

A man and a woman are standing in front of a large, brightly lit Christmas tree at night. The woman, on the left, is wearing a red coat and black gloves, holding a large red gift box. The man, on the right, is wearing a dark suit and glasses, holding a green gift box and a yellow gift box. The background is filled with the warm glow of the Christmas tree lights and other festive decorations.

THE **WATCHTOWER**
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

DECEMBER 15, 1999

CHRISTMAS
Why Even in the Orient?

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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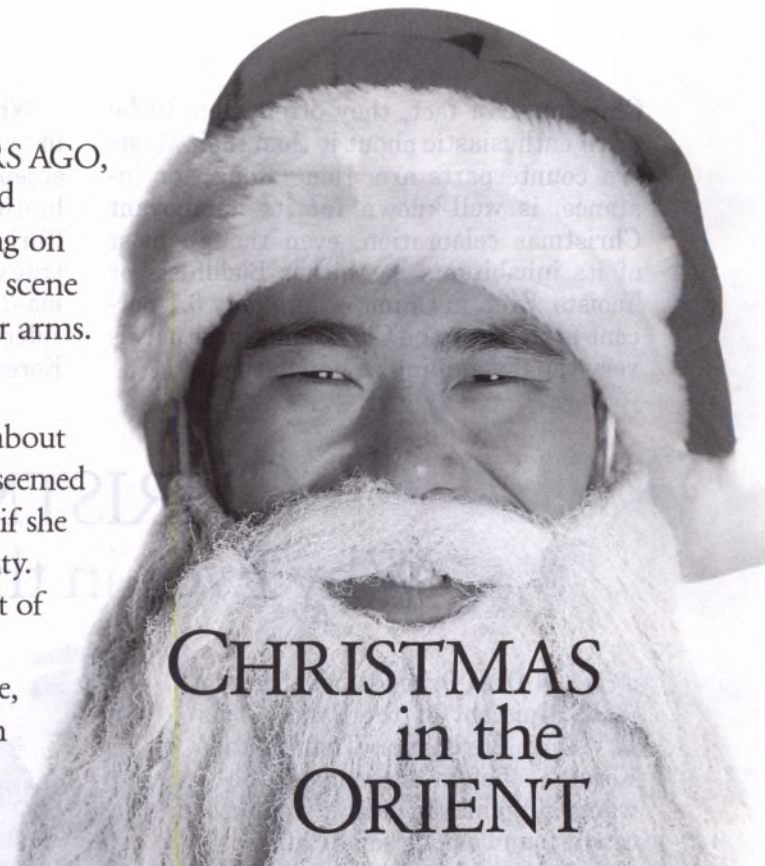
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• SOME TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, a prominent Korean scholar visited Peking, China. Staring at a painting on the ceiling of a cathedral, he saw a scene of Mary with the child Jesus in her arms. He said of this startling painting:

“A lady held a sickly-looking child, about five or six years old, on her lap. She seemed to have little strength in her neck, as if she couldn’t bear to watch her son for pity. And far behind them there were a lot of ghosts and babies with wings flying around. As I stared at them above me, it looked as if they would drop down on me at any moment. Startled, I put my hand out to take them.”

THAT occurred long after the Reformation began in Europe, long after the dark era of the Middle Ages. But to most Orientals, Christianity was as unfamiliar as the painting itself. How that situation has changed! Every Christmas season, scenes of the baby Jesus are featured. The Orient has become used to such scenes, and many streets there now resemble those in Europe.

On the evening of November 25, 1998, a month prior to Christmas, the Champs Élysées in Paris is brightly lit by over 100,000 bulbs on the 300 trees lining that famous avenue. Comparably, on a downtown street in Seoul, Korea, a giant Christmas tree is featured by a major department store and begins to brighten the night in that capital city. Soon its streets are adorned with Christmas decorations.



CHRISTMAS in the ORIENT

Television, radio, and newspapers present Christmas-related programs day after day. Stirred by the Christmas mood, the whole country becomes occupied with welcoming the end of the year. The churches in Seoul, the number of which astonishes many visitors, get decorated in a hurry. Thus, Korea and other countries in the Orient are engulfed by the Christmas spirit about the time that the United States is involved in its Thanksgiving Day celebration in late November.

Most countries of the Orient are not considered part of Christendom. For instance, only 26.3 percent of the population of Korea professes to be Christian. In Hong Kong it is 7.9 percent, in Taiwan 7.4 percent, and in Japan only 1.2 percent. Clearly, most Orientals do not practice Christianity, but they seem to have no objection to celebrating

Christmas. In fact, they often seem to be more enthusiastic about it than their Western counterparts are. Hong Kong, for instance, is well-known for its flamboyant Christmas celebration, even though most of its inhabitants are either Buddhists or Taoists. Even in China, where only 0.1 percent professes to be Christian, Christmas is very rapidly gaining in popularity.

Why is Christmas celebrated so widely in the Orient? Why do people who do not accept Jesus as the Messiah join in celebrating Christmas, which most professing Christians view as his birthday? Should true Christians imitate their view of Christmas? We shall find the answers as we consider how Christmas became popularized in Korea, an age-old country of the Orient.

CHRISTMAS Why Even in the Orient?

AN OLD Oriental belief is reminiscent of the Santa Claus of Christmas. That is the Korean belief in one named Chowangshin, and something similar can be found among some Chinese and Japanese.

Chowangshin was considered a god in charge of the kitchen, a god of fire who was related to the ancient Korean worship of fire. (In olden times, Koreans transported live charcoals carefully, making sure that these were never extinguished.) This god was believed to keep watch over the conduct of family members for a year, after which he ascended to heaven through the kitchen stove and chimney.

Supposedly, Chowangshin reported to the king of heaven on the 23rd of the lunar month of December. He was expected to come back at the end of the year through the chimney and the stove, bringing rewards and penalties in accord with each one's conduct. On the day of his return,



the members of the family were to light candles in the kitchen and elsewhere in the house. Portraits of that kitchen god bear another similarity to Santa Claus—he was depicted in red! It used to be a custom for the daughter-in-law to make a pair of traditional Korean socks and on the winter solstice give them to her mother-in-law. That was meant to symbolize her wish that the mother-in-law would have a long life, since the days get longer after that date.

Do you not see some similarities between the foregoing points and Christmas? They share stories and customs: the chimney, candles, gift-giving, socks, an old man in red clothing, and the date. Still, such similarities alone do not account for the easy acceptance of Christmas in Korea. The belief in Chowangshin had almost faded away by the time Christmas was first introduced to Korea. In fact, most Koreans today do not know that such a belief ever existed.



Nonetheless, this illustrates how customs related to the winter solstice and the end of the year spread all over the world through different paths. In the fourth century C.E., the prevailing church in the Roman Empire changed the name of the Saturnalia, the pagan Roman festival of the birth of the sun-god, and made this part of Christmas. The Christmas celebration amounted to a revival of local customs with a different name tag. How was that possible?

The Role of Gift-Giving

Gift-giving is one custom that has never faded away. For a long time, Koreans have found much joy in giving and receiving gifts. This was one reason for the popularizing of the Christmas celebration in Korea.

After World War II, for the U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea who wanted to strengthen their ties with the people, churches were places to meet and to distribute gifts and relief aid. Especially on Christmas Day did this

Many children visited churches out of curiosity and received gifts of chocolate. They then looked forward to the next Christmas

occur. Many children visited churches out of curiosity, and there they had their first exposure to gifts of chocolate. As you can understand, many of them then looked forward to the next Christmas.

For such children, Santa Claus was an American soldier in a red stocking cap. Proverbs 19:6 says: "Everybody is a companion to the man making gifts." Yes, gift-giving proved to be very effective. But as you can conclude from that verse, such gifts do not guarantee a lasting friendship. Even in Korea, many are those whose experiences with the church amounted to nothing more than a taste of chocolate in their younger years. Christmas, though, was not forgotten. Along with Korea's rapid economic growth, commercialism grew, and Christmas gift-giving was a simple means for boosting consumer spending. Businesses exploited Christmas to increase profits.

That provides you with insight into Christmas in the Orient today. Aiming at the Christmas shopping spree, new products

are developed. Plans for advertisements begin in midsummer. Sales figures peak at year-end, supported by all the purchasing of Christmas gifts, cards, and musical recordings. Why, advertisements would make the average youth feel miserable if he or she stayed at home and did not get any presents on Christmas Eve!

As Christmas Day draws near, stores and shopping malls in Seoul get crowded with people who are there to buy gifts, and the story is the same in other Oriental cities. There are traffic jams. Hotels, business districts, restaurants, and nightclubs are flooded with customers. Sounds of revelry—loud singing—can be heard. On Christmas Eve, drunken men and women are seen making their way through streets that are littered with trash.

