

FEBRUARY 15, 2005

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



A detailed illustration of Jesus walking on the water. He is shown from the waist up, wearing a white robe and a dark sash. He has a beard and is looking towards the right. In the background, a small boat with several people is visible on a dark, choppy sea under a dark sky.

Should You Believe in
Miracles?



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

February 15, 2005

Average Printing Each Issue: 26,439,000

Vol. 126, No. 4

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.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Miracles—Fact or Fiction?
- 5 Miracles That You Have Seen!
- 9 The Berleburg Bible
- 10 Climbing to The Bottom of Saba
- 12 Christians—Be Proud of Who You Are!
- 17 Safeguarding Our Christian Identity
- 23 'If You Are Impressed Into Service'
- 27 Questions From Readers
- 28 Do You Measure Yourself Against Others?
- 32 Who Will Feed the World?

WATCHTOWER STUDIES

MARCH 21-27:

Christians—Be Proud of Who You Are!
Page 12. Songs to be used: 113, 29.

MARCH 28—APRIL 3:

Safeguarding Our Christian Identity.
Page 17. Songs to be used: 207, 202.

Publication of *The Watchtower* is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*.

The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; M. H. Larson, President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589.

Changes of address should reach us 30 days before your moving date. Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label).

© 2005 Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania.

All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

Semimonthly

ENGLISH

Would you welcome more information or a free home Bible study? Please send your request to Jehovah's Witnesses, using the appropriate address below.

America, United States of: Wallkill, NY 12589. **Antigua:** Box 119, St. Johns. **Australia:** Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. **Bahamas:** Box N-1247, Nassau, N.P. **Barbados, W.I.:** Crusher Site Road, Prospect, St. James. **Britain:** The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. **Canada:** Box 4100, Halton Hills (Georgetown), Ontario L7G 4Y4. **Germany:** Niederselters, Am Steinfeil, D-65618 Selters. **Ghana:** P. O. Box GP 760, Accra. **Guyana:** 352-360 Tyrell St., Republic Park Phase 2 EBD. **Hawaii 96819:** 2055 Kam IV Rd., Honolulu. **Hong Kong:** 4 Kent Road, Kowloon Tong. **India:** Post Box 6440, Yelahanka, Bangalore 560 064, KAR. **Ireland:** Newcastle, Greystones, Co. Wicklow. **Jamaica:** P. O. Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. **Japan:** 1271 Nakashinden, Ebina City, Kanagawa Pref., 243-0496. **Kenya:** P.O. Box 47788, GPO Nairobi 00100. **New Zealand:** P.O. Box 75-142, Manurewa. **Nigeria:** P.M.B. 1090, Benin City 300001, Edo State. **Philippines, Republic of:** P. O. Box 2044, 1060 Manila. **South Africa:** Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. **Trinidad and Tobago, Republic of:** Lower Rapsey Street & Laxmi Lane, Curepe. **Zambia:** Box 33459, Lusaka 10101. **Zimbabwe:** Private Bag WG-5001, Westgate.

NOW PUBLISHED IN 150 LANGUAGES. SEMIMONTLY: Afrikaans, Albanian,* Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Bicol, Bislama, Bulgarian, Cebuano,* Chichewa,* Chinese, Chinese (Simplified),* Cibemba,* Croatian,* Czech,* Danish,* Dutch,* East Armenian, Efik,* English** (also Braille), Estonian, Ewe, Fijian, Finnish,** French,** Ga, Georgian, German,** Greek,* Gujarati, Gun, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hindi, Hungarian,* Igbo,* Ilokano,* Indonesian, Italian,** Japanese** (also Braille), Kannada, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Korean** (also Braille), Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Luvale, Macedonian, Malagasy,* Malayalam, Maltese, Marathi, Myanmar, Nepali, New Guinea Pidgin, Norwegian,** Pangasinan, Papiamento (Aruba), Papiamento (Curaçao), Polish,** Portuguese** (also Braille), Punjabi, Rarotongan, Romanian,* Russian,* Samar-Leyte, Samoan, Sango, Sepedi, Serbian, Sesotho, Shona,* Silozi, Sinhala, Slovak,* Slovenian, Solomon Islands Pidgin, Spanish,** Sranantongo, Swahili,* Swedish,** Tagalog,* Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tigrinya, Tongan, Tshiluba, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian,* Urdu, Venda, Vietnamese, Wallian, Xhosa, Yoruba,* Zulu*

MONTHLY: American Sign Language,[△] Armenian, Assamese, Azerbaijani (Roman script), Brazilian Sign Language,[△] Cambodian, Chitonga, Gilbertese, Greenlandic, Haitian Creole, Hausa, Hiri Motu, Icelandic, Isoko, Kaonde, Kazakh, Kikongo, Kiluba, Kirghiz, Kwanyama/Ndonga, Luganda, Marshallese, Mauritian Creole, Mizo, Monukutuba, Moore, Niuean, Ossetian, Otetela, Palauan, Persian, Ponapean, Seychelles Creole, Tahitian, Tatar, Tiv, Trukese, Tumbuka, Tuvaluan, Umbundu, Yapese, Zande

* Study articles also available in large-print edition.

[△] Audio cassettes also available.

[○] CD (MP3 format) also available.

[▲] Videocassette

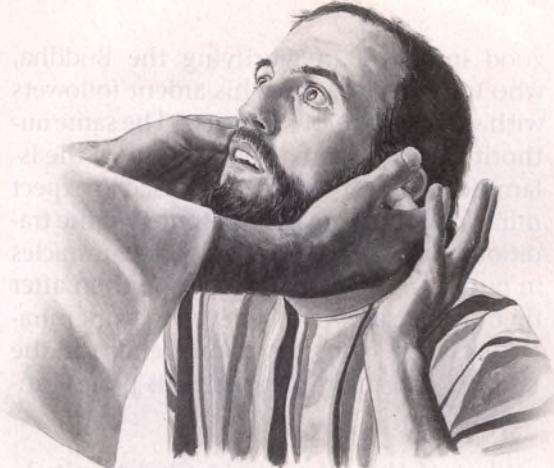
[□] DVD

Miracles Fact or Fiction?

THE gentleman's attention was immediately caught by the bumper sticker on a passing car, "Miracles Happen—Just Ask the Angels." Although he was a religious man himself, he was unsure what this meant. Did the sign mean that the driver believed in miracles? Or was it, rather, a jocular way of indicating lack of belief in both miracles and angels?

You may be interested in what German author Manfred Barthel noted: "*Miracle* is a word that immediately polarizes readers into two warring camps." Those who believe in miracles are convinced that they occur and perhaps occur often.* For example, it is reported that in Greece during the last few years, believers have claimed that miracles take place about once a month. This led a bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church to caution: "The believer tends to humanize God, Mary, and the saints. Believers should not carry things too far."

Belief in miracles is less widespread in some other countries. According to an Al-lensbach poll published in Germany in 2002, 71 percent of its citizens consider miracles to be fiction, not fact. Among the less than one third who do believe in miracles, however, are three women who claim to have received a message from the Virgin Mary. A few months after Mary allegedly appeared to them—accompanied by angels and



a dove—the German newspaper *Westfalenpost* reported: "Up until now about 50,000 pilgrims, people in search of healing, as well as the curious have closely followed the visions seen by the women." An additional 10,000 were expected to stream into the village to experience additional appearances. Similar appearances of the Virgin Mary are said to have taken place in Lourdes, France, in 1858, and in Fátima, Portugal, in 1917.

How About Non-Christian Religions?

Belief in miracles is found in almost all religions. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* explains that the founders of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam held diverse views about miracles, but it notes: "The subsequent history of these religions demonstrates unmistakably that miracles and miracle stories have been an integral part of man's religious life." This reference work says that "the Buddha himself was sometimes led to work miracles." Later, when "Buddhism was transplanted to China, its missionaries often resorted to the display of miraculous powers."

After referring to several such supposed miracles, that encyclopedia concludes: "One may not be prepared to accept all of these miracle stories told by pious biographers, but they were undoubtedly created with the

* The word "miracles" as used in this article is as defined in a Bible dictionary: "Effects in the physical world that surpass all known human or natural powers and are therefore attributed to supernatural agency."

good intention of glorifying the Buddha, who was able to endow his ardent followers with such miraculous powers." The same authority says of Islam: "The majority of the Islamic community has never ceased to expect miracles. Muhammad is presented in the traditions (*hadīths*) as having worked miracles in public on many occasions. . . . Even after their death, saints are believed to work miracles at their own graves on behalf of the faithful, and their intercession is piously invoked."

What of the Miracles in Christianity?

Many of those who have accepted Christianity are divided in their opinions. Some accept as fact the Bible reports about the miracles performed by Jesus Christ or by servants of God in pre-Christian times. Yet, many agree with Protestant Reformer Martin

Luther. *The Encyclopedia of Religion* says of him: "Both Luther and Calvin wrote that the age of miracles was over and that their occurrence should not be expected." The Catholic Church held to its belief in miracles "without trying to defend it intellectually," says this reference work. However, "the academic Protestant community came to believe that the practice of Christianity was largely a matter of morality and that neither God nor the spiritual world contacted or influenced practical human life to any great extent."

Other professed Christians, including some clergymen, doubt that the miracles mentioned in the Bible are factual. Take, for example, the burning-bush episode reported in the Bible at Exodus 3:1-5. The book *What the Bible Really Says* explains that a number of German theologians do not take this as

WHY CERTAIN MIRACLES NO LONGER OCCUR

Various kinds of miracles are mentioned in the Bible. (Exodus 7:19-21; 1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:22-38; 2 Kings 5:1-14; Matthew 8:24-27; Luke 17:11-19; John 2:1-11; 9:1-7) Many of these miracles served to identify Jesus as the Messiah, and they proved that he had God's backing. Jesus' early followers displayed miraculous gifts, such as speaking in tongues and discernment of inspired utterances. (Acts 2:5-12; 1 Corinthians 12:28-31) Such miraculous gifts were useful for the Christian congregation during its infancy. How so?

Well, copies of the Scriptures were few. Usually, only the rich possessed scrolls or books of any sort. In pagan lands, there was no knowledge of the Bible or of its Author, Jehovah. Christian teaching had to be conveyed by word of mouth. The miraculous gifts were useful in showing that God was using the Christian congregation.

But Paul explained that these gifts would pass away once they were no longer needed. "Whether there are gifts of prophesying, they will be done away with; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we have partial knowledge and we prophesy partially; but when that which is complete arrives, that which is partial will be done away with."—1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

Today, people have access to Bibles, as well as concordances and encyclopedias. Over six million trained Christians are assisting others to gain divine knowledge based on the Bible. Thus, miracles are no longer necessary to attest to Jesus Christ as God's appointed Deliverer or to provide proof that Jehovah is backing his servants.

the literal account of a miracle. Instead, they interpret it as "a symbol of Moses' inner struggle with the pricks and burning pangs of conscience." The book adds: "The flames could also be seen as flowers that burst into bloom in the sunlight of the divine presence."

