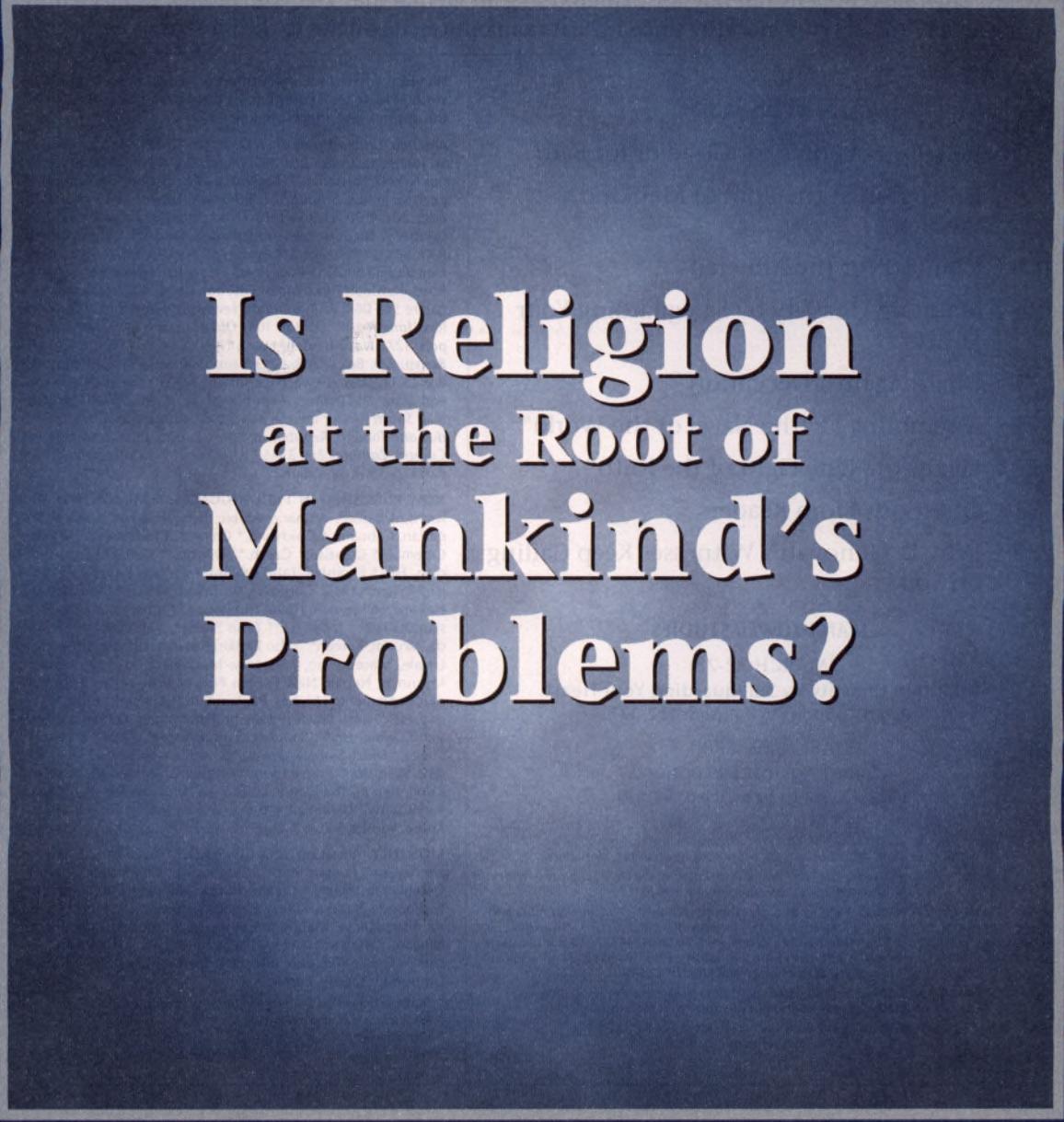


FEBRUARY 15, 2004

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



# Is Religion at the Root of Mankind's Problems?

# 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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## RELIGION A Force for Good or for Bad?

"I OWE Christianity a debt, and so, I believe, does the world we have lived in for the last 2000 years."—Foreword, *Two Thousand Years—The First Millennium: The Birth of Christianity to the Crusades*.