So it is. Christmas in the Orient is no longer a holiday led by professed Christians. Obviously, in Korea as elsewhere, commercialism has taken the lead in making the most of this holiday of Christendom. Is the commercialism, then, solely to blame for a Christmas that has become so out of line with the spirit of Christ? True Christians need to probe deeper into the serious issue involved.

The Origin of Christmas

A wild animal that is moved into a cage in a zoo is still a beast. And it would be a grave mistake to believe that it has been domesticated just because it has been in a cage for a while and seemingly enjoys itself with its young ones. You may have heard reports of zoo workers being attacked.

In some ways we can say much the same about the celebration of Christmas. At first it was a "beast" living outside of Christianity. Under the subheading "Relation to

the Roman Saturnalia," *The Christian Encyclopedia* (in Korean)* observes regarding Christmas:

"The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence. The recognition of Sunday (the day of Phoebus and Mithras as well as the Lord's Day) by the emperor Constantine . . . may have led

Christians of the fourth century to feel the appropriateness of making the birthday of the Son of God coincide with that of the physical sun. The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner."

Do you think that such a development could come about without any opposition? The same encyclopedia says: "Christian preachers of the West and the Nearer East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun-worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival." Truly, something was wrong from the beginning. "Yet the festival rapidly gained acceptance and became at last so firmly established that even the Protestant revolution of the sixteenth century was not able to dislodge it," the encyclopedia notes.

Yes, a festival of the sun-god, outside of true Christianity, was brought into the prevailing church. It got a different name—yet its pagan character remained. And it helped to infuse paganism into nominally Christian churches and to corrupt individuals' spirituality. History bears out that as Christendom developed, the original attitude of "love

* Based on *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.

**Christmas
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churches**



Christmas Eve in downtown Seoul, Korea

thy enemies" gave way to moral degradations and violent wars.

In time, it was clear that despite its counterfeit name, Christmas reflected its pagan origin with revelry, heavy drinking, merrymaking, dancing, gift-giving, and the decorating of homes with evergreens. For the sake of commercialism's ultimate goal—more sales—Christmas has been exploited in every possible way. The mass media praise it; the public is simply amused. In downtown Seoul, a store that specializes in underwear made television news by displaying in its window a Christmas tree decorat-

ed only with underwear. The atmosphere of Christmas was noticeable, but any sign of welcoming the Christ was not.

Scriptural Insight Into Christmas

What do we learn from such historical background and developments? If a shirt or blouse is buttoned unevenly from the start, the only way to correct the situation is to begin again. Is that not true? Despite that truth, some argue that notwithstanding its pagan roots in sun worship, Christmas has been accepted by Christendom. So they feel that the holiday has been sanctified as the



Christ is no longer a babe but the powerful King of God's Kingdom

birthday of Christ and imbued with new significance.

We can learn a valuable lesson from a historical event that took place in ancient Judah. In 612 B.C.E., the Judeans introduced pagan worship of the sun into the temple in Jerusalem. Was such pagan worship sanctified by being carried on in the place devoted to clean worship of Jehovah God? The Bible writer Ezekiel wrote of the sun worship practiced at Jerusalem's temple: "Look! at the entrance of the temple of Jehovah, between the porch and the altar, there were about twenty-five men with . . . their faces to the east, and they were bowing down to the east, to the sun. And he went on to say to me: 'Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it such a light thing to the house of Judah to do the detestable things that they have done here, that they have to fill the land with violence and that they should offend

me again, and here they are thrusting out the shoot to my nose?'"—Ezekiel 8:16, 17.

Yes, rather than being sanctified, that pagan form of worship put the whole temple in jeopardy. Such practices permeated Judah and contributed to the prevalence of violence and moral degradation in that land. It is similar in Christendom, where practices rooted in the sun worship of Saturnalia come to the fore at Christmas. Significantly, a few years after Ezekiel received that vision, Jerusalem experienced God's judgment—it met destruction at the hands of the Babylonians.—2 Chronicles 36:15-20.

You might have found the description of the young Jesus by a Korean scholar, related in the preceding article, amusing. But the fact is that coming from a person without an accurate knowledge of Christ, the reaction has considerable validity. It might make people who celebrate Christmas think seriously. Why? Because Christmas falls far short of representing Christ correctly. In fact, it obscures his true standing now. Jesus is no longer a babe in a manger.

Over and over, the Bible highlights that Jesus is now the Messiah, the powerful King of God's heavenly Kingdom. (Revelation 11:15) He is ready to put an end to the poverty and misery that some people have not forgotten during the Christmas season as they give to charity.

Frankly, Christmas has benefited neither the lands of Christendom nor other countries, including those in the Orient. Rather, it has diverted attention from the true Christian message about the Kingdom of God and the end of the present wicked system. (Matthew 24:14) We invite you to inquire of Jehovah's Witnesses about how that end will come. And you can learn from them about the lasting blessings that then will follow on earth, under the direction of God's Kingdom and the reigning King, Jesus Christ.—Revelation 21:3, 4.

Finding Real Peace in a Troubled Land

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“The monster of sectarian violence is well out of its cage,” said one report back in 1969. That was when the Troubles, the current period of unrest in Northern Ireland, began to escalate.

SECTARIAN violence and killing became the order of the day as Protestant and Catholic killers, “the wild men on both sides” of the political and religious divide, intensified the struggle for dominance in Ireland. Since then “more than 3,600 people have been killed and thousands maimed in almost 30 years of violence,” reports *The Irish Times*.

This is not a new struggle, of course. It has plagued Ireland for centuries. In recent years its most lethal effects have been felt in Northern Ireland, but people all over Ireland have had their lives blighted by the bitterness and discord it has created.

In that scenario, for over one hundred years now, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been pointing to the real solution to the problems that have plagued this troubled land. That solution is God’s Kingdom in the hands of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 6: 9, 10) At the start of the Troubles

in 1969, there were 876 of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ireland. Now there are well over 4,500, in more than 100 congregations. Here are a few experiences from some who have turned their backs on political and paramilitary activities.

“When I Grow Up, I Am Going to Join the IRA!”

Michael* grew up a Catholic in the Republic of Ireland. At school he was taught something of the history of Ireland and its centuries-old conflict with Britain. As a child, he developed a deep hatred of the English, whom he saw as “oppressors of the Irish people.” When he was ten years old, he told his grandmother, “When I grow up, I am going to join the IRA!” (The Irish Republican Army) “I got a slap on the face that I remember to this day,” he says. He learned later that his grandfather had been in the British army during

* Names have been changed.



The paramilitary struggle has been idealized in murals throughout Northern Ireland

World War I. His grandmother once had to stand in front of his grandfather to prevent members of the IRA from shooting him.

Still, when Michael got older, he wanted to do something to help his fellow Catholics in Northern Ireland. "It seemed to me at the time," he says, "that the only people doing anything to help the Catholic people of Northern Ireland were the IRA." Fired by what he saw as a just cause, he became an IRA member and received training in the use of weapons. Three of his friends were shot dead by Protestant paramilitaries in Northern Ireland.

Michael eventually became disillusioned with the paramilitary struggle, disturbed, for example, by the bitter feuding that was carried on among different paramilitary groups. While in prison for offenses in connection with IRA activity, he prayed to God

to help him to find the real way to lasting peace and justice. Some time later Jehovah's Witnesses called at his home. Old prejudices, however, created barriers. The Witnesses were English. His deep-seated hatred made it difficult for him to listen. "I did not always show that I was glad to see them," he says, "but they persevered in calling and talking with me, and I began to see that God's Kingdom would put an end to all the political and social injustices that I was fighting to eradicate."

—Psalm 37:10, 11; 72:12-14.

The crunch came one evening when Michael met his commanding officer of the IRA, who said, "We have a job for you to do." "I felt I had to make a choice there and then," says Michael, "so I took a deep breath and said, 'I am now one of Jehovah's Witnesses,' even though I wasn't baptized at the time. I just knew that I wanted to be a servant of Jehovah." "You should be put up against a wall and shot," was

the commanding officer's reply. Despite the threat, Michael left the IRA. He drew courage to do this by letting Jehovah's words affect his mind and heart. "In time, my wife and some of my children also dedicated their lives to Jehovah. We now have true peace in our hearts. And we will always be grateful to Jehovah for allowing us to learn the truth and to share in spreading a peaceful message in a troubled land."—Psalm 34:14; 119:165.

Being Neutral Is a Real Protection

"I grew up in the countryside in County Derry in Northern Ireland," says Patrick. "As a child, I knew nothing except the Troubles. That environment obviously affected my outlook and thinking." Patrick developed



extremist views influenced by virulent nationalism and deep anti-British prejudices. He saw religious people on both sides of the political struggle violate fundamental Christian principles as well as principles of basic human decency. As a result, he turned away from religion, eventually becoming an atheist and a confirmed Marxist.—Compare Matthew 15:7-9; 23:27, 28.