You may find such an explanation less than satisfying. So, what should you believe? Is it realistic to believe that miracles have ever taken place? And what about modern-day miracles? Since we cannot ask the angels, whom can we ask?

The Biblical Position

No one can deny that the Bible reports that God in bygone days at times stepped in to perform humanly impossible acts. Of him, we read: "You proceeded to bring forth your people Israel out of the land of Egypt, with signs and *with miracles* and with a strong hand and with a stretched-out arm and with great fearsomeness." (Jeremiah 32:21) Imagine, the most powerful nation of the day brought to its knees by means of ten divinely

sent plagues, including the death of its first-born. Miracles indeed!—Exodus, chapters 7 to 14.

Centuries later, the four Gospel writers described some 35 miracles performed by Jesus. In fact, their words suggest that he performed even more supernatural feats than those they report. Are these reports fact or fiction?*—Matthew 9:35; Luke 9:11.

If the Bible is what it claims to be—God's Word of truth—then you have clear reason to believe in the miracles about which it speaks. The Bible is explicit in reporting that miracles occurred in bygone days—miraculous healings, resurrections, and the like—yet it is just as explicit in explaining that such miracles no longer take place. (See the box "Why Certain Miracles No Longer Occur," on page 4.) So does this mean that even those who accept the Bible as fact consider belief in modern-day miracles to be unfounded? Let the next article reply.

* You can consider evidence that the Bible is worthy of belief. Such is set out in the book *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Miracles That You Have Seen!

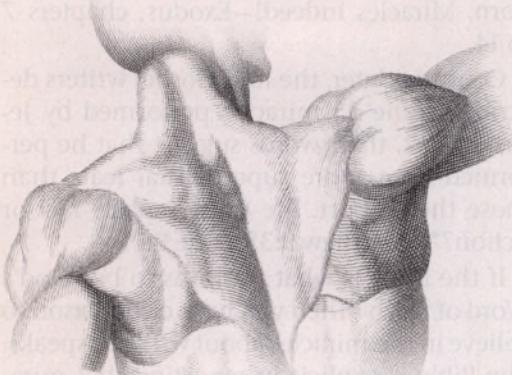
THE word "miracle" has the secondary meaning of "an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment." We have all seen this kind of miracle, independent of divine intervention.

Gaining increased knowledge of the physical laws of nature, humans have been able to achieve what at one time was commonly viewed as unachievable. For example,

a hundred years ago, most people probably thought impossible what computers, television, space technology, and similar modern-day developments have made commonplace now.

Recognizing that they have only partial knowledge of the scientific wonders behind God's creations, some scientists admit that they can no longer state with certainty that

The human body is a marvelous creation



Anatomy Improved and Illustrated, London, 1723, Bernardino Genga

something is impossible. At most, they are willing to say that it is improbable. Thus they leave the way open for future "miracles."

Even if we are using the primary meaning of "miracle," thus referring to things "attributed to supernatural agency," we can say that each of us has seen miracles. For example, we observe the sun, moon, and stars—all products of a "supernatural agency," the Creator himself. Besides, who can fully explain in detail how the human body functions? how the brain works? or how the human embryo develops? The book *The Body Machine* points out: "The human organism, controlled and co-ordinated by the central nervous system, is a sophisticated sensory apparatus, a self-regulating mobile engine, a self-reproducing computer—a marvellous and in many ways mysterious creation." The God who created "the human organism" indeed performed a miracle, one that continues to amaze us. There are also other kinds of miracles that you have seen, though you may not have recognized them as such.

Can a Book Be a Miracle?

No book enjoys such a wide circulation as does the Bible. Do you see in it a miracle? Can we attribute its existence to a "supernat-

ural agency"? True, the Bible is a book written down by humans, but they claimed to have expressed the thoughts of God, not their own. (2 Samuel 23:1, 2; 2 Peter 1:20, 21) Think of it. They were some 40 individuals, living over a span of 1,600 years. They came from backgrounds as varied as those of shepherds, military men, fishermen, civil servants, physicians, priests, and kings. Yet, they were able to convey a unified message of hope that is both truthful and accurate.

Based on a careful study, Jehovah's Witnesses accept the Bible, "not as the word of men, but, just as it truthfully is, as the word of God," as the apostle Paul wrote. (1 Thessalonians 2:13) Their publications have over the years explained how so-called contradictions in the Bible can be harmonized with its overall message. This inner harmony is in itself a proof of divine authorship.*

No other book has been subjected to such vigorous attempts to destroy it as has the Bible. Yet, it still exists and this, at least in part, in over 2,000 languages. Both its physical preservation as a book and the preservation of its integrity manifest divine intervention. The Bible is truly a miracle!

A Miracle That "Is Alive and Exerts Power"

The miracles of bygone days—miraculous healings and resurrections—no longer occur. But we have reason for confidence that in God's upcoming new world, such miracles will take place again, this time on a global scale. They will bring permanent relief and will go beyond our present ability to comprehend.

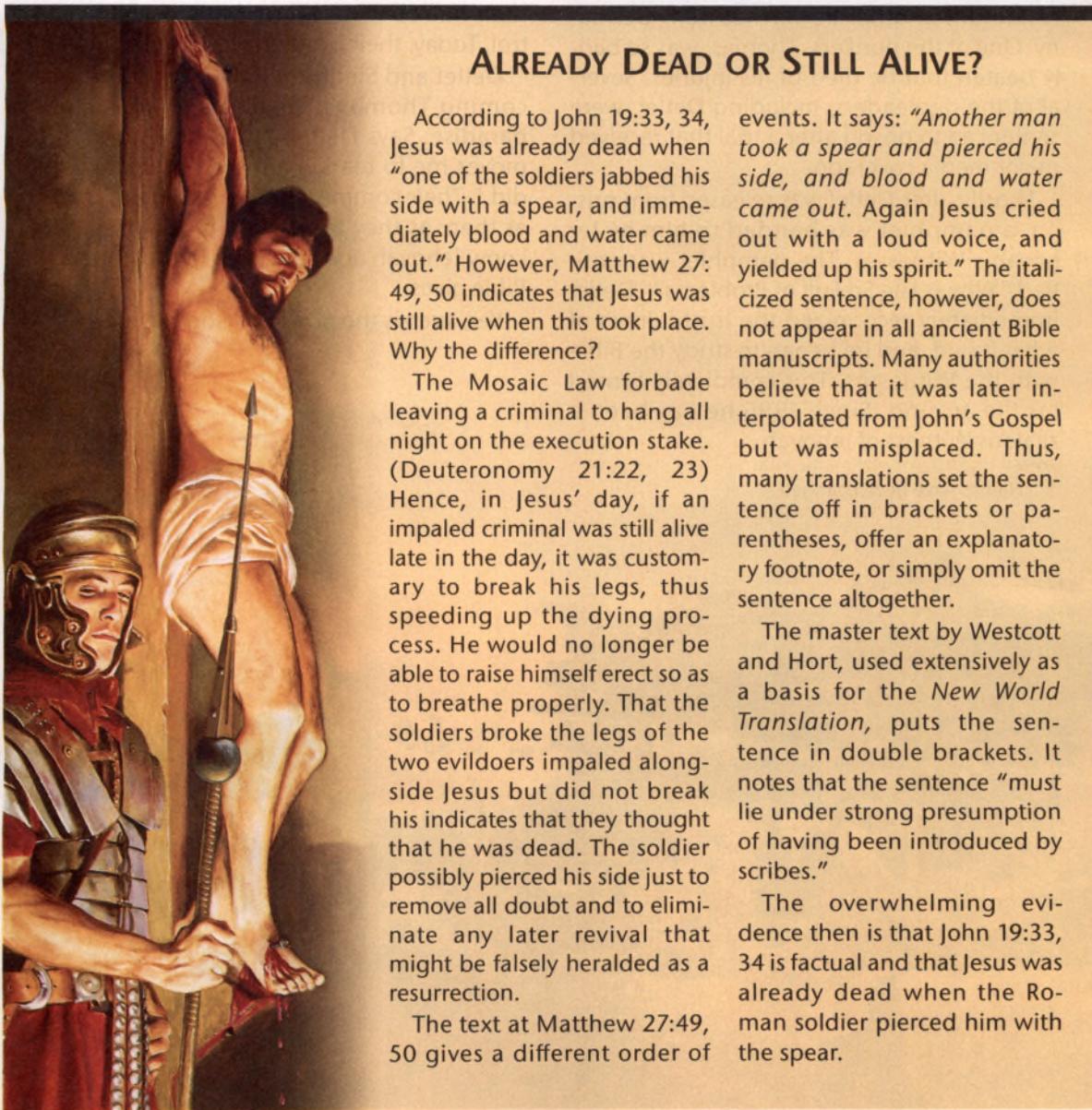
The miracle of the Bible can even today perform what is tantamount to miracles by

* If you desire to investigate more of these so-called contradictions to see how they can be harmonized, many examples are considered in *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?* chapter 7, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

motivating people to change their personalities for the better. (See an example in the box "The Power of God's Word," on page 8.) Hebrews 4:12 states: "The word of God is alive and exerts power and is sharper than any two-edged sword and pierces even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of joints and their marrow, and is able to discern

thoughts and intentions of the heart." Yes, the Bible has been instrumental in transforming the lives of over six million people who live around the globe, filling their lives with purpose and offering them a marvelous hope for the future.

Why not allow the Bible to work a miracle in your life?



ALREADY DEAD OR STILL ALIVE?

According to John 19:33, 34, Jesus was already dead when "one of the soldiers jabbed his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out." However, Matthew 27:49, 50 indicates that Jesus was still alive when this took place. Why the difference?

The Mosaic Law forbade leaving a criminal to hang all night on the execution stake. (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23) Hence, in Jesus' day, if an impaled criminal was still alive late in the day, it was customary to break his legs, thus speeding up the dying process. He would no longer be able to raise himself erect so as to breathe properly. That the soldiers broke the legs of the two evildoers impaled alongside Jesus but did not break his indicates that they thought that he was dead. The soldier possibly pierced his side just to remove all doubt and to eliminate any later revival that might be falsely heralded as a resurrection.

The text at Matthew 27:49, 50 gives a different order of

events. It says: "*Another man took a spear and pierced his side, and blood and water came out. Again Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit.*" The italicized sentence, however, does not appear in all ancient Bible manuscripts. Many authorities believe that it was later interpolated from John's Gospel but was misplaced. Thus, many translations set the sentence off in brackets or parentheses, offer an explanatory footnote, or simply omit the sentence altogether.

