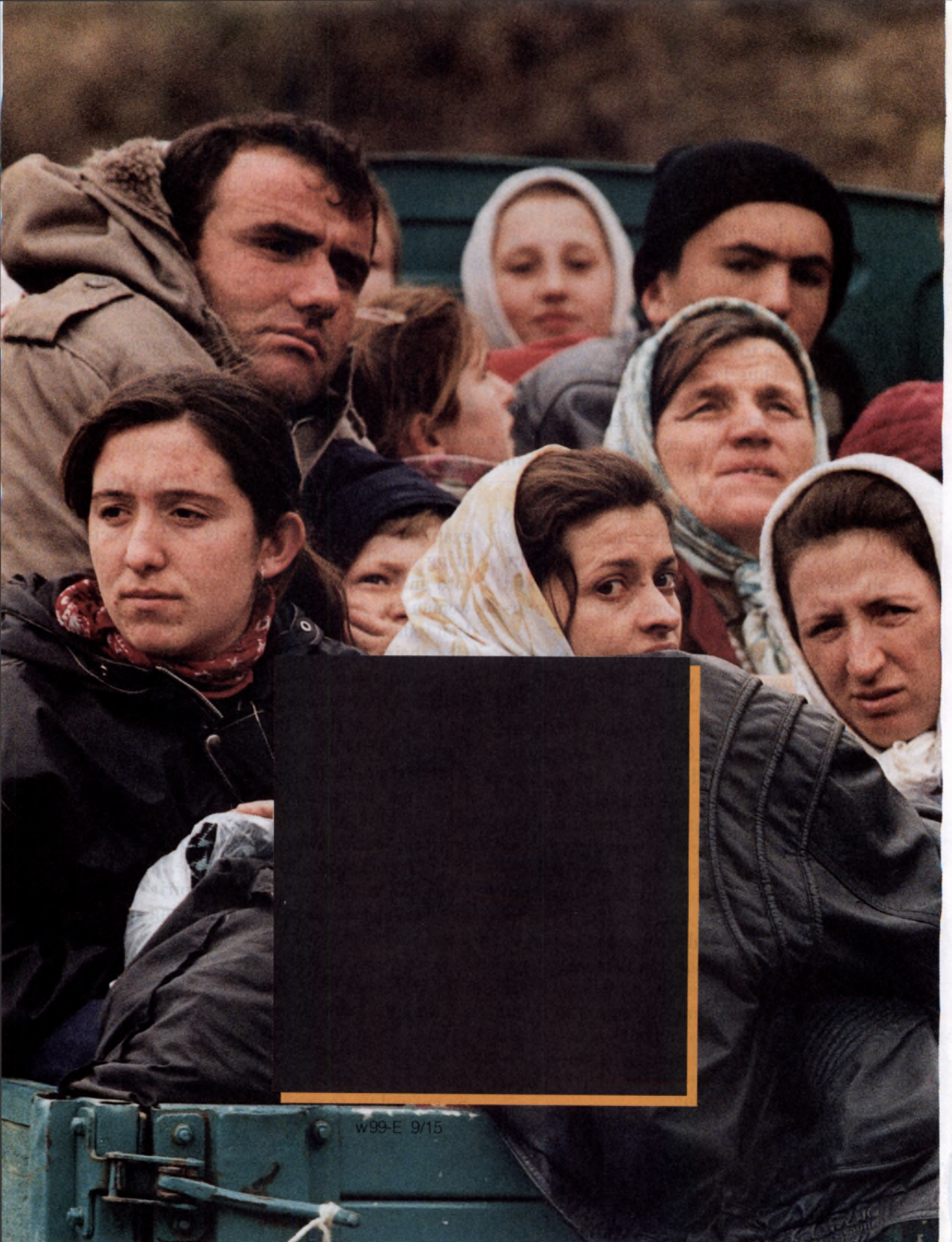
“I have no one else of a disposition like his”

Undoubtedly, Timothy learned much from Paul. The esteem that the apostle had for his fellow worker is amply testified to by the fact that he wrote him two divinely inspired letters found in the Christian Greek Scriptures. In about 65 C.E., when Paul realized that his own martyrdom was imminent, he once again summoned Timothy. (2 Timothy 4:6, 9) Whether Timothy managed to see Paul before the apostle was executed, the Scriptures do not reveal.

Make Yourself Available!

Much can be learned from Timothy’s fine example. He benefited greatly from associating with Paul, growing from a shy youth into an overseer. Young Christian men and women can gain much from similar association today. And if they make Jehovah’s service their career, they will have plenty of worthwhile work to do. (1 Corinthians 15:58) They may become pioneers, or full-time preachers, in their home congregation, or they may be able to serve where the need for Kingdom proclaimers is greater. Among the many possibilities are missionary work in another land or service at the world headquarters of the Watch Tower Society or at one of its branches. And, of course, all Christians can manifest the same spirit as the one Timothy displayed, by rendering whole-souled service to Jehovah.

Do you desire to continue growing spiritually, to be useful to Jehovah’s organization in whatever capacity he may consider appropriate? Then do as Timothy did. To the extent possible, make yourself available. Who knows what future privileges of service may be opened up to you?



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