“My earliest memories are of the hunger strikes by republican prisoners in the North,” Patrick says. “They affected me deeply. I remember putting up Irish flags and scrawling anti-British graffiti everywhere I could. At just 15 years of age, I was a steward at the funeral of one of the hunger strikers who died in prison.” Like many others who were caught up in the turmoil and confusion of the times, Patrick took part in riots and protest marches in pursuit of what he saw as social justice and equality. He developed close friendships with a number of extreme nationalists, many of whom were imprisoned by the British authorities.

“Then,” Patrick says, “for economic reasons, I ended up spending some time in England. While I was there, the British police arrested one of my friends who was on a bombing mission.” Even though Patrick was still very sympathetic to the nationalist cause, his attitude started to change. He began to see that his prejudices against all English people were fundamentally unfounded. “I also began to realize,” he says, “that paramilitary activity would never really solve the problems and remove the injustices that distressed me. There was too much corruption and other imperfections among those controlling the paramilitary organizations.”—Ecclesiastes 4:1; Jeremiah 10:23.

Patrick eventually returned to Northern Ireland. “When I got back, a friend introduced me to Jehovah’s Witnesses.” From his study of the Bible with the Witnesses, Pat-

rick began to see the real solution to human conflict and discord. He made rapid spiritual progress as the principles of the Bible affected his mind and heart. (Ephesians 4:20-24) “Now,” he says, “instead of plotting to overturn the existing order, I find myself preaching the message of peace from the Bible, even in loyalist areas where I would never have ventured before. In fact, at a time when there were a lot of sectarian killings in Belfast, the only ones who could move freely between loyalist and nationalist areas without armored cars were Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Like other Witnesses in Northern Ireland during this time, he found that being neutral, just as the early Christians were, is a real protection. (John 17:16; 18:36) He concludes: “It is so liberating to see that Jehovah through Jesus Christ will provide true justice and freedom from oppression to all of humanity.”—Isaiah 32:1, 16-18.

“My Guns Were My Only Protection”

“I grew up on the other side of the political and religious divide,” says William. “I was steeped in Protestant prejudices and had an intense hatred of anything Catholic. I would not even go into a Catholic shop if at all possible, and I visited the Republic of Ireland only once. I got involved in various Protestant groups and institutions, like the Orange Order—an organization that is dedicated to the preservation of the Protestant religion and way of life.” When he was 22, William joined the Ulster Defense Regiment, a part of the British army recruited locally. Most of its members were Protestant. He was quite willing to kill to defend his heritage. “I owned several guns and would not have hesitated to use them if necessary. I kept one under my pillow at night.”

But there came a turning point. “I began to realize that Jehovah’s Witnesses had something special when I worked alongside one of them renovating an old house. This

fellow worker had a profound effect on me. As we built the house together, I was able to ask him many questions that bothered me about the Troubles, religion, and God. His simple, clear answers helped me to see Jehovah's Witnesses for what they are—a united, nonviolent and politically neutral body of people, marked by love for God and neighbor.”—John 13:34, 35.

Within four months of starting a Bible study, William resigned from all the religious and political institutions he was associated with. “This was a big step for me,” he remembers, “because I had to relinquish many cherished, long-standing traditions.” His biggest test was yet to come, however. “Because of the situation in Northern Ireland, I felt that my guns were my only protection. I was seen as a ‘legitimate target’ by IRA paramilitaries. So it was very difficult to give up these weapons.” Gradually, though, Bible counsel, such as that found at Isaiah 2: 2-4, changed his outlook. He saw that in the end Jehovah was his real protection, just as He was for the first-century Christians. William then handed in his guns.

“One of the things that I am really glad about,” says William, “is that I now have deep and abiding friendships with people whom I would formerly have viewed as mortal enemies. Also, it is a real source of joy to be able to take the Bible’s message of hope into what were formerly ‘no-go areas’ for me. Reflecting on what the truth has done for me and my family makes me eternally grateful to Jehovah and his organization.”

“Things Just Did Not Make Any Sense”

Robert and Teresa come from totally different backgrounds. “I am from a staunchly Protestant family,” says Robert. “Some of my relatives have been involved in paramilitary activities. I myself joined the Ulster Defense

Regiment of the British army at 19 years of age. Much of that time was spent patrolling areas where Teresa lived. One night I was reassigned from a regular patrol to other duties. That night the Land-Rover in which I would have been traveling was blown up. Two soldiers were killed and two others injured.”

Robert began to wonder about the meaning of life. “I always believed in God, but when I looked around Northern Ireland, things just did not make any sense to me. I actually began to pray to God. I asked God if he really existed, and if he did, to show me the right way to live my life. I remember saying to God that there must be one true religion somewhere!” Just a few days later, one of Jehovah’s Witnesses called on Robert and left some literature. When he came home late from a patrol that night, Robert started reading it and finished at five o’clock in the morning. “I quickly recognized the ring of truth,” he says, “and I could see that everything was coming straight from the Bible.” (2 Timothy 3:16) He began to have a Bible study, and in a short time, he dedicated his life to God.

“The Witnesses Always Directed Us to the Bible”

Teresa, on the other hand, was from a Catholic background, with deep nationalist sympathies. “As a young girl, I joined Sinn Féin.”* Teresa admits: “This got me involved in the support of paramilitary activity. I helped to raise funds for the military struggle. I kept the IRA informed about what went on in my area. I also got involved in riots and stone-throwing attacks on police and army patrols.”

When some of Teresa’s family began to study the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses, her curiosity was aroused too. The power of

* A political party closely associated with the Provisional IRA.



God's Word influenced her greatly. "The Witnesses always directed us to the Bible to get answers to questions," she says. "The promise at Daniel 2:44 was a real eye-opener. I saw that God's Kingdom was the real means for removing all the injustices that I was struggling against." She felt a growing revulsion at some of the atrocities perpetrated by paramilitaries. Teresa could not understand, for example, why anyone with feelings of compassion and decency would cheer at the news of a terrorist action where soldiers or others were killed or maimed and families were devastated by grief and anguish. She too responded to the truth in the Bible and allowed God's principles to adjust her thinking. She dedicated her life to God and soon was baptized.—Proverbs 2:1-5, 10-14.

Teresa met Robert when they both attended meetings at one of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Northern Ireland. She comments: "When I first met Robert, I found it difficult to believe that I was talking so calmly and peacefully with

someone whom I, until recently, would have considered part of the British war machine. God's Word had certainly helped me to remove deep-seated hatreds and prejudices." She and Robert found that instead of being divided by hatreds and prejudices springing from their different traditions and cultures, they now had many things in common. The most powerful of these was a love for Jehovah God. They got married. Now they work together in bringing God's message of true peace to people of all backgrounds and beliefs in this troubled land.

Others in Ireland have had similar experiences. By listening to and accepting the teachings of the inspired Word of God, they have escaped from the 'philosophies and empty deceptions' of men. (Colossians 2:8) Now they put their full confidence in God's promises recorded in the Bible. They are happy to share with any who will listen their hope of a peaceful future—one that will be totally free from sectarian and other kinds of violence.—Isaiah 11:6-9.

MAY WE NEVER SHRINK BACK TO DESTRUCTION!

"We are not the sort that shrink back to destruction."

—HEBREWS 10:39.

THE apostles must have been shocked when their beloved Master, Jesus, told them that they would all scatter and abandon him. How could such a thing be—in this, his hour of greatest need? Peter insisted: "Even if all the others are stumbled, yet I will not be." In truth, Peter was a brave, bold man. But when Jesus was betrayed and arrested, the apostles—including Peter—scattered. Later, while Jesus was being interrogated in the house of High Priest Caiaphas, Peter lingered anxiously in the courtyard. As the cold night wore on, Peter likely came to fear that Jesus and anyone associated with him might be executed. When some bystanders recognized Peter as one of Jesus' close associates, panic seized him. Three times he disavowed his connection with Jesus. Peter denied even knowing him!—Mark 14:27-31, 66-72.

² That was a low point in Peter's life, a moment he no doubt regretted for the rest of his days. But did Peter's course that night make him a coward? Did it make him one of "the sort" that the apostle Paul later described when he wrote: "Now we are not the sort that shrink back to destruction"? (Hebrews 10:39) Most of us would likely agree

1. What circumstances led to the apostle Peter's giving in to fear?
2. (a) Why would Peter's fearful course on the night of Jesus' arrest not make him of "the sort that shrink back"? (b) What should be our determination?

that Paul's words do not apply to Peter. Why? Because Peter's fear was temporary, a brief lapse in a life marked by outstanding courage and faith. Similarly, many of us have moments in our past that we recall with some degree of shame, moments when fear caught us by surprise and kept us from standing as boldly for the truth as we would have liked. (Compare Romans 7:21-23.) We can be assured that such momentary lapses do not make us the sort that shrink back to destruction. Still, we need to be determined never to become of that sort. Why? And how can we avoid becoming such a person?