The master text by Westcott and Hort, used extensively as a basis for the *New World Translation*, puts the sentence in double brackets. It notes that the sentence "must lie under strong presumption of having been introduced by scribes."

The overwhelming evidence then is that John 19:33, 34 is factual and that Jesus was already dead when the Roman soldier pierced him with the spear.

THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

As a teenager and victim of a broken home, Detlef drifted into a world of drugs, alcohol, and heavy metal.* He became what is commonly called a skinhead, and his violent behavior soon got him into trouble with the police.

In 1992, 60 skinheads became involved in a massive brawl with about 35 punks at a restaurant and bar in northeastern Germany. One of the punks, Thomas, was so badly beaten that he died of his injuries. Several of the ringleaders, including Detlef, were sentenced to prison after a trial that received major media coverage.

Shortly after Detlef was released from prison, a pamphlet was handed to him by Jehovah's Witnesses. The pamphlet was entitled "Why Is Life So Full of Problems?" Detlef immediately recognized the truthfulness of what it said, and he began to study the Bible with the Witnesses. This completely turned his life around. Since 1996 he has been a zealous Witness of Jehovah.

* Names have been changed.

Siegfried, a former punker, was a good friend of Thomas, the young man who was killed; he too later became a Witness and is now a congregation elder. When Siegfried visited Detlef's congregation to deliver a Bible talk (incidentally, Thomas' mother also attends meetings there occasionally), Detlef invited him to lunch. Some ten years ago, their hatred would have been hard to control. Today, their brotherly love is obvious.

Detlef and Siegfried look forward to welcoming Thomas back to life in an earthly paradise. Says Detlef: "Just thinking of this moves me to tears. I am so sorry for what I did." Their common desire is to help Thomas then, as they today help others, to get to know Jehovah and to rejoice in the hope the Bible gives.

Yes, such is the power of God's Word!





The Berleburg Bible

PIETISM was a religious movement that developed within the German Lutheran Church in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some followers of this movement were ridiculed or even persecuted because of their faith. Several Pietist scholars found refuge in Berleburg, some 100 miles north of Frankfurt am Main. They were granted asylum by a local nobleman, Count Casimir von Wittgenstein Berleburg, who held religion in high esteem. The presence of these preachers and academics in Berleburg led to a new translation of the Bible, known today as the Berleburg Bible. How did the translation come about?

One of the asylum seekers was Johann Haug, who was forced to leave his home in Strasbourg because of the intolerance of local theologians. Haug was an erudite scholar and a talented linguist. He told his fellow scholars in Berleburg of his earnest desire "to provide a wholly pure Bible translation, to correct Luther's translation, to render the meaning exactly according to the letter of God's Word and according to its spirit." (*Die Geschichte der Berlenburger Bibel* [The History of the Berleburg Bible]) The goal was to produce a Bible with ex-

planatory notes and comments, and it was to be understandable to the common man. Haug enlisted the support of academics in other European lands, and he worked on the project for 20 years. The Berleburg Bible was published starting in 1726. Because of its extensive notes, it ran to eight volumes.

The Berleburg Bible certainly has some interesting points. For example, Exodus 6: 2, 3 reads: "Further God talked to Moses and spoke to him: I am the LORD! And appeared to Abraham/to Isaac and to Jacob/as an omni-sufficient God: but by my name JEHOVAH I did not become known to them." A note explains: "The name JEHOVAH . . . , the name set apart/or/the declared name." God's own personal name, Jehovah, also appears in comments on Exodus 3:15 and Exodus 34:6.

The Berleburg Bible thus became one in a long line of German Bibles that have used the name Jehovah either in the main text, in footnotes, or in comments. One of the more modern translations giving due honor to God's personal name is the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Climbing to The Bottom of Saba

THE Dutch island of Saba once served as a stronghold for buccaneers who sailed the waters of the Caribbean Sea in search of plunder. Today, this tiny island, located 150 miles east of Puerto Rico, is home to some 1,600 inhabitants, 5 of whom are Jehovah's Witnesses. These intrepid ministers are searching for something far more valuable than plunder, however. They are diligently searching for people who are "rightly disposed for everlasting life." —Acts 13:48.

The good news of God's Kingdom first reached the island on June 22, 1952, when the 59-foot schooner *Sibia*, operated by Jehovah's Witnesses, anchored off Saba's coast. (Matthew 24:14) Missionaries Gust Maki and Stanley Carter climbed The Ladder, a pathway of over 500 stone steps up to

Background: www.sabatourism.com

PUERTO RICO



The Bottom, Saba's capital.* For centuries, this narrow path was the only means to reach the island's inhabitants.

The first published report of Christian witnessing work on Saba appeared in the 1966 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*. According to that report, there was only one active Witness on the island. Later, a family from Canada spent several years preaching the good news there. Recently, Russel and Kathy, a retired couple from the United States, went to Saba and shared in the preaching work there. Consider their story.

* It seems that pirates called it The Bottom because they thought it was at the bottom of a volcanic crater.



Visit to Saba

My wife and I arrive by plane as guests of Ronald, who was the island's only Witness during most of the 1990's. Our host is waiting for us at the airport. He is delighted with the small box of vegetables that we brought as a gift, since no commercial farming is done on the island. Boarding a small truck, we slowly zigzag up the side of Mount Scenery to the peak of this extinct volcano.

We stop at the village of Hell's Gate while Ronald checks the public information board to see if an invitation for Sunday's public talk is still posted. We are glad to see that it is. He hops back in the truck, and we continue our climb to the island's largest hamlet, Windwardside. As its name suggests, this picturesque village is located on the windward side of the island, situated some 1,300 feet above sea level. As we pull into the driveway of Ron's cottage, we see a colorful sign on the front porch identifying it as a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses.

During lunch I raise the question that has prompted our visit, "How did you come to be a Kingdom proclaimer on Saba?"

"When construction on the Puerto Rico branch of Jehovah's Witnesses ended in 1993," says Ron, "my wife and I were interested in remaining in a foreign assignment. Earlier, we had visited Saba with another pioneer couple and had learned that there were 1,400 inhabitants but no Witnesses. So we spoke to the Puerto Rico Branch Committee about our moving here."

"One thing led to another, and we finally received approval to relocate. Sadly, two years later my wife became seriously ill, and we returned to California. Following her death, I came back to Saba. You see, I don't like to start something and not finish it."

House-to-House Witnessing on Saba

The living room of Ron's one-hundred-

year-old house doubles as a Kingdom Hall.* As we enjoy breakfast and prepare to go into the ministry, rain from a passing cloud dampens the open-air kitchen. After breakfast, we leave under scattered clouds for a morning of door-to-door witnessing in The Bottom. At each home, Ron greets the householder by name. Our discussion focuses on a recent local news event. Most people are familiar with Ron and his ministry, and many readily accept Bible literature.

Keeping a record of those who are interested in the Kingdom message can be a challenge if you are not acquainted with the villagers. Why? Because "the law requires that all homes are painted the same color," says Ron. Sure enough, I look around and observe that all the houses on Saba are white with red roofs.

After concluding our Bible discussion, we invite the householder to attend the public Bible talk held on Sunday at the Kingdom Hall. When Ron is at home on the island, he gives a public talk every week. Presently, 17 Bible studies are conducted on Saba. Twenty people attended the Memorial of Christ's death in 2004. And while that number may seem quite small, it represents 1 percent of Saba's entire population!

Indeed, Jehovah's Witnesses have spared no effort to reach as many people as possible with God's message of salvation. Whether it is a tiny island like Saba or an entire continent, Jehovah's Witnesses are faithfully carrying out the commission to "make disciples of people of all the nations."—Matthew 28:19.

Sadly, our visit has come to an end. As we board our plane, we wave farewell. We will always remember our visit to Saba and the time we spent climbing to The Bottom!

* On September 28, 2003, volunteers from Florida, U.S.A., went to Saba and remodeled a building nearby, which now serves as the Kingdom Hall.

CHRISTIANS—BE PROUD OF WHO YOU ARE!

"He that boasts, let him boast in Jehovah."—1 CORINTHIANS 1:31.

"APATHEISM." A commentator on religious affairs recently used that word to describe the stance many people maintain toward their faith. He explained: "The greatest development in modern religion is not a religion at all—it's an attitude best described as 'apatheism.'" Elaborating, he defined apatheism as "a disinclination to care all that much about one's own religion." Many people, he observed, "believe in God . . . ; they just don't care much about him."

² This slide toward apathy is not surprising to students of the Bible. (Luke 18:8) And when it comes to religion in general, such disinterest is to be expected. False religion has misled and disappointed mankind for so long. (Revelation 17:15, 16) For genuine Christians, however, the pervasive spirit of halfheartedness and lack of zeal presents a danger. We cannot afford to become nonchalant about our faith and lose our zeal for serving God and for Bible truth. Jesus warned against such lukewarmness when he cautioned first-century Christians living in Laodicea: "You are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were

1. What trend is evident in the attitude of people toward religion?

2. (a) Why is it not surprising that people have become spiritually apathetic? (b) What danger does indifference pose to true Christians?



cold or else hot. . . . You are lukewarm."—Revelation 3:15-18.

Seeing Who We Are

³ To fight spiritual apathy, Christians need to have a clear view of who they are, and they must take reasonable pride in their distinct identity. As servants of Jehovah and disciples of Christ, we can find in the Bible descriptions of who we are. We are "witnesses" of Jehovah, "God's fellow workers," as we actively share the "good news" with others. (Isaiah 43:10; 1 Corinthians 3:9; Matthew 24:14) We are people who "love one another." (John 13:34) True Christians are individuals who "through use have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong." (Hebrews 5:14) We are "illuminators in the world." (Philippians 2:15) We strive to "maintain [our] conduct fine among the nations."—1 Peter 2:12; 2 Peter 3:11, 14.

⁴ True worshipers of Jehovah also know what they are not. "They are no part of the world," just as their Leader, Jesus Christ, was no part of the world. (John 17:16) They remain separate from "the nations," which "are in darkness mentally, and alienated

3. In what aspects of their identity can Christians take pride?

4. How can a worshiper of Jehovah determine what he is not?

from the life that belongs to God." (Ephesians 4:17, 18) As a result, Jesus' followers "repudiate ungodliness and worldly desires and . . . live with soundness of mind and righteousness and godly devotion amid this present system of things."—Titus 2:12.

⁵ Our clear view of our identity and our relationship with the Sovereign Ruler of the universe motivates us to "boast in Jehovah." (1 Corinthians 1:31) What kind of boasting is that? As true Christians, we are proud to have Jehovah as our God. We follow the admonition: "Let the one bragging about himself brag about himself because of this very thing, the having of insight and the having of knowledge of me, that I am Jehovah, the One exercising loving-kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth." (Jeremiah 9:24) We "boast" in the privilege of knowing God and of being used by him to assist others.