What It Means to Shrink Back to Destruction

³ When Paul wrote of "the sort that shrink back," he did not mean those who may suffer a momentary lapse of courage. Paul surely knew of Peter's experience and of other similar cases. Elijah, a bold and outspoken prophet, once gave in to fear and fled for his life because of a death threat from wicked Queen Jezebel. (1 Kings 19:1-4) The prophet Jonah had a more serious bout with fear. Jehovah assigned him to travel to the notoriously violent, wicked city of Nineveh. Jonah promptly boarded a boat headed for Tarshish—2,200 miles in the opposite direction! (Jonah 1:1-3) Yet, neither of these faithful prophets nor the apostle Pe-

3. How did the prophets Elijah and Jonah give in to fear?



Peter's lapse into fear did not make him of "the sort that shrink back to destruction"



ter could rightly be described as the sort that shrink back. Why not?

⁴Note the full phrase that Paul used: "Now we are not the sort that shrink back to *destruction*." What did he mean by "destruction"? The Greek word he used refers at times to eternal destruction. This definition fits the context. Paul had just warned: "If we practice sin willfully after having received the accurate knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice for sins left, but there is a certain fearful expectation of judgment and there is a fiery jealousy that is going to consume those in opposition." —Hebrews 10:26, 27.

⁵So when Paul said to his fellow believers, "We are not the sort that shrink back to destruction," he meant that he and his faithful Christian readers were determined

never to turn away from Jehovah and stop serving him. To do so could lead only to eternal destruction. Judas Iscariot was one who shrank back to such destruction, as did other enemies of the truth who willfully worked against Jehovah's spirit. (John 17: 12; 2 Thessalonians 2:3) Such individuals are among "the cowards" who suffer eternal destruction in the symbolic lake of fire. (Revelation 21:8) No, we do not ever want to be of that sort!

⁶Satan the Devil wants us to shrink back to destruction. A master of "crafty acts," he knows that such a ruinous course often starts in small ways. (Ephesians 6:11, footnote) If direct persecution fails to achieve his ends, he seeks to erode the faith of true Christians through subtler means. He wants to see bold, zealous Witnesses of Jehovah silenced. Let us see what tactics he used against the Hebrew Christians to whom Paul wrote.

4, 5. (a) How does the context help us to determine what Paul meant by "destruction" at Hebrews 10:39? (b) What did Paul mean when he said: "We are not the sort that shrink back to destruction"?

6. What course does Satan the Devil want us to take?

How Christians Were Pressured to Shrink Back

⁷ The evidence indicates that Paul wrote his letter to the Hebrews about 61 C.E. The congregation in Jerusalem had a tumultuous history. After the death of Jesus, a wave of vicious persecution struck, forcing many Christians in the city to scatter. A period of peace ensued, however, allowing the number of Christians to multiply. (Acts 8:4; 9:31) As the years passed, other persecutions and hardships came and went. It seems that by the time Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews, the congregation was once again enjoying a period of comparative peace. Still, there were pressures. Nearly three decades had passed since Jesus had foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. There were likely some who felt that the end had delayed beyond reason and might not come in their lifetime. Others, especially those newer in the faith, had not yet been tested by severe persecution and knew little of the need for endurance under trial. (Hebrews 12:4) Satan surely sought to take advantage of such circumstances. What “crafty acts” did he use?

⁸ The Jewish community in Jerusalem and Judea viewed the fledgling Christian congregation with contempt. Judging from the content of Paul’s letter, we get some idea of the taunts that the arrogant Jewish religious leaders and their followers directed at the Christians. They may, in effect, have said: ‘We have the great temple in Jerusalem, standing for centuries! We have a noble high priest officiating there, along with his underpriests. Sacrifices are offered daily. We have the Law, transmitted by an-

gels to Moses and established with great signs upon Mount Sinai. This upstart sect, these Christians, who have apostatized from Judaism, they have none of these things!’ Did such scorn find its mark? Some Hebrew Christians were evidently troubled by the attacks. Paul’s letter came to their aid at just the right time.

Why They Should Never Shrink Back to Destruction

⁹ Let us examine two reasons that Paul gave his brothers and sisters there in Judea for never shrinking back to destruction. The first—the superiority of the Christian system of worship—pervades the letter to the Hebrews. Throughout his letter, Paul developed this theme. The temple in Jerusalem was merely a copy of a far greater reality, Jehovah’s spiritual temple, a building “not made with hands.” (Hebrews 9:11) Those Christians had the privilege of serving in that spiritual arrangement for pure worship. They served under a better covenant, the long-promised new covenant, which had a Mediator superior to Moses, Jesus Christ. —Jeremiah 31:31-34.

¹⁰ Those Christians also had a far better High Priest, Jesus Christ. No, he had not descended from Aaron. Rather, he was a High Priest “according to the manner of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4) Melchizedek, whose lineage was unrecorded, was king of ancient Salem as well as its high priest. He thus made a fitting prophetic type of Jesus, whose priesthood depended, not on any imperfect human ancestry, but on something

9. (a) What theme pervades the letter to the Hebrews? (b) In what sense did Christians serve in a better temple than the one in Jerusalem?

10, 11. (a) Why did Jesus’ lineage not disqualify his serving as High Priest in the spiritual temple? (b) In what ways was Jesus a High Priest superior to the one serving at the temple in Jerusalem?

7. (a) What was the history of the congregation in Jerusalem? (b) What spiritual circumstances existed in the case of some of Paul’s readers?

8. What attitude did many Jews have toward the fledgling Christian congregation?

far greater—Jehovah God's own oath. Like Melchizedek, Jesus serves not only as High Priest but also as King, one who will never die.—Hebrews 7:11-21.

¹¹ Furthermore, unlike the high priest at the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus did not have to offer sacrifices year after year. His sacrifice was his own perfect life, which he offered once for all time. (Hebrews 7:27) All those sacrifices offered at the temple were only shadows, pictures of what Jesus offered. His perfect sacrifice provided for real forgiveness of the sins of all who exercised faith. Heartwarming, too, are Paul's comments showing that this High Priest is the same unchanging Jesus whom the Christians in Jerusalem had known. He was humble, kind, and one who can "sympathize with our weaknesses." (Hebrews 4:15; 13:8) Those anointed Christians had the prospect of serving as Christ's underpriests! How could they even think of shrinking back to "the weak and beggarly" things of corrupt Judaism?—Galatians 4:9.

¹² As if that were not enough, Paul gave the Hebrews a second reason never to shrink back to destruction—their own record of endurance. He wrote: "Keep on remembering the former days in which, after you were enlightened, you endured a great contest under sufferings." Paul reminded them that they had been "exposed as in a theater" to reproaches and tribulations. Some had suffered imprisonment; others had sympathized with and supported those in prison. Yes, they had shown exemplary faith and perseverance. (Hebrews 10:32-34) Yet, why did Paul ask them to "keep on remembering" such painful experiences? Would that not prove discouraging?

12, 13. (a) What second reason never to shrink back did Paul provide? (b) Why would their past record of endurance encourage the Hebrew Christians never to shrink back to destruction?

¹³ On the contrary, "remembering the former days" would remind the Hebrews of how Jehovah had sustained them under trial. With his help, they had already resisted many of Satan's attacks. Paul wrote: "God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name." (Hebrews 6:10) Yes, Jehovah remembered all their faithful works, storing them in his limitless memory. We are reminded of Jesus' exhortation to store up treasures in heaven. No thief can steal these treasures; no moth or rust can consume them. (Matthew 6:19-21) In fact, these treasures can be destroyed only if a Christian shrinks back to destruction. That would squander any treasures he had stored up in heaven. What a powerful reason Paul gave the Hebrew Christians for never pursuing such a course! Why waste all their years of faithful service? It would be right and far better to keep on enduring.

Why We Should Never Shrink Back to Destruction

¹⁴ True Christians today have equally powerful reasons for not shrinking back. First, let us remember what a blessing we have in the pure form of worship that Jehovah has given us. Like the first-century Christians, we live at a time when members of the more popular religions sneer at us and mock us, pointing proudly to their impressive religious edifices and the antiquity of their traditions. Jehovah assures us, though, that he approves of our form of worship. In fact, we enjoy blessings today that the first-century Christians did not have. You might wonder, 'How can that be?' After all, they lived when the spiritual temple came into operation. Christ became its High Priest upon his baptism in 29 C.E. Some of

14. What challenges do we face that are similar to those faced by the first-century Christians?

them had seen the miracle-working Son of God. Even after his death, there were more miracles. As foretold, though, such gifts eventually ceased.—1 Corinthians 13:8.

¹⁵ However, we live during a significant fulfillment of the extensive temple prophecy of Ezekiel chapters 40-48.* Thus, we have seen the restoration of God's arrangement for pure worship. That spiritual temple has been cleansed of all forms of religious pollution and idolatry. (Ezekiel 43:9; Malachi 3:1-5) Think of the advantages that this cleansing has given us.

¹⁶ During the first century, the future looked dark for the organized Christian congregation. Jesus had foretold that it would be as if a newly planted wheat field were oversown with weeds, making the wheat virtually indistinguishable from the weeds. (Matthew 13:24-30) And so it was. By the end of the first century, when the aged apos-

* See *The Watchtower*, March 1, 1999, pages 8-23.

15. True Christians today live during the fulfillment of what prophecy, and what does that mean for us?

16. What discouraging trend did first-century Christians face?

Do You Remember?

- ☐ What does it mean to shrink back to destruction?
- ☐ What pressures were bearing down on the Hebrew Christians to whom Paul wrote?
- ☐ What reasons for not shrinking back to destruction did Paul give the Hebrews?
- ☐ What reasons do we have for being resolved never to shrink back to destruction?

tle John was acting as the final restraint against corruption, apostasy was already flourishing. (2 Thessalonians 2:6; 1 John 2:18) Not long after the death of the apostles, a separate clergy class arose, oppressing the flock and wearing distinctive garb. Apostasy spread like gangrene. How discouraging for faithful Christians! They saw the newly established arrangement for pure worship become overwhelmed by a corrupted form. This developed less than a century after Christ founded the congregation.

¹⁷ Now, consider a contrast. Today, pure worship has already lasted longer than the period until the apostles died. From the time of the publication of the first issue of this journal back in 1879, Jehovah has blessed us with increasingly purified worship. Jehovah and Christ Jesus entered the spiritual temple in 1918 for the purpose of cleansing it. (Malachi 3:1-5) Since 1919, the arrangement for worshiping Jehovah God has been progressively refined. Our understanding of Bible prophecies and principles has become clearer. (Proverbs 4:18) To whom does the credit go? Not to mere imperfect humans. Only Jehovah, with his Son as Head of the congregation, could protect His people from corruption during these corrupt times. Let us never fail, then, to thank Jehovah for allowing us to take part in pure worship today. And let us be firmly resolved never to shrink back to destruction!

¹⁸ Like those Hebrew Christians, we have a second reason for rejecting a cowardly, shrinking course—our own record of endurance. Whether we have begun to serve Jehovah in recent years or have been doing so faithfully for decades, we have built up a

17. In what sense has the modern-day Christian congregation outlasted its first-century counterpart?

18. What reason do we have for never shrinking back to destruction?

record of Christian works. Many of us have suffered persecution, be it imprisonment, ban, brutality, or loss of property. Many more have faced family opposition, scorn, ridicule, and indifference. All of us have endured, continuing in our faithful service to Jehovah despite life's challenges and tests. By doing so, we have built up a record of perseverance that Jehovah will not forget, a storehouse of treasures in heaven. Surely, then, this is no time to shrink back to the corrupt old system we left behind! Why ren-

der all our hard work worthless? Especially is this true today, when only "a very little while" is left before the end.—Hebrews 10:37.

¹⁹ Yes, let us be resolved that "we are not the sort that shrink back to destruction"! Let us, rather, be "the sort that have faith." (Hebrews 10:39) How can we make sure that we fit that description, and how can we help fellow Christians to do the same? Our next article will consider this matter.

19. What will be discussed in our next article?

LET US BE THE SORT THAT HAVE FAITH

"We are . . . the sort that have faith to the preserving alive of the soul."

—HEBREWS 10:39.

THE next time you are in a Kingdom Hall full of worshipers of Jehovah, pause to look at those around you. Think of the many ways in which they show faith. You may see elderly ones who have served God for decades, youths who daily stand up to peer pressure, and parents who work hard to raise God-fearing children. There are congregation elders and ministerial servants, who shoulder many responsibilities. Yes, you may see spiritual brothers and sisters of every age who surmount all manner of obstacles in order to serve Jehovah. How precious the faith of each one! —1 Peter 1:7.

1. Why can it be said that the faith of each loyal servant of Jehovah is precious?

² Few imperfect humans, if any, have understood the importance of faith better than did the apostle Paul. In fact, he noted that genuine faith leads to "the preserving alive of the soul." (Hebrews 10:39) Paul knew, though, that faith is subject to attack and erosion in this faithless world. He was deeply concerned about the Hebrew Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, who were struggling to preserve their faith. As we look at parts of Hebrews chapters 10 and 11, let us take note of the methods that Paul used to build up their faith. In the process, we will see how we can build stronger faith in ourselves and in those around us.

2. Why is Paul's counsel in Hebrews chapters 10 and 11 beneficial to us today?

Express Confidence in One Another

³ The first thing we might note is Paul's positive attitude toward his audience. He wrote: "Now we are not the sort that shrink back to destruction, but the sort that have faith to the preserving alive of the soul." (Hebrews 10:39) Paul thought the best, not the worst, of his faithful fellow Christians. Notice, too, that he used the expression "we." Paul was a righteous man. Yet, he did not speak down to his audience, as if he were on a lofty plane of righteousness far above them. (Compare Ecclesiastes 7:16.) Rather, he included himself with them. He expressed heartfelt confidence that he and his faithful Christian readers would all face the daunting obstacles looming before them, that they would courageously refuse to shrink back to destruction, and that they would prove to be of the sort that have faith.

⁴ How could Paul have such confidence? Was he blind to the faults of the Hebrew Christians? On the contrary, he offered them specific counsel to help them overcome their spiritual shortcomings. (Hebrews 3:12; 5:12-14; 6:4-6; 10:26, 27; 12:5) Still, Paul had at least two good reasons for having confidence in his brothers. (1) As an imitator of Jehovah, Paul endeavored to see God's people as Jehovah sees them. That was not merely in terms of their faults but in terms of their good qualities and their potential for choosing to do good in the future. (Psalm 130:3; Ephesians 5:1) (2) Paul had implicit faith in the power of the holy spirit. He knew that no obstacles, no human frailties, could prevent Jehovah from imparting "power beyond what is normal" to any Christian endeavoring to serve Him faithfully. (2 Corinthians 4:7; Philippians 4:13) So Paul's

3. How do Paul's words found at Hebrews 10:39 show that he had confidence in his brothers and sisters in the faith?

4. For what reasons did Paul have confidence in his fellow believers?

confidence in his brothers and sisters was not misplaced, unrealistic, or blindly optimistic. It was solidly based and Scripturally founded.

⁵ Surely, the confidence Paul displayed proved infectious. It must have meant a great deal to the congregations in Jerusalem and Judea to have Paul speak so encouragingly to them. In the face of the withering scorn and haughty indifference of their Jewish opposers, the Hebrew Christians were helped by such expressions to resolve in their hearts to be the sort that have faith. Can we do the same for one another today? It is all too easy to see in others only a long list of faults and personality quirks. (Matthew 7:1-5) Yet, we can help one another far more if we take note of and value the unique faith that each one possesses. With such encouragement, faith is more likely to grow. —Romans 1:11, 12.

Fitting Use of God's Word

⁶ Paul also built faith in his fellow believers by his skillful use of the Scriptures. For example, he wrote: "'But my righteous one will live by reason of faith,' and, 'if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.'" (Hebrews 10:38) Paul was here quoting from the prophet Habakkuk.* These words were likely familiar to Paul's readers, Hebrew Christians to whom the prophetic books were well-known. Considering

* Paul quoted the *Septuagint* rendering of Habakkuk 2:4, which includes the phrase "if anyone shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." This statement does not appear in any extant Hebrew manuscript. Some have suggested that the *Septuagint* was based on earlier Hebrew manuscripts that no longer exist. In any event, Paul included it here under the influence of God's holy spirit. It therefore has divine authorization.

5. How can we imitate Paul's confidence, and with what likely result?

6. From what source was Paul quoting when he wrote the words recorded at Hebrews 10:38?

his goal—to strengthen the faith of Christians in and near Jerusalem around the year 61 C.E.—the example of Habakkuk was an apt choice. Why?

⁷ Habakkuk evidently wrote his book just over two decades before the destruction of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. In vision, the prophet saw the Chaldeans (or, Babylonians), a “nation bitter and impetuous,” swooping down on Judah and destroying Jerusalem, swallowing up peoples and nations in the process. (Habakkuk 1:5-11) But such a calamity had been foretold since Isaiah’s day, over a century earlier. In Habakkuk’s time, Jehoiakim succeeded good King Josiah, and wickedness again flourished in Judah. Jehoiakim persecuted and even murdered those speaking in Jehovah’s name. (2 Chronicles 36:5; Jeremiah 22:17; 26:20-24) It is no wonder that the anguished prophet Habakkuk cried out: “How long, O Jehovah?”—Habakkuk 1:2.