The Challenge

⁶ Admittedly, maintaining a sharp perception of our distinct identity as Christians is not always easy. A young man who was raised as a Christian recalled that he for a while had experienced a state of spiritual weakness: "At times, I felt I didn't know why I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. I had been around the truth since infancy. Sometimes I felt that this was just another mainstream, accepted religion." Others may have let their identity be shaped by the entertainment world, mass media, and the current ungodly outlook on life. (Ephesians 2:2, 3) Some Christians may occasionally go through periods of self-doubt and of a reassessment of their values and goals.

5. What is implied by the admonition to "boast in Jehovah"?

6. Why do some find it challenging to maintain a clear perception of their identity as Christians?

⁷ Is a degree of careful self-examination entirely inappropriate? No. You may recall that the apostle Paul encouraged Christians to keep examining themselves: "Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep proving what you yourselves are." (2 Corinthians 13:5) The apostle was here promoting a wholesome endeavor to spot any spiritual weaknesses that may have developed, with the objective of taking the necessary steps to rectify them. A Christian, in testing whether he is in the faith, must determine whether his words and deeds harmonize with his profession of faith. However, if misdirected, self-examination that prompts us to look for our "identity" or to search for answers outside our relationship with Jehovah or the Christian congregation will prove to be pointless and can be spiritually fatal.* Never would we want to 'experience shipwreck concerning our faith'!—1 Timothy 1:19.

We Are Not Immune to Challenges

⁸ Should Christians who occasionally experience self-doubt feel that they have failed? Of course not! Indeed, they can find comfort in knowing that such feelings are not new. Faithful witnesses of God in times past experienced them. Take, for example, Moses, who displayed extraordinary faith, loyalty, and devotion. When assigned a seemingly overwhelming task, Moses diffidently asked: "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11) Apparently, the answer he had in mind was, 'I am a nobody!' or 'I am incapable!' Several

* Here reference is made solely to our spiritual identity. For a few, mental-health issues may necessitate professional treatment.

7. (a) What kind of self-examination is fitting for servants of God? (b) Where does danger lurk?

8, 9. (a) How did Moses express his feelings of self-doubt? (b) How did Jehovah respond to Moses' reservations? (c) How are you affected by Jehovah's reassurances?

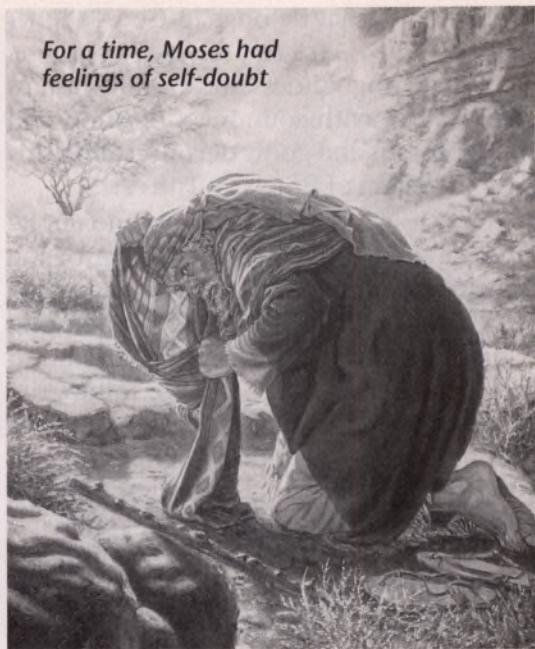
aspects of Moses' background might have caused him to feel inadequate: He belonged to a nation of slaves. He had been rejected by the Israelites. He was not a fluent speaker. (Exodus 1:13, 14; 2:11-14; 4:10) He was a shepherd, an occupation abhorred by the Egyptians. (Genesis 46:34) No wonder he felt unfit to become the liberator of God's enslaved people!

⁹ Jehovah reassured Moses by giving him two powerful promises: "I shall prove to be with you, and this is the sign for you that it is I who have sent you: After you have brought the people out of Egypt, you people will serve the true God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12) God was telling his hesitant servant that He would constantly be with him. In addition, Jehovah was indicating that he would without fail deliver his people. Down through the centuries, God has provided similar promises of support. For instance, through Moses he said to the nation of Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land: "Be courageous and strong. . . . Jehovah your God is the one marching with you. He will neither desert you nor leave you entirely." (Deuteronomy 31:6) Jehovah also assured Joshua: "Nobody will take a firm stand before you all the days of your life. . . . I shall prove to be with you. I shall neither desert you nor leave you entirely." (Joshua 1:5) And he promises Christians: "I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) Having such strong support should make us feel proud to be Christians!

¹⁰ About five centuries after Moses, a faithful Levite named Asaph wrote candidly regarding his doubts about the value of pursuing an upright course. While he struggled with serving God despite trials and temptations, Asaph saw some who scoffed at God

10, 11. How was the Levite Asaph helped to maintain the correct attitude toward the value of his service to Jehovah?

For a time, Moses had feelings of self-doubt



grow more powerful and prosperous. How was Asaph affected? "As for me, my feet had almost turned aside," he admitted. "My steps had nearly been made to slip. For I became envious of the boasters, when I would see the very peace of wicked people." He began to doubt the value of being a worshiper of Jehovah. "Surely it is in vain that I have cleansed my heart and that I wash my hands in innocence itself," Asaph thought. "And I came to be plagued all day long."—Psalm 73:2, 3, 13, 14.

¹¹ How did Asaph deal with these unsettling emotions? Did he deny them? No. He expressed them in prayer to God, as we see in the 73rd Psalm. The turning point for Asaph was a visit to the temple sanctuary. While there, he came to the realization that devotion to God is still the best course. With his spiritual appreciation renewed, he understood that Jehovah hated badness and that in due time the wicked would be punished. (Psalm 73:17-19) In the

process, Asaph strengthened his sense of identity as a privileged servant of Jehovah. He said to God: "I am constantly with you; you have taken hold of my right hand. With your counsel you will lead me, and afterward you will take me even to glory." (Psalm 73:23, 24) Asaph came to take pride in his God again.—Psalm 34:2.

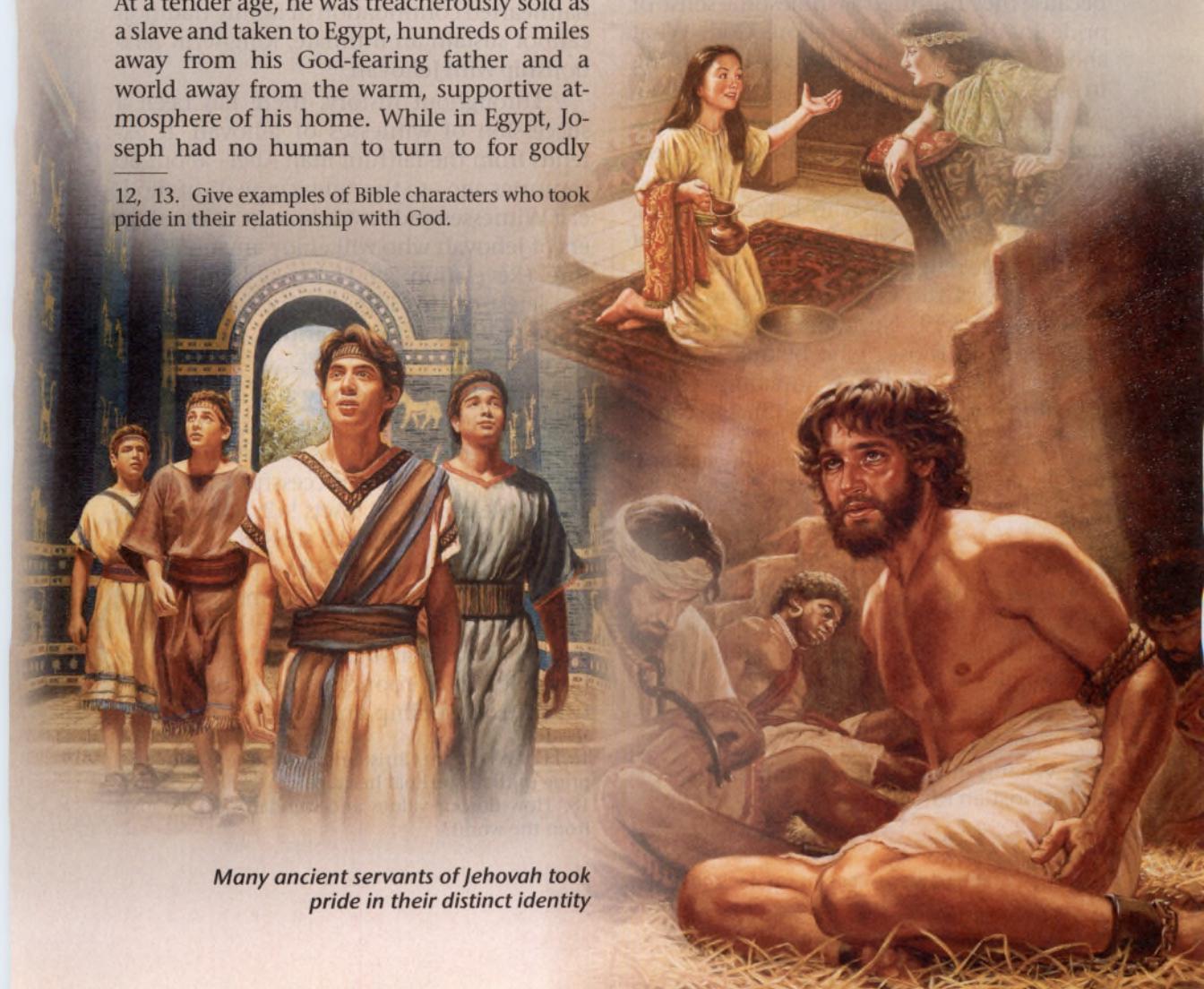
They Had a Strong Sense of Identity

¹² One way to strengthen our sense of Christian identity is to examine and imitate the faith of loyal worshipers, who despite adversity took real pride in their relationship with God. Consider Joseph, the son of Jacob. At a tender age, he was treacherously sold as a slave and taken to Egypt, hundreds of miles away from his God-fearing father and a world away from the warm, supportive atmosphere of his home. While in Egypt, Joseph had no human to turn to for godly

12, 13. Give examples of Bible characters who took pride in their relationship with God.

advice, and he had to face challenging situations that tested his morals and reliance on God. However, he clearly made a conscious effort to retain a strong sense of identity as a servant of God, and he remained faithful to what he knew was right. He was proud to be a worshiper of Jehovah even in a hostile environment, and he did not shy away from expressing how he felt.—Genesis 39:7-10.