⁸ Habakkuk did not know how close the destruction of Jerusalem was. Similarly, the first-century Christians did not know when the Jewish system of things would end. Nor do we today know the “day and hour” when Jehovah’s judgment will come against this wicked system. (Matthew 24:36) Let us note, then, Jehovah’s twofold answer to Habakkuk. First, he assured the prophet that the end would come right on time. “It will not be late,” God said, even though from a human standpoint, it might appear to delay. (Habakkuk 2:3) Second, Jehovah reminded Habakkuk: “As for the righteous one, by his faithfulness he will keep living.” (Habakkuk 2:4) What beautiful, simple truths! What matters most is, not when the end comes, but whether we continue to live a life of faith.

7. When did Habakkuk record his prophecy, and what were the conditions in Judah at that time?

8. Why would Habakkuk’s example prove helpful to Christians in the first century and today?

⁹ When Jerusalem was sacked in 607 B.C.E., Jeremiah, his secretary Baruch, Ebed-melech, and the loyal Rechabites saw the truth of Jehovah’s promise to Habakkuk. They ‘kept living’ by escaping the terrible destruction of Jerusalem. Why? Jehovah rewarded their faithfulness. (Jeremiah 35:1-19; 39:15-18; 43:4-7; 45:1-5) Similarly, the first-century Hebrew Christians must have responded well to Paul’s counsel, for when the Roman armies attacked Jerusalem in 66 C.E. and then inexplicably withdrew, those Christians faithfully heeded Jesus’ warning to flee. (Luke 21:20, 21) They kept living because of their faithfulness. Likewise, we will keep living if we are found faithful when the end comes. What a vital reason for strengthening our faith now!

Bringing Examples of Faith to Life

¹⁰ Paul also built faith by powerful use of examples. As you read Hebrews chapter 11, note how he brings the examples of Bible characters to life. He says, for instance, that Moses “continued steadfast *as seeing* the One who is invisible.” (Hebrews 11:27) In

9. How did obedient servants of Jehovah keep living by their faithfulness (a) in 607 B.C.E.? (b) after 66 C.E.? (c) Why is it vital that we strengthen our faith?

10. How did Paul describe Moses’ faith, and how might we imitate Moses in this regard?

In Our Next Issue

Serving With the Watchman

The “Polish Brethren”—Why Were They Persecuted?

We Need Jehovah’s Organization

other words, Jehovah was so real to Moses that it was as if he could see the invisible God. Could the same be said of us? It is easy to talk about a relationship with Jehovah, but to build and strengthen that relationship requires work. That is work we need to do! Is Jehovah so real to us that we take him into consideration when making decisions, including seemingly minor ones? Faith of that kind will help us to endure even the worst opposition.

¹¹ Consider, too, the faith of Enoch. The opposition he faced is difficult for us to imagine. Enoch had to deliver a stinging message of judgment against the wicked people living then. (Jude 14, 15) The persecution that threatened this faithful man was evidently so vicious, so violent, that Jehovah “transferred him,” taking him from the living state to the sleep of death before the enemies could lay hold of him. So Enoch did not get to see the fulfillment of the prophecy he uttered. However, he received a gift that was, in some respects, even better.—Hebrews 11:5; Genesis 5:22-24.

¹² Paul explains: “Before his transference [Enoch] had the witness that he had pleased God well.” (Hebrews 11:5) What did this

11, 12. (a) Under what conditions may Enoch’s faith have been tested? (b) What encouraging reward did Enoch receive?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ How did Paul express confidence in the Hebrew Christians, and what can we learn from this?
- ☐ Why was Paul’s reference to the prophet Habakkuk so fitting?
- ☐ What Scriptural examples of faith did Paul bring to life?
- ☐ What practical means of building faith did Paul recommend?

mean? Before he went into the sleep of death, Enoch may have had a vision of some kind, perhaps of the earthly Paradise in which he will awaken one day soon. In any case, Jehovah let Enoch know that He was well pleased by his faithful course. Enoch had made Jehovah’s heart rejoice. (Compare Proverbs 27:11.) Thinking of Enoch’s life is touching, is it not? Would you like to live such a life of faith? Then ponder over such examples; see them as real people. Be determined to live by faith, day by day. Remember, too, that the sort that have faith do not serve Jehovah on the basis of a date or deadline when God will fulfill all his promises. Rather, we are resolved to serve Jehovah forever! Doing so means the very best way of life in this system of things and in the next.

How to Grow Stronger in the Faith

¹³ Paul showed the Hebrew Christians a number of practical ways in which they could strengthen their faith. Let us consider just two. We likely are familiar with his exhortation at Hebrews 10:24, 25, urging us to gather regularly at our Christian meetings. Remember, though, that Paul’s inspired words there do not imply that we are to be mere passive observers at such meetings. Rather, Paul describes meetings as opportunities to get to know one another, to move one another to serve God more fully, and to encourage one another. We are there to give, not just to receive. That helps to make our meetings joyous occasions.—Acts 20:35.

¹⁴ Primarily, though, we attend Christian meetings to worship Jehovah God. We do so by joining in prayer and song, by listening intently, and by offering “the fruit of lips”—expressions of praise to Jehovah in our comments and parts on the meeting. (He-

13, 14. (a) How might Paul’s words recorded at Hebrews 10:24, 25 help us to make our meetings joyous occasions? (b) What is the primary reason for Christian meetings?

brews 13:15) If we keep those goals in mind and act on them at every meeting, our faith will without fail be built up each time.

¹⁵ Another way to build faith is through the preaching work. Paul wrote: "Let us hold fast the public declaration of our hope without wavering, for he is faithful that promised." (Hebrews 10:23) You might urge others to hold fast to something when they seem in danger of letting go. Satan was certainly pressuring those Hebrew Christians to let go of their ministry, and he is pressuring God's people today as well. In the face of such pressure, what should we do? Consider what Paul did.

¹⁶ To the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul wrote: "After we had first suffered and been insolently treated (just as you know) in Philippi, we mustered up boldness by means of our God to speak to you the good news of God with a great deal of struggling." (1 Thessalonians 2:2) How had Paul and his companions been "insolently treated" in Philippi? According to some scholars, the Greek word used by Paul expresses insulting, shameful, or outrageous treatment. The Philippian authorities had beaten them with rods, thrown them into prison, and confined them in stocks. (Acts 16:16-24) How did that painful experience affect Paul? Did ones in the next city on his missionary tour, Thessalonica, find Paul shrinking back in fear? No, he "mustered up boldness." He conquered fear and continued to preach boldly.

¹⁷ From where did Paul's boldness come? From within? No, he said that he mustered up boldness "by means of our God." A ref-

15. Why did Paul urge the Hebrew Christians to hold fast to their ministry, and why is the same counsel appropriate today?

16, 17. (a) How did Paul acquire boldness for the ministry? (b) What measures should we take if we find ourselves intimidated by some aspect of our Christian ministry?



After his painful experience in Philippi, Paul mustered up boldness to continue preaching

erence work for Bible translators says that this statement may be rendered "God took fear out of our hearts." So if you do not feel particularly bold about your ministry, or if some aspect of it in particular strikes you as intimidating, why not appeal to Jehovah to do the same for you? Ask him to take the fear from your heart. Ask him to help you muster up boldness for the work. In addition, take some other practical measures. For example, arrange to work with someone who is adept at the form of witnessing that concerns you. It may involve business territory, street witnessing, informal preaching, or telephone witnessing. Perhaps your partner will be willing to take the lead at first. If so, observe and learn. But then muster up the boldness to give it a try.



**Can you muster up boldness
to try various forms of witnessing?**

¹⁸ If you do muster up boldness, think of what may result. When you persist and do not let yourself become discouraged, you are likely to have good experiences in sharing the truth, experiences that you might otherwise have missed. (See page 25.) You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have pleased Jehovah by doing something that is difficult for you. You will experience his blessing and help in overcoming your fears. Your faith will be stronger. Really, you cannot work at building faith in others without building your own faith at the same time.—Jude 20, 21.

¹⁹ May you continue to strengthen your faith and the faith of those around you. You can do so by building yourself and others up through adept use of God's Word, by studying Bible examples of faith and bringing them to life, by preparing for and participating in Christian meetings, and by holding fast to the precious privilege of the public ministry. As you do these things, be assured that you are, indeed, one of "the sort that have faith." Remember, too, that those of this sort have a precious reward. They are "the sort that have faith to the preserving alive of the soul."* May your faith continue to grow, and may Jehovah God preserve you alive forever!

* The yeartext of Jehovah's Witnesses for the year 2000 will be: "We are not the sort that shrink back . . . but the sort that have faith." —Hebrews 10:39.

18. What blessings may we experience if we muster up boldness in our ministry?

19. What precious reward is in store for "the sort that have faith"?

They Mustered Up Boldness

IT IS not always easy to muster up boldness in order to preach. In fact, the apostle Paul said that on one occasion, he did so "with a great deal of struggling." (1 Thessalonians 2:2) Is the 'struggle' to preach worth the effort? There is no guarantee of spectacular experiences, but God's people are often glad that they mustered up boldness. Consider some examples.

An eight-year-old girl named Tara listened intently as her teacher told the class that during World War II, Jewish concentration camp inmates had to wear a yellow Star of David for identification. Tara wondered if she should speak up. "I prayed with my eyes open," she recalls. Then she raised her hand and said that Jehovah's Witnesses were in those camps too, and they had to wear a purple triangle. The teacher was interested and thanked her. Tara's



Tara

comment opened the way for further discussions with the teacher, who later even showed her entire class the video *Jehovah's Witnesses Stand Firm Against Nazi Assault*.

In Guinea, West Africa, a young unbaptized publisher named Irène wanted to make progress in her ministry. The missionary who studied the Bible with her encouraged her to try placing the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines with fellow students at school. Irène was hesitant because her classmates had been unresponsive. However, moved by the missionary's encouragement, Irène decided to approach first the student who had seemed the most opposed. To Irène's surprise, the girl was responsive and eagerly accepted the magazines. Other students followed suit. Irène placed more magazines that month than she had in the preceding five combined.

In Trinidad an elder felt quite hesitant about approaching the principal of a school to show her the educational value of the *Awake!* magazine. Nonetheless,

he mustered up the boldness. He says: "I prayed as I entered the compound. I could not believe it when the principal was extraordinarily pleasant." She accepted the *Awake!* magazine on "What Hope for Today's Youths?" and even agreed to use it in teaching class. Since then, she has accepted 40 magazines covering various issues.

As a youth, Vaughn always found preaching difficult. "I would get nervous, my palms would sweat, and I would speak fast—I couldn't slow down." Nevertheless, he became a full-time minister. Still, it was not always easy for him to speak up. Once, after a discouraging day of job hunting, he wanted to witness to someone on the train, "so at least some good could come out of a bad day." But he felt intimidated by the important-looking businessmen on the subway train.



Vaughn

Finally, he mustered up boldness to speak to an elderly man next to him. A long conversation resulted. "You have such good questions for a young person," the businessman said, asking, "Are you a theologian?" Vaughn replied, "No, I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses." "Ah," the man smiled. "Now I understand."

All these Witnesses—and countless others—are glad that they mustered up boldness to preach. Will you do the same?

Gilead Sends Missionaries “to the Most Distant Part of the Earth”

FOR over half a century now, the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead has been sending out missionaries. On September 11, 1999, Gilead's 107th class graduated. It consisted of 48 students from 11 coun-

tries, and these were assigned to serve in 24 different lands. They will join thousands of other missionaries, who have played a significant role in fulfilling Jesus' last words before ascending to heaven. He foretold that



107th Graduating Class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead

In the list below, rows are numbered from front to back, and names are listed from left to right in each row.
 1. Peralta, C.; Hollenbeck, B.; Shaw, R.; Hassan, N.; Martin, D.; Hutchinson, A. 2. Edwards, L.; Vezer, T.; Ceruti, Q.; Entzminger, G.; D'Aloise, L.; Baglieri, L. 3. Knight, P.; Krause, A.; Kasuske, D.; Rose, M.; Friedl, K.; Nieto, R. 4. Rose, E.; Backus, T.; Talley, S.; Humbert, D.; Bernhardt, A.; Peralta, M. 5. D'Aloise, A.; Humbert, D.; Dunn, H.; Gatling, G.; Shaw, J.; Ceruti, M. 6. Baglieri, S.; Krause, J.; Hollenbeck, T.; Martin, M.; Bernhardt, J.; Hutchinson, M. 7. Backus, A.; Dunn, O.; Gatling, T.; Vezer, R.; Knight, P.; Hassan, O. 8. Nieto, C.; Talley, M.; Friedl, D.; Kasuske, A.; Edwards, J.; Entzminger, M.

his disciples would “be witnesses of [him] . . . to the most distant part of the earth.” —Acts 1:8.

The graduation program, originating at the Watchtower Educational Center in Patterson, New York, proved to be a grand occasion in beautiful surroundings. The graduating students were very happy to have relatives, close friends, and guests in attendance. Including those who listened and observed by audio and video connections to the Brooklyn and Wallkill complexes, the total attendance was 4,992.

Serve Jehovah and Neighbor Faithfully

“Who Is on Jehovah’s Side?” That was the theme of the opening remarks by Carey Barber, a member of the Governing Body and chairman of the graduation program. He explained that this was the issue facing the Israelites in Moses’ day. Graduating students and those in attendance were reminded that many of the Israelites lost their lives in the wilderness because they did not loyally remain on Jehovah’s side. After falling victim to idolatry, they “sat down to eat and drink. Then they got up to have a good time.” (Exodus 32:1-29) Jesus warned Christians of the same danger: “Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day be instantly upon you.” —Luke 21:34-36.

The next speaker, Gene Smalley, of the Writing Department, asked the graduating students: “Will You Prove to Be a Paregoric?” He explained that the Greek word *pa-re-go-ri’a* was adopted into English as the name for a medicinal mixture that alleviates discomfort. However, the apostle Paul used this expressive Greek word at Colossians 4:11 to describe his fellow workers. In

the *New World Translation*, this word is translated “a strengthening aid.”

In their assignments the graduating missionaries can be modern-day paregorics in a very down-to-earth way by humbly becoming a strengthening aid to the local brothers and sisters and by reflecting a cooperative and loving spirit in association with fellow missionaries.

Daniel Sydlik, a member of the Governing Body, spoke next on the subject “The Golden Rule to Live By.” He explained that the exalted principle set forth by Jesus at Matthew 7:12, “all things . . . that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them,” involves doing positive things for others, not simply refraining from doing harm.

To do this successfully, three things are required: a seeing eye, a sympathetic heart, and a helping hand. Summing up, he said: “If we feel a desire to help, we should help at once. We have to go out of the way to do for others what we would like them to do for us.” Especially would this be true of missionaries going to other lands to help people practice true Christianity.

Instructors Give Warm Reminders

Gilead instructor Karl Adams encouraged the graduating missionaries to “Keep On Growing.” In what respects? First, in knowledge and in the ability to use it well. At Gilead, the students had learned how to do research to get the background and setting for Bible accounts. They had been encouraged to consider how each account should affect their lives. They were urged to keep on doing this.

“Second, keep on growing in love. Love is something that, when nourished, grows. When neglected, it can die,” Brother Adams said. (Philippians 1:9) Now, as missionaries, they would need to grow in love under different circumstances. And third: “Go

on growing in the undeserved kindness and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18) “This is the marvelous kindness that Jehovah has shown through his Son,” the speaker said. “As we grow in appreciation for that undeserved kindness, our pleasure grows in doing God’s will and in carrying out what he has assigned us to do.”

Another Gilead instructor, Mark Noumair, spoke on the theme “Take It With Love, and You Can Take It.” He admonished: “Learn to take challenging situations in missionary life with love, and you will be able to take it. Jehovah only disciplines those whom he loves. Even if you feel that certain counsel is ill-advised, being picky, or unfair, love for Jehovah and your relationship with him will help you to take it.”

Brother Noumair pointed out that missionary service includes many duties. “But duty without love will make you discontented. Without love, your home duties—such as cooking, shopping, scrubbing the fruit, boiling the water—can become very dreary. You must stop and ask yourself, ‘Why am I doing these?’ Well, if you say to yourself, ‘My efforts are contributing to the health and happiness of my fellow missionaries,’ then it will not be hard to take.” In summary, he exhorted: “Whether it comes to accepting discipline, fulfilling your missionary commitments, or handling misunderstandings, taking it with love will enable you to endure in your assignment. ‘Love never fails.’” —1 Corinthians 13:8.

Gilead instructor Wallace Liverance next moderated the reenactment of a number of delightful experiences the students enjoyed while working with local congregations. In addition to going from house to house, they used their missionary training in searching out people at truck stops, laundromats, train stations, and other locations.

Seasoned Missionaries Give Assurances

When new missionaries go to a foreign country, is there need for anxious concern? Can they meet the challenges of a foreign assignment? What is done by branch offices to help these new arrivals to be successful? To answer these and other questions, Steven Lett, of the Service Department, and David Splane, of the Writing Department, interviewed brothers who were then attending the branch school at the Watchtower Educational Center. The brothers interviewed serve on branch committees in Spain, Hong Kong, Liberia, Benin, Madagascar, Brazil, and Japan.