¹³ Eight centuries later, a captive Israelite girl who became a slave of the Syrian general Naaman did not forget her identity as a worshiper of Jehovah. When the opportunity arose, she boldly gave a fine witness for Jehovah when she identified Elisha as a prophet



Many ancient servants of Jehovah took pride in their distinct identity

of the true God. (2 Kings 5:1-19) Years after that, young King Josiah, despite being in a corrupt environment, enacted long-term religious reforms, repaired God's temple, and led the nation back to Jehovah. He took pride in his faith and worship. (2 Chronicles, chapters 34, 35) Daniel and his three Hebrew companions in Babylon never forgot their identity as servants of Jehovah, and even under pressure and temptation, they kept their integrity. Clearly, they were proud to be servants of Jehovah.—Daniel 1:8-20.

Be Proud of Who You Are

¹⁴ These servants of God were successful because they nurtured a wholesome sense of pride in their standing before God. What about us today? What is involved in boasting in our Christian identity?

¹⁵ Primarily, this includes a deep appreciation for being one of Jehovah's name people, having his blessing and approval. God has no doubts about who belong to him. The apostle Paul, who lived in an era of considerable religious confusion, wrote: "Jehovah knows those who belong to him." (2 Timothy 2:19; Numbers 16:5) Jehovah takes pride in those "who belong to him." He declares: "He that is touching you is touching my eyeball." (Zechariah 2:8) Clear-

14, 15. What is involved in boasting in our Christian identity?

Do You Recall?

- How can Christians "boast in Jehovah"?
- What have you learned from the examples of Moses and Asaph?
- What Bible characters took pride in their service to God?
- What is involved in boasting in our Christian identity?

ly, Jehovah loves us. In return, our relationship with him should be based on deep love for him. Paul noted: "If anyone loves God, this one is known by him."—1 Corinthians 8:3.

¹⁶ Young people who have been raised as Jehovah's Witnesses do well to examine whether their Christian identity is becoming stronger based on a personal relationship with God. They cannot depend merely on the faith of their parents. Regarding each servant of God, Paul wrote: "To his own master he stands or falls." Thus, Paul continues: "Each of us will render an account for himself to God." (Romans 14:4, 12) Obviously, a halfhearted continuation of family tradition cannot sustain an intimate, long-term relationship with Jehovah.

¹⁷ Throughout history, there has been a succession of witnesses of Jehovah. It extends from the faithful man Abel—about 60 centuries ago—to the "great crowd" of modern Witnesses and on to throngs of worshipers of Jehovah who will enjoy an endless future. (Revelation 7:9; Hebrews 11:4) We are the latest of this long line of faithful worshipers. What a rich spiritual heritage we have!

¹⁸ Our Christian identity also includes the set of values, qualities, standards, and characteristics that identify us as Christians. It is "The Way," the only successful way of life and of pleasing God. (Acts 9:2; Ephesians 4:22-24) Christians "make sure of all things" and "hold fast to what is fine"! (1 Thessalonians 5:21) We have a clear understanding of the vast difference between Christianity and the world that is alienated from God. Jehovah leaves no room for any ambiguity between true worship and false. Through his

16, 17. Why can Christians, young and old, take pride in their spiritual heritage?

18. How do our values and standards set us apart from the world?

prophet Malachi, he declared: “You people will again certainly see the distinction between a righteous one and a wicked one, between one serving God and one who has not served him.”—Malachi 3:18.

¹⁹ Since boasting in Jehovah is so impor-

19. What will true Christians never become?

tant in this confused and disoriented world, what can assist us to maintain a wholesome pride in our God and a strong sense of Christian identity? Helpful suggestions are found in the next article. While considering these, you can be certain of this: True Christians will never become victims of “apatheism.”



SAFEGUARDING OUR CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

“You are my witnesses,” is the utterance of Jehovah.”—ISAIAH 43:10.

WHEN you are at a Kingdom Hall, take a good look around you. Whom do you see at this place of worship? You might see earnest young people attentively absorbing Scriptural wisdom. (Psalm 148:12, 13) Likely, you will also observe family heads striving to please God while living in a world that degrades family life. Perhaps you will catch sight of dear older ones, steadfastly living up to their dedication to Jehovah despite the maladies of advanced age. (Proverbs 16:31)

1. What kind of people does Jehovah draw to himself?

All love Jehovah deeply. And he saw fit to draw them into a relationship with him. “No man can come to me,” affirmed the Son of God, “unless the Father, who sent me, draws him.”—John 6:37, 44, 65.

² Are we not delighted to be part of a people who have Jehovah’s approval and blessing? Yet, maintaining a strong sense of our identity as Christians in these “critical times hard to deal with” is a challenge. (2 Timothy 3:1) This is especially true of young ones who are

2, 3. Why can it be challenging to maintain a strong sense of Christian identity?

being raised in Christian families. "Though I was attending Christian meetings," admitted one such youth, "I had no clear spiritual goals and, frankly, no crystallized desire to serve Jehovah."

³ Some, while sincerely desiring to serve Jehovah, might be distracted by intense peer pressure, worldly influences, and sinful tendencies. When pressure is exerted on us, it may gradually cause us to lose our Christian identity. For example, many in the world today view the Bible's standards of morality as old-fashioned or unrealistic in our modern world. (1 Peter 4:4) Some feel that it is not vital to worship God in the way that he directs. (John 4:24) In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of the world as having a "spirit," or dominant attitude. (Ephesians 2:2) That spirit exerts pressure on people to conform to the thinking of a society that does not know Jehovah.

⁴ However, as dedicated servants of Jehovah, we realize that it would be tragic for any of us—young or old—to lose our Christian identification. A wholesome sense of Christian identity can be based only on Jehovah's standards and his expectations for us. After all, we are created in his image. (Genesis 1:26; Micah 6:8) The Bible likens our clear identification as Christians to outer garments, worn for all to see. Regarding our times, Jesus warned: "Look! I am coming as a thief. Happy is the one that stays awake and keeps his outer garments, that he may not walk naked and people look upon his shameful ness."*

* These words may allude to the duties of the officer of the temple mount in Jerusalem. During the night watches, he went through the temple to see whether its Levite guards were awake or asleep at their posts. Any guard found sleeping was struck with a stick, and his outer garments might be burned as shameful punishment.

4. How did Jesus emphasize the need for us to safeguard our clear identification as Christians?



(Revelation 16:15) We do not want to shed our Christian qualities and standards of conduct and allow Satan's world to mold us. If that was to happen, we would lose these "outer garments." Such a situation would be regrettable and shameful.

⁵ A strong sense of Christian identity greatly affects the direction one's life takes. How so? If a worshiper of Jehovah was to lose his clear sense of identity, he might end up unfocused, without well-defined direction or goals. The Bible repeatedly warns against such an indecisive state. "He who doubts," cautioned the disciple James, "is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and blown about. In fact, let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from Jehovah; he is an indecisive man, unsteady in all his ways." —James 1:6-8; Ephesians 4:14; Hebrews 13:9.

⁶ How can we safeguard our Christian identity? What can help us to enhance our awareness of our great privilege to be worshipers of the Most High? Please consider the following ways.

5, 6. Why is spiritual stability vital?

Firmly Establish Your Christian Identity

⁷ Continually reaffirm your relationship with Jehovah. The most precious possession a Christian has is his personal relationship with God. (Psalm 25:14; Proverbs 3:32) If we begin to have disturbing questions about our Christian identity, it is time to examine closely the quality and the depth of this relationship. The psalmist appropriately pleaded: "Examine me, O Jehovah, and put me to the test; refine my kidneys and my heart." (Psalm 26:2) Why is such an examination vital? Because we ourselves cannot be reliable assessors of our own deepest motives and innermost inclinations. Only Jehovah is able to fathom our inner person—our motives, thoughts, and emotions.—Jeremiah 17:9, 10.

⁸ By asking Jehovah to examine us, we invite him to test us. He may allow situations to develop that reveal our true motives and heart condition. (Hebrews 4:12, 13; James 1:22-25) We should welcome such tests because they give us an opportunity to demonstrate the depth of our loyalty to Jehovah. Such can show whether we are "complete and sound in all respects, not lacking in anything." (James 1:2-4) And in the process, we can grow spiritually.—Ephesians 4:22-24.

⁹ Prove Bible truth to yourself. Our sense of identity as servants of Jehovah can weaken if it is not solidly based on knowledge of the Scriptures. (Philippians 1:9, 10) Every Christian—young or old—needs to prove to his own satisfaction that what he believes is indeed the truth as found in the Bible. Paul urged fellow believers: "Make sure of all things; hold fast to what is fine." (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Young Christians who belong to

7. Why is it profitable to plead with Jehovah to examine us?
8. (a) How can testing by Jehovah benefit us?
(b) How have you been helped to make progress as a Christian?
9. Is proving Bible truth to ourselves optional? Explain.

God-fearing families must realize that they cannot live off the faith of their parents. Solomon's own father, David, exhorted him to "know the God of your father and serve him with a complete heart." (1 Chronicles 28:9) It would not be enough for young Solomon to watch how his own father built faith in Jehovah. He had to get to know Jehovah for himself, and he did. He beseeched God: "Give me now wisdom and knowledge that I may go out before this people and that I may come in."—2 Chronicles 1:10.

¹⁰ Strong faith is built on knowledge. "Faith follows the thing heard," stated Paul. (Romans 10:17) What did he mean by that? He meant that by feeding on God's Word, we build our faith and confidence in Jehovah, his promises, and his organization. Asking honest questions about the Bible can lead to reassuring answers. Furthermore, at Romans 12:2, we find the advice of Paul: "Prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Just how can we achieve that? By gaining "the accurate knowledge of the truth." (Titus 1:1) Jehovah's spirit can help us to comprehend even difficult subjects. (1 Corinthians 2:11, 12) We should pray for God's help when we are having problems understanding something. (Psalm 119:10, 11, 27) Jehovah wants us to understand his Word, believe it, and obey it. He welcomes honest questions asked with the right motive.

Be Determined to Please God

¹¹ Seek to please God, not man. It is only natural to define our identity in part by belonging to a group. Everyone needs friends, and being included makes us feel good. During adolescence—as well as later in life—peer

10. Why is there nothing wrong with asking honest questions with the right motive?
11. (a) What natural desire can ensnare us?
(b) How can we muster the courage to withstand peer pressure?