These experienced servants of Jehovah, many of whom have served as missionaries for decades, reassured the graduating students as well as their parents and relatives in attendance. Based on their own personal experience and that of fellow missionaries, they showed that problems and concerns can be dealt with successfully. The problem they face may be big, “but it can be solved, and the Society helps us,” commented Raimo Kuokkanen, a missionary in Madagascar. “We did not choose the assignment, we received it,” said Östen Gustavsson, now serving in Brazil. “So we decided to do our best to stick to it.” James Linton, who serves in Japan, said that what helped him was “the presence of brothers who had already been serving in a missionary assignment.” Missionary service is a happy and fulfilling way of serving Jehovah and caring for his sheep.

Avoiding the Plague That Kills Spirituality

Theodore Jaracz, a member of the Governing Body, who himself graduated with Gilead’s seventh class in 1946, gave the concluding talk, on the theme “The Challenge to Keeping Spiritually Alive.” Acknowledging first the terrible atrocities occurring in var-

ious parts of the world, he pointed out that actually, worse calamities are happening to mankind.

Referring to Psalm 91, Brother Jaracz identified the “pestilence” and “destruction” that have spiritually sickened and killed millions all around us. The Devil and his wicked system have used pestilencelike propaganda, based on intellectualism and materialism, to weaken and kill spirituality, but Jehovah assures us that this plague will not come near “anyone dwelling in the secret place of the Most High.”—Psalm 91:1-7.

“The challenge,” Brother Jaracz said, “is to keep healthy in the faith, to remain in the place of security. We cannot be like the ridiculers ‘not having spirituality.’ Now this is a problem today. It is one that faces all of us in the organization. It can also face you in your missionary assignment.” (Jude 18, 19) But the graduating missionaries were told that they could successfully maintain spirituality in their assignments. They were urged to consider, for example, how our brothers are enduring in Russia, in Asia, and in African lands—despite bans, intense opposition, ridicule, atheistic propaganda, and false charges. And, in many cases, physical problems are added, brought on by ethnic conflicts and shortages of necessities.

When there is an ebb in spirituality, “it is necessary to address the cause of the problem and then work on it, using the counsel of God’s Word.” Biblical examples were given. Joshua was encouraged to read his copy of the Law in an undertone every day. (Joshua 1:8) When the book of the Law was found in Josiah’s day, Jehovah blessed the faithful application of its instructions. (2 Kings 23: 2, 3) Timothy knew the holy writings from his infancy. (2 Timothy 3:14, 15) The Bereans were more than good listeners; they were considered to be “noble-minded” because they examined the Scriptures daily.

(Acts 17:10, 11) And Jesus Christ is the foremost example of one who knew and used God’s Word.—Matthew 4:1-11.

In closing, Brother Jaracz warmly admonished the new missionaries: “Now you are prepared to carry out your missionary assignment. And you are going to go abroad, in a very literal sense, to many different parts of the earth. If we meet the challenge to keep spiritually alive, then we are not going to let anything distract us from carrying out what we have resolved to do. You are going to preach with zeal, inspire others to imitate your faith, and we will pray along with you that those whom you teach, Jehovah will make alive as he has us. And thus many more are yet going to escape the spiritual calamity now raging worldwide. They will join us in increasing numbers to do Jehovah’s will. And may Jehovah bless you to that end.”

After the chairman read greetings from various countries around the world, the time came for giving the graduating students their diplomas. Then followed the reading of a warm letter of appreciation composed by the students. How grateful to Jehovah and his organization they were for the special training they had received and for their respective assignments as missionaries going “to the most distant part of the earth!”—Acts 1:8.

Class Statistics

Number of countries represented: 11
Number of countries assigned to: 24
Number of students: 48
Number of married couples: 24
Average age: 34
Average years in truth: 17
Average years in full-time ministry: 12

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Have you given careful thought to recent issues of *The Watchtower*? If so, you will find it interesting to recall the following:

□ **What are some questions that two Christians might ask themselves before they begin thinking of engagement?** 'Am I really sure of the other's spirituality and devotion to God? Can I envision serving God with that one for a lifetime? Have we been adequately exposed to each other's personality traits? Am I confident that we will be lastingly compatible? Do we know enough about the past actions and present circumstances of each other?'—8/15, page 31.

□ **What did Jesus mean when he said to his followers: "You are the salt of the earth"?** (Matthew 5:13) Jesus implied that his followers' preaching to others about God's Kingdom would have a potentially preserving, or lifesaving, influence on their hearers. Indeed, those who applied Jesus' words would be protected from the moral and spiritual decay in the world.—8/15, page 32.

□ **How can courting couples avoid the snare of sexual immorality?** If you are dating, you are wise to avoid being alone with your prospective mate under inappropriate circumstances. It is best to enjoy each other's association in a group setting or in public places. Place limits on displays of affection, each respecting the other's feelings and conscience.—9/1, pages 17, 18.

□ **What is understanding?** It 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. (Proverbs 4:1)—9/15, page 13.

□ **What is Jehovah asking of us today?** Basically, what Jehovah is asking of us is to listen to His Son and follow his example and teachings. (Matthew 16:24; 1 Peter 2:21)—9/15, page 22.

□ **Who only can experience peace?** Since Jehovah is "the God who gives peace," peace can be experienced only by people who love God and deeply respect his righteous principles. (Romans 15:33)—10/1, page 11.

□ **How did Joseph acquire the moral strength to say no to Potiphar's wife day after day?** Joseph valued his relationship with Jehovah far more than he valued momentary pleasures. Also, although he was not under a divine law code, Joseph had a clear grasp of moral principles. (Genesis 39:9)—10/1, page 29.

□ **How important is our willingness to forgive our brothers?** Our prospects for continuing to receive God's forgiveness are to a large extent contingent on our being willing to forgive others. (Matthew 6:12, 14; Luke 11:4)—10/15, page 17.

□ **To what sort of sins was Matthew 18:15-17 pointing, and what indicates that?** The sins Jesus meant were sufficiently grave that they could lead to the wrongdoer's being viewed "as a man of the nations and as a tax collector." Jews would not socialize with Gentiles, and they avoided tax collectors. So Matthew 18:15-17 refers to serious sins, not mere personal offenses or hurts that you can simply forgive and forget. (Matthew 18:21, 22)—10/15, page 19.

□ **What does truly loving God's Word involve?** Loving God's Word leads one to live in harmony with its requirements. (Psalm 119:97, 101, 105) This requires constant adjustment of one's thinking and way of living.—11/1, page 14.

□ **Having received so much at Jehovah's hand, what can we give in return to the greatest King and Giver?** The Bible reveals that the best gift we can give to Jehovah is "a sacrifice of praise." (Hebrews 13:15) Why? Because this sacrifice is directly linked to the saving of life, a major concern of Jehovah in this time of the end. (Ezekiel 18:23)—11/1, page 21.

□ **What did Solomon mean when he wrote: "The words of the wise ones are like oxgoads"?** (Ecclesiastes 12:11) The words of those possessing godly wisdom prod the readers or the listeners to make advancements in harmony with the wise words read or heard.—11/15, page 21.

□ **What is godly discernment?** It is the ability to distinguish right from wrong and then to choose the correct course. The study and application of God's Word imparts discernment.—11/15, page 25.

□ **With what should a willingness to accept responsibilities be tempered?** (1 Timothy 3:1) This should be tempered with good judgment. Nobody should take on so many assignments that he loses his joy in Jehovah's service. A willing spirit is commendable, but willingness must also reflect modesty and "soundness of mind." (Titus 2:12; Revelation 3:15, 16)—12/1, page 28.

□ **How may the challenge of parenting be met?** God counsels parents to be examples, companions, communicators, and teachers. (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7)—12/1, page 32.

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"How Can We Wake Up Our Parishes?"

THAT question, recently asked by the French Catholic magazine *Famille Chrétienne* (Christian Family), comes as no surprise to many. Britain's Cardinal Hume even called church parishes "sleeping giants." Parish-based groups that preach to others have been proposed as a way of stopping the slumber. "Direct evangelization with new methods," an Italian priest calls it. While the pope recently encouraged such initiatives, not all see the need to share their faith.

Pigi Perini, a curate in Milan, recently visited Africa, where a nun told him: "I've been here for 40 years, and I've succeeded in never pronouncing the name of Jesus so as not to destroy African culture." The curate concludes: "We no longer speak about Jesus, we no longer share Jesus, we no longer preach the gospel!" For many others, though, preaching is an important part of their lives and a way of staying spiritually awake. Pigi Perini admits: "You come across two people who talk about Christ at the market, or who carry a Bible under their arm, and you say to yourself: Look, Jehovah's Witnesses!"

Millions of people enjoy discussing God's Word with Jehovah's Witnesses. No doubt Witnesses have arranged for Bible discussions in your own community. As in the first century, these zealous Christians encourage one another to share their faith with others. Their places of meeting (called Kingdom Halls) are places of warmth and friendship. Why not attend one of the meetings arranged by Jehovah's Witnesses and see how you can fight spiritual lethargy?