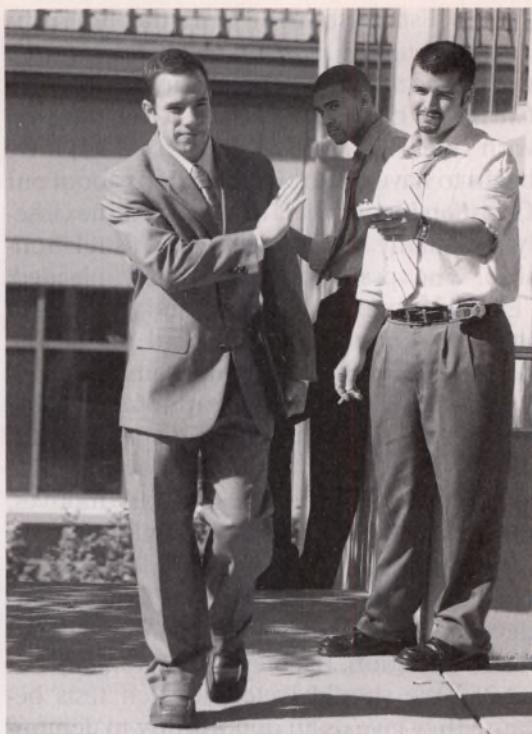
pressure can be powerful, generating a desperate desire to imitate or please others. But friends and peers do not always have our best interests at heart. Sometimes they only want company in doing what is wrong. (Proverbs 1:11-19) When a Christian succumbs to negative peer pressure, he usually tries to conceal his identity. (Psalm 26:4) "Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you," warned the apostle Paul. (Romans 12:2, *The Jerusalem Bible*) Jehovah provides the inner strength we need in order to combat any outside pressure to conform. —Hebrews 13:6.

¹² When outside pressure threatens to damage our sense of Christian identity, it is good to remember that our loyalty to God is far more important than public opinion or the trends of the majority. The words of Exodus 23:2 serve as a safe principle: "You must not follow after the crowd for evil ends." When the majority of fellow Israelites doubted Jehovah's ability to fulfill His promises, Caleb staunchly refused to go along with the majority. He was certain that God's promises were trustworthy, and he was richly rewarded for his stand. (Numbers 13:30; Joshua 14:6-11) Are you similarly willing to resist the pressure of popular opinion in order to safeguard your relationship with God?

¹³ *Make your Christian identity known.* The saying that the best defense is a good offense is true as we stand up for our Christian identity. When confronted with opposition to their efforts to do Jehovah's will in the days of Ezra, faithful Israelites stated: "We are the servants of the God of the heavens and the earth." (Ezra 5:11) If we are affected by the reactions and criticism of hostile people,

12. What principle and what example can fortify us to stand our ground when our trust in God is involved?

13. Why is it the course of wisdom to make known our identity as Christians?



we can become paralyzed with fear. A policy of pleasing everyone will undermine our effectiveness. So do not be intimidated. It is always good to make it clearly known to others that you are one of Jehovah's Witnesses. In a respectful but firm way, you can explain to others your values, your beliefs, and your position as a Christian. Let others know that you have resolved to maintain Jehovah's high standards on issues of morality. Make it clear that your Christian integrity is not negotiable. Show that you are proud of your moral standards. (Psalm 64:10) Standing out as a steadfast Christian can fortify you, protect you, and even move some to inquire about Jehovah and his people.

¹⁴ Yes, some might ridicule or oppose you. (Jude 18) If others do not respond favorably

14. Should ridicule or opposition discourage us? Explain.

to your efforts to explain your values to them, do not get discouraged. (Ezekiel 3:7, 8) No matter how determined you are, you are never going to convince people who have no desire to be convinced. Remember Pharaoh. No plague or miracle—not even the personal loss of his firstborn—was able to persuade Pharaoh that Moses was speaking on behalf of Jehovah. Therefore, do not let fear of man paralyze you. Trust and faith in God can help us overcome fear.—Proverbs 3:5, 6; 29:25.

Immersing ourselves in Christian activities can enhance our Christian identity



Look to the Past, Build for the Future

¹⁵ Cherish your spiritual heritage. In the light of God's Word, Christians will benefit from pondering their rich spiritual heritage. This inheritance includes the truth of Jehovah's Word, the hope of everlasting life, and the honor to represent God as proclaimers of the good news. Can you see your individual place among his Witnesses, in the privileged group of people who have been commissioned with the lifesaving work of Kingdom preaching? Remember, it is none other than Jehovah who affirms: "You are my witnesses."—Isaiah 43:10.

¹⁶ You can ask yourself such questions as: 'How precious is this spiritual heritage to me? Do I prize it sufficiently to make the doing of God's will the top priority in my life? Is my

15, 16. (a) What is our spiritual heritage? (b) How can we benefit from pondering our spiritual heritage in the light of God's Word?

appreciation of it strong enough to fortify me to resist any temptation that might lead to my forfeiting it?" Our spiritual heritage can also infuse in us a deep sense of spiritual security that can be enjoyed only within Jehovah's organization. (Psalm 91:1, 2) Reviewing remarkable events from the modern-day history of Jehovah's organization can impress upon us that no person or thing can eradicate Jehovah's people from the face of the earth.—Isaiah 54:17; Jeremiah 1:19.

¹⁷ Of course, we cannot depend solely on our spiritual heritage. Each of us must develop an intimate relationship with God. After Paul had worked hard to build the faith of Christians in Philippi, he wrote to them: "Consequently, my beloved ones, in the way that you have always obeyed, not during my presence only, but now much more readily during my absence, keep working out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12) We cannot rely on someone else for our salvation.

¹⁸ *Immerse yourself in Christian activities.* It has been observed that "work has been a shaper of personal identity." Christians today have been commissioned to do the vital work of preaching the good news of God's estab-

17. What more is needed than merely relying on our spiritual heritage?
18. How can Christian activities enhance our sense of Christian identity?

Do You Recall?

- Why is it vital for Christians to safeguard their spiritual identity?
- How can we firmly establish our Christian identity?
- When faced with the question of whom to please, what factors can help us make the right decision?
- How can a strong sense of identity shape our future as Christians?

lished Kingdom. Paul declared: "Forasmuch as I am, in reality, an apostle to the nations, I glorify my ministry." (Romans 11:13) Our preaching work distinguishes us from the world, and our participation in it enhances our Christian identity. Immersing ourselves in other theocratic activities, such as Christian meetings, programs for building places of worship, efforts to help those in need, and the like, can deepen our sense of identity as Christians.—Galatians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 10:23, 24.

Clear Identity, Tangible Blessings

¹⁹ Take a moment to contemplate the many benefits and advantages we enjoy because we are true Christians. We have the privilege of being personally recognized by Jehovah. The prophet Malachi said: "Those in fear of Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance began to be written up before him for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name." (Malachi 3:16) We can be viewed by God as his friends. (James 2:23) Our lives are adorned by a clear sense of purpose, by deep meaning, and by wholesome, productive goals. And we have been given the hope of an eternal future.—Psalm 37:9.

²⁰ Remember that your true identity and value lie in God's estimate of your worth, not in what other people may think of you. Others might appraise us according to inadequate human standards. But God's love and personal interest give us the real basis for our worth—we belong to him. (Matthew 10:29-31) In turn, our own love for God can provide us with the greatest sense of identity and the clearest direction in our lives. "If anyone loves God, this one is known by him." —1 Corinthians 8:3.

- 19, 20. (a) What benefits have you personally enjoyed by being a Christian? (b) What gives us the basis for our true identity?

'If You Are Impressed Into Service'

"HEY you! Stop what you're doing right now, and get over here to carry this pack for me." How do you think a busy Jew in the first century might have reacted if a Roman soldier had said that to him? In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus recommended: "If someone under authority impresses you into service for a mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:41) How would Jesus' listeners understand that counsel? And what should it mean for us today?

To get the answers, we need to know about compulsory service in ancient times. That practice was all too familiar to the inhabitants of Israel in Jesus' day.

Compulsory Service

Evidence of compulsory service (or, corvée) in the Near East dates back as far as the 18th century B.C.E. Administrative texts from the ancient Syrian city of Alalakh refer to corvée gangs conscripted by the government for personal service. In Ugarit, on the Syrian coast, tenant farmers were subject to similar duties unless granted immunity by the king.

Of course, conquered or subjugated peoples were frequently set to forced labor. Egyptian taskmasters obliged the Israelites to slave for them in making bricks. Later, the Israelites put Canaanite inhabitants of the Promised Land to slavish labor, and similar practices were continued by David and Solomon.—Exodus 1:13, 14; 2 Samuel 12:31; 1 Kings 9:20, 21.



When the Israelites asked for a king, Samuel explained what the king's rightful due would be. He would take his subjects to serve as charioteers and horsemen, to do plowing and harvesting, to make weapons, and so on. (1 Samuel 8:4-17) However, during the construction of Jehovah's temple, while foreigners were subjected to slavish forced labor, "there were none of the sons of Israel that Solomon constituted slaves; for they were the warriors and his servants and his princes and his adjutants and chiefs of his charioteers and of his horsemen."—1 Kings 9:22.

As for the Israelites employed in building projects, 1 Kings 5:13, 14 says: "King Solomon kept bringing up those conscripted for forced labor out of all Israel; and those conscripted for forced labor amounted to thirty thousand men. And he would send them to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month. For a month they would continue in Lebanon, for two months at their homes." "There can be no doubt," says one scholar, "that the Israelite and Judean kings made use of the corvée as a means of securing unpaid labor for their building activities as well as for work on the crown-lands."

The burden was heavy under Solomon. So grievous was it that when Rehoboam threatened to increase such loads, all Israel revolted and stoned the official appointed over those conscripted for forced labor. (1 Kings 12:12-18) However, the institution was not abolished. Asa, Rehoboam's grandson, summoned people of Judah to construct the cities of Geba and Mizpah, and "there was none exempt."—1 Kings 15:22.

Under Roman Domination

The Sermon on the Mount shows that first-century Jews were familiar with the possibility of being 'impressed into service.' The expression translates the Greek word *ag-gareu'o*, which originally related to the activity of Persian couriers. They had authority to press into service men, horses, ships, or anything else needed to expedite public business.

In Jesus' day, Israel was occupied by the Romans, who had adopted a comparable system. In the Oriental provinces, in addition to

normal taxes, compulsory work could be demanded from the population on a regular or an exceptional basis. Such duties would be unpopular at best. Furthermore, unauthorized seizure of animals, drivers, or wagons for State transport was commonplace. According to historian Michael Rostovtzeff, administrators "tried to regulate and to systematize [the institution], but without success, for so long as the practice existed, it was bound to produce evil effects. Edict after edict was issued by the prefects, who honestly endeavoured to stop the arbitrariness and the oppression inherent in the system . . . But the institution remained oppressive."

"Anyone could be impressed to carry the baggage of the army for a certain distance," says one Greek scholar, and "anyone could be compelled to perform any service that the occupiers chose to lay upon him." That happened to Simon of Cyrene, whom Roman soldiers "impressed into service" to carry Jesus' torture stake.—Matthew 27:32.

Simon of Cyrene was impressed into service



Rabbinic texts too refer to this unpopular institution. For example, one rabbi was seized to transport myrtles to a palace. Laborers could be taken from employers and set to other tasks, while employers still had to pay their wages. Pack animals or oxen could be commandeered. If they were returned at all, they were unlikely to be in a condition fit for further work. You can see why seizure was synonymous with confiscation. Thus, a Jewish proverb affirmed: "*Angareia* is like death." Says one historian: "A village could be reduced to ruin by the seizure of ploughing oxen for *angareia* instead of authorized draught animals."

You can just imagine how unpopular such services were, especially since they were often imposed with arrogance and injustice. Given the hatred they nurtured for the Gentile powers that dominated them, the Jews bitterly resented the humiliation of being forced into such vexatious labor. No extant law informs us just how far a citizen could be compelled to carry a load. It is likely that many would not be willing to go one step further than the law required.

Yet, this was the institution Jesus referred to when he said: "If someone under authority impresses you into service for a mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:41) On hearing that, some must have thought him unreasonable. Just what did he mean?

How Christians Should React

Put simply, Jesus was telling his listeners that if an authority compelled them into some kind of legitimate service, they should perform it willingly and without resentment. They were thus to pay "Caesar's things to Caesar" but not overlook the obligation to pay "God's things to God."—Mark 12:17.*

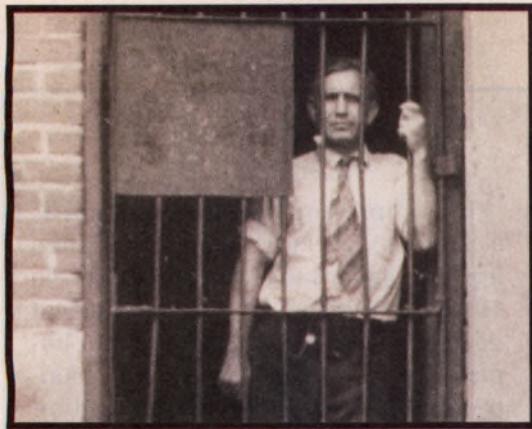
* For a full discussion of what it means for Christians to "pay back Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God," see *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1996, pages 15-20.

ANCIENT MISUSE OF IMPRESSIONT

That impressment was often used as a pretext to extort services is seen from regulations to curb such abuses. In 118 B.C.E., Ptolemy Euergetes II of Egypt decreed that his officials "shall not impress any of the inhabitants of the country for private services, nor requisition (*aggareuein*) their cattle for any purpose of their own." Additionally: "No one shall requisition . . . boats for his own use on any pretext whatsoever." In an inscription dated 49 C.E., in the Temple of the Great Oasis, Egypt, Roman prefect Vergilius Capito acknowledged that soldiers had made illegal requisitions, and he established that "no one shall take or requisition . . . anything, unless he has a written authorization from me."

Moreover, the apostle Paul exhorted Christians: "Let every soul be in subjection to the superior authorities, for there is no authority except by God; the existing authorities stand placed in their relative positions by God. Therefore he who opposes the authority has taken a stand against the arrangement of God . . . If you are doing what is bad, be in fear: for it is not without purpose that it bears the sword."—Romans 13:1-4.

Jesus and Paul thus acknowledged the right of a king or a government to mete out punishment to those who violated their demands. What kind of punishment? Greek philosopher Epictetus, of the first and second centuries C.E., provides one answer: "If an unforeseen requisition arises and a soldier takes your young ass, let it go. Do not resist, do not murmur, lest you receive blows as well as lose the ass."



Many Witnesses have spent time in prison for maintaining their Christian stand

Yet, on occasion, both in ancient and in modern times, Christians have felt that they could not in good conscience comply with government demands. Sometimes the consequences have been serious. Some Christians have been sentenced to death. Others have spent many years in prison for refusing to participate in what they considered to be nonneutral activities. (Isaiah 2:4; John 17:16; 18:36) On other occasions, Christians have felt that they could comply with what was asked of them. For example, some Christians feel that they can in good conscience perform services under a civilian administration involving general work useful to the community. That might mean assisting the elderly or disabled, serving as firefighters, cleaning beaches, working in parks, forests, or libraries, and so on.

Naturally, situations vary from land to land. Therefore, in order to decide whether to comply with demands or not, each Christian must follow his Bible-trained conscience.

Going the Second Mile

The principle Jesus taught, that of being willing to carry out legitimate requests, is valid not only for governmental requirements but also in everyday human relations. It may be, for instance, that a person with authority over you asks you to do something that you would prefer not to do but that is not contrary to God's law. How will you react? You

may feel that unreasonable demands are being made on your time and energies, and you may therefore react indignantly. The result may be ill will. On the other hand, if you comply sullenly, you may lose your inner peace. The solution? Do as Jesus recommended—go the second mile. Do not only what is asked of you but even more than what is asked. Do it willingly. In that frame of mind, you will no longer feel that you are being taken advantage of, yet you remain free to be master of your own actions.

"Many people go through life doing only those things they are compelled to do," notes one author. "For them life is a hard experience, and they are constantly tired. Others go beyond the call of duty and freely give themselves." In effect, many situations present the choice of going just one mile under compulsion—or two. In the first case, a person may be interested in demanding his rights. In the second, he may have his most rewarding experiences. What kind of person are you? You will probably be much happier and more productive if you can view your activities, not as mere duties or things you have to do, but as things you want to do.

And what if you are a person with authority? Clearly, it is neither loving nor Christian to use authority to force others to do unwillingly what you ask of them. "The rulers of the nations lord it over them and the great men wield authority over them," said Jesus. But that is not the Christian way. (Matthew 20:25, 26) While an authoritarian approach may get results, how much better relations will be among all involved if kind and appropriate requests are met by respectful and cheerful compliance! Yes, a readiness to go two miles instead of just one can truly enrich your life.

Questions From Readers

Did David, a man agreeable to God's own heart, treat his captives savagely, as some conclude from 2 Samuel 12:31 and 1 Chronicles 20:3?

No. David merely consigned the Ammonite captives to forced labor. David's actions have been misunderstood because of the way some Bible translations render these verses.

Describing the treatment meted out to the Ammonites, those Bible versions portray David as barbaric and cruel. For example, 2 Samuel 12:31, according to the *King James Version*, reads: "He brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brickkiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." The account at 1 Chronicles 20:3 is rendered similarly.

However, as noted by Bible scholar Samuel Rolles Driver, cruelty "is alien to all that we know of the personal character and temper of David." Thus, a comment in *The Anchor Bible* states: "David is setting up work crews of captives for the economic exploitation of the conquered territory, evidently standard practice for victorious kings." Along the same line, Adam Clarke comments: "The meaning there-

fore is, He made the people slaves, and employed them in sawing, making iron harrows, or mining, . . . and in hewing of wood, and making of brick. Sawing asunder, hacking, chopping, and hewing human beings, have no place in this text, no more than they had in David's conduct towards the Ammonites."

Reflecting this more accurate understanding, various modern translations make it clear that David should not be charged with inhumane treatment.* Note the rendering of the *New English Translation* (2003): "He removed the people who were in it and made them do hard labor with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, putting them to work at the brick kiln. This was his policy with all the Ammonite cities." (2 Samuel 12:31) "He took the city's residents and made them work with saws, iron picks, and axes. David did this to all the cities of the Ammonites." (1 Chronicles 20:3) The rendering of the *New World Translation* is also in keeping with the latest scholarship: "The people that were in it, he brought out that he might put them at sawing stones and at sharp instruments of iron and at axes of iron, and he made them serve at brickmaking." (2 Samuel 12:31) "The people that were in it he brought out, and he kept them employed at sawing stones and at sharp instruments of iron and at axes; and that was the way David proceeded to do to all the cities of the sons of Ammon."—1 Chronicles 20:3.

David did not subject the defeated Ammonites to barbarous torture and gruesome massacres. He did not copy the sadistic and brutal war customs of his day.

* By a difference of one letter, the Hebrew text can read "he put them into the saw" or "he cut (sawed) them in pieces." Moreover, the word for "brick kiln" can also mean "brick mold." Such a mold would be too narrow for anyone to pass through.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The Benefits of Making Peace

Wise Guidance for Married Couples

"Faithful Under Trials"

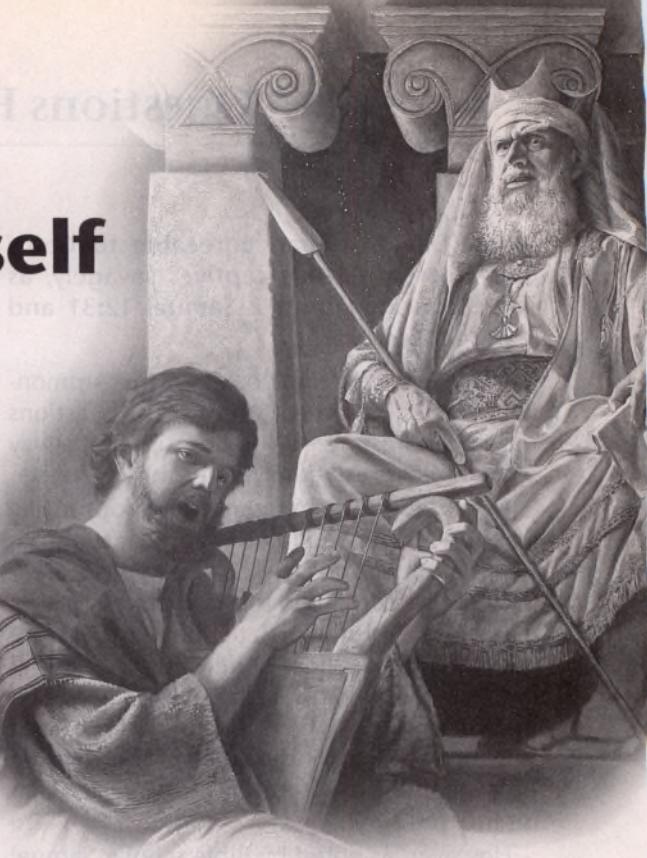
Do You Measure Yourself Against Others?

WHOMO of us has not met a person who is better looking than we are, seems to be more popular, grasps things faster, or gets better grades in school? Maybe others have better health or a more gratifying job, are more successful, or seem to have more friends. They may have more possessions, more money, a newer car, or they may just seem to be happier. In noting such things, do we measure ourselves against others? Are comparisons inevitable? Why might a Christian want to avoid them? And how can we be content without comparing ourselves with anyone?

Why and When We May Compare

One concept of why people may compare themselves with others is that this serves to maintain or enhance their self-esteem. People are often satisfied to find that they are as successful as their peers. Another idea is that comparisons are attempts to reduce uncertainty about ourselves, to understand what we are capable of doing and what our limits are. We observe what others have achieved. If they are like us in many respects and have reached certain objectives, we might feel that we can reach similar goals.

Comparisons are most often made between people who resemble one another



—who are of the same sex, of a similar age, and at a similar social level and who know one another. We are less likely to measure ourselves against someone else if the perceived disparity is great. Put another way, the average teenage girl is less likely to compare herself with a top model than with her schoolmates, and the model is unlikely to compare herself with the teenager.

In what areas do comparisons take place? Any possession or attribute considered of value in a community—be it intelligence, beauty, wealth, clothes—may be the basis for comparison. However, we tend to draw comparisons about things that interest us. We will probably not envy the size of the stamp collection of one of our acquaintances, for example, unless we are particularly interested in collecting stamps.

King Saul grew envious of David

Comparisons elicit a whole spectrum of reactions, ranging from contentment to depression, from admiration and a desire for emulation to uneasiness or antagonism. Some of these emotions are harmful, and they are incompatible with Christian qualities.

Competitive Comparisons

Many who strive to come off "winners" in comparisons display a competitive spirit. They want to be better than others, and they are not content until they feel that they are. It is not pleasant to be around such individuals. Friendships with them are strained, relationships tense. Not only do such people lack humility but they usually fail to apply the Bible's counsel about loving their fellowman, since their attitude can easily arouse in others feelings of inferiority and humiliation.—Matthew 18:1-5; John 13:34, 35.

Making people feel that they are "losers" injures them in a sense. According to one writer, "our failures are all the more painful when it appears that people who are in the same situation as we are have procured the possessions that we want." A competitive spirit thus provokes envy, resentment, and displeasure toward someone because of his belongings, prosperity, position, reputation, advantages, and so on. This leads to more competition—a vicious circle. The Bible condemns "stirring up competition."—Galatians 5:26.

By degrading the achievements of rivals, envious ones attempt to save their own injured self-esteem. Such reactions may seem petty, but if not recognized and checked, they can lead to malicious wrongdoing.

Consider two Bible accounts in which envy was a factor.

During his residence among the Philistines, Isaac was blessed with "flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and a large body of servants, so that the Philistines began to envy him." They reacted by stopping up the wells dug by Isaac's father, Abraham, and their king asked Isaac to leave the area. (Genesis 26:1-3, 12-16) Their envy was spiteful and destructive. They just could not bear Isaac's enjoyment of prosperity in their midst any longer.

Centuries later, David distinguished himself on the battlefield. His feats were celebrated by the women of Israel, who sang: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Though he was receiving a measure of praise, Saul considered that comparison to be demeaning, and envy stirred in his heart. From then on, he nurtured ill will toward David. He soon made the first of several attempts to kill David. What wickedness can spring from envy!—1 Samuel 18:6-11.

So if measuring ourselves against others—their feats or advantages—stimulates feelings akin to envy or competitiveness, beware! These are negative emotions, incompatible with God's thinking. But before examining how such attitudes can be resisted, let us consider something else that generates comparisons.

Self-Evaluation and Contentment

'Am I intelligent, attractive, competent, in good physical shape, authoritative, lovable? And to what extent?' We rarely stand in front of a mirror asking things like these. Yet, according to one writer, "implicitly, such questions often cross our mind and tacitly elicit answers that are more or less satisfying." A person who is not sure of what he can achieve might muse about these

things without any competitive urge or tinge of envy. He is simply evaluating himself. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that. The right way to do this, however, is not by comparing ourselves with others.

We have different abilities, depending on a variety of factors. There will always be some who seem to be doing better than we are. Hence, rather than observing them enviously, we should gauge our performance in relation to God's righteous standards, which provide a sure guide of what is right and good. Jehovah is interested in what we are individually. He does not need to compare us with anybody. The apostle Paul advises us: "Let each one prove what his own work is, and then he will have cause for exultation in regard to himself alone, and not in comparison with the other person."—Galatians 6:4.

Combating Envy

Because all humans are imperfect, vigorous and protracted efforts may be necessary to combat envy. It is one thing to know that the Scriptures tell us: "In showing honor to one another take the lead," but it is quite another to do it. Paul recognized his own inclination toward sin. To fight it, he had to "pummel [his] body and lead it as a slave." (Romans 12:10; 1 Corinthians 9:27) For us, that may mean resisting competitive thoughts, replacing them with positive ones. We need to pray, asking Jehovah to help us "not to think more of [ourselves] than it is necessary to think."—Romans 12:3.



Bible study and meditation also help. Think, for instance, of the future Paradise God promises. Then all will have peace, good health, abundant food, comfortable homes, and satisfying work. (Psalm 46:8, 9; 72:7, 8, 16; Isaiah 65:21-23) Will anyone feel the urge to compete? Hardly. There will be no reason for doing so. True, Jehovah has not provided every detail of what life will be like then, but we may reasonably suppose that all will be able to pursue interests and skills that appeal to them. One may study astronomy, another design beautiful fabrics. Why would one envy the other? The activities of our fellows will be a stimulus, not a cause for resentment. Such feelings will be things of the past.

If that is the life we desire, should we not strive to nurture the same attitude now? We already enjoy a spiritual paradise, free from many problems of the world around us. Since there will be no competitive spirit in God's new world, there really is reason to avoid it now.

Is it wrong, then, to compare ourselves with others? Or are there times when that may be appropriate?

Appropriate Comparisons

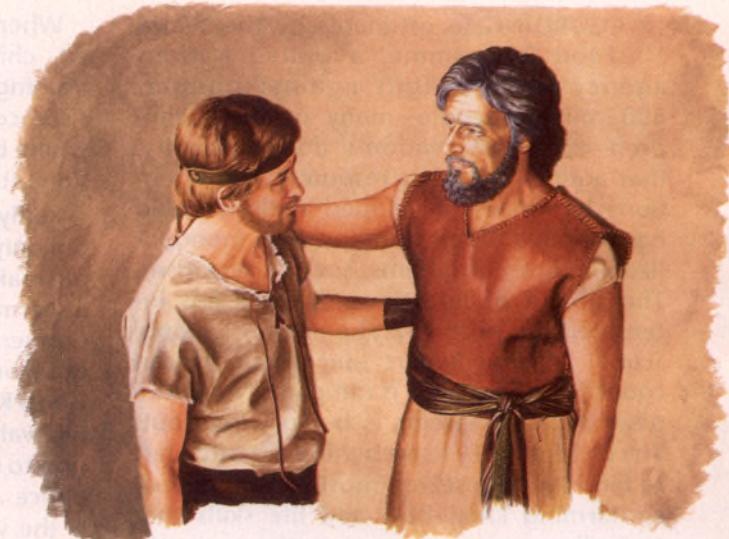
Many comparisons have led to bitter or depressive reactions, but they need not always do so. In this connection, note the apostle Paul's advice: "Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Hebrews 6:12) Striving to cultivate qualities like those of Jehovah's faith-

ful servants of ancient times can be productive. Granted, that may involve some comparisons. Yet, it can help us to see examples that we can emulate and areas where we need to improve.

Consider Jonathan. In a sense, he had reason to be envious. As the eldest son of King Saul of Israel, Jonathan may once have expected to become king, but Jehovah chose a man some 30 years his junior, young David. Instead of harboring a grudge, Jonathan distinguished himself in unselfish friendship and support for David as Jehovah's king-designate. Jonathan was a truly spiritual man. (1 Samuel 19:1-4) Unlike his father, who saw David as a rival, Jonathan recognized Jehovah's hand in matters and submitted to His will; he did not compare himself with David, asking, "Why David and not me?"

Among fellow Christians, we should never feel threatened, as if others are trying to outdo us or take our place. Rivalry is inappropriate. Mature Christians are characterized by cooperation, unity, and love, not competition. "Love is envy's great enemy," says sociologist Francesco Alberoni. "If we love someone, we want what is good for him, and we are happy when he is successful and happy." So if someone else in the Christian congregation is chosen for a certain privilege, the loving thing would be to be content with that. That is the way Jonathan was. Like him, we will be blessed if we support those faithfully serving in responsible positions in Jehovah's organization.

The excellent example set by fellow Christians may properly be admired. Balanced comparisons with them can spur us on to healthy imitation of their faith. (He-



*Jonathan never viewed
the younger David as a rival*

brews 13:7) But if we are not careful, emulation can turn into competition. If we feel outdone by someone whom we admire and we try to denigrate or criticize him, emulation would be degraded to envy.

No imperfect human offers an ideal model. Thus, the Scriptures say: "Become imitators of God, as beloved children." Also, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you a model for you to follow his steps closely." (Ephesians 5:1, 2; 1 Peter 2:21) The attributes of Jehovah and Jesus—their love, warmth, empathy, and humility—should be what we strive to imitate. We should take time to measure ourselves against their qualities, purposes, and ways of doing things. Such comparison can enrich our lives, providing sure direction, stability, and security, and can help us to attain to the stature of mature Christian men and women. (Ephesians 4:13) If we concentrate on doing our best to imitate their perfect example, we will surely be less inclined to compare ourselves with fellow humans.

ACCORDING to estimates by the World Food Programme, a United Nations agency for the fight against hunger, 800 million people—many of them children—are at starvation's door. Recently, that agency said that resources and attention that many developed nations could have applied to this situation were monopolized by other problems, such as terrorism. The spread of infectious diseases has intensified the problem. The agency's *Global School Feeding Report* said about African countries where AIDS is rampant: "An entire generation of parents is being wiped out. The children they leave behind are often left to fend for themselves, most lacking the basic farming know-how and life skills that typically pass from one generation to another."

The World Food Programme is promoting an initiative that aims to serve at least one meal a day in schools. The idea is not only to reduce hunger but also to activate through regular education other programs designed to prevent HIV/AIDS among youngsters.

Who Will Feed the World?

Where the initiative has been implemented, children have received nourishment, training in personal hygiene, and other assistance. It has also been observed that where behavior is modified, HIV/AIDS infection rates decline.

Sadly, the results of human efforts are often only partial and not decisive. But the Bible makes a comforting promise concerning a permanent solution to the problem of hunger. "There will come to be plenty of grain on the earth," says Psalm 72:16. Under God's Kingdom, people will be able to say of Jehovah God: "You have turned your attention to the earth, that you may give it abundance . . . You prepare their grain, for that is the way you prepare the earth."—Psalm 65:9.

WFP/Y. Yuge