That endorsement for "Christianity" comes from English writer and broadcaster Melvyn Bragg. His words echo the sentiments of millions of earth's inhabitants who feel a similar immense debt and loyalty to one religion or another. They are convinced that religion has been a powerful force for good in their lives. For example, one writer says that Islam "has inspired a great civilisation . . . [that has] enriched the whole world."

### Religion's Role—Good or Bad?

Bragg's next words, however, raise a serious question about whether religion in general really has been a force for good. He adds: "Christianity also owes me an explanation." For what does he want an explanation? "For the bigotry, the wickedness, the inhumanity and the wilful ignorance which has also characterized much of its 'history,'" he says.

Many would say that bigotry, wickedness, inhumanity, and willful ignorance have marked most of the world's religions throughout history. Their view is that religion simply poses as a benefactor of mankind—that under its facade of virtue and holiness, it is in reality full of hypocrisy and lies. (Matthew 23:27, 28) "No statement is more common in our literature than that religion is of peculiar value in connection with civilization," says *A Rationalist Encyclopædia*. "And none is more massively discredited by the facts of history," it continues.

Pick up any newspaper today, and you will find almost endless examples of religious leaders who preach love, peace, and compassion but who fan the flames of hatred and invoke the name of God to legitimize their brutal conflicts. No wonder many people feel that religion is more often than not a destructive force in life!

### Better With No Religion?

Some have even concluded, as did English philosopher Bertrand Russell, that it would be good if in time "every kind of religious

belief [would] die out." In their view, the removal of religion is the only lasting solution to all of mankind's problems. They may choose to forget, however, that those who reject religion can engender just as much hatred and intolerance as those who espouse it. Religion writer Karen Armstrong reminds us: "At the very least, the Holocaust showed that a secularist ideology [can] be just as le-

thal as any religious crusade."—*The Battle for God—Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*.

So is religion really a force for good, or does it, in fact, lie at the root of mankind's problems? Is the solution to those problems to get rid of *all* religion? Consider what the Bible has to say about this in the next article. The answer may surprise you.

## Is Religion at the Root of Mankind's Problems?



**W**HEN religion is not encouraging strife it is acting as a drug which numbs the human conscience and fills the human brain with escapist fantasies. . . . [It] causes human beings to be narrow, superstitious, full of hatred and fear." The former Methodist missionary who wrote that added: "These charges are true. There is bad and good religion."—*Start Your Own Religion*.

'Surely that is unfair criticism,' some may say. Yet, who can deny the facts of history? To a large extent, religion—defined as "the

service and worship of God or the supernatural"—has a shocking record. It *should* enlighten and inspire us. More often than not, however, what it *does* is engender strife, intolerance, and hatred. Why is that?

### A Misleading "Angel of Light"

According to the Bible, there is a very simple answer. Posing as "an angel of light," Satan the Devil has misled millions into following his teachings rather than God's. (2 Corinthians 11:14) The apostle John

showed that Satan's influence is so extensive that "*the whole world* is lying in the power of the wicked one." (1 John 5:19) John knew that Satan was "misleading the entire inhabited earth."—Revelation 12:9.

What have been the consequences of this? Satan has promoted religious systems that on the surface appear to be holy. They have "a façade of 'religion,'" but their true condition is exposed by the evil fruitage they produce. (2 Timothy 3:5; J. B. Phillips; Matthew 7:15-20) Instead of helping to solve mankind's problems, religion actually becomes part of the problem.

Do not quickly dismiss that idea as being farfetched or unreasonable. Remember, the very nature of deception is that the one being deceived is unaware of it. The apostle Paul gave an example of this when he wrote: "The things which the nations sacrifice they sacrifice to demons, and not to God." (1 Corinthians 10:20) Those people would likely have been shocked to think that they were worshiping demons. They thought that they were worshiping a good god, or gods, of some kind. Yet, in reality they had been deceived by "wicked spirit forces in the heavenly places," who support Satan in his efforts to mislead mankind.—Ephesians 6:12.

Let us consider, for example, how Satan managed to deceive and mislead many professed Christians who chose to ignore the apostle John's warning about that evil influence.—1 Corinthians 10:12.



## What Jesus Taught Came From God

"What I teach," said Jesus Christ, "is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me." (John 7:16) Yes, what he taught was from Almighty God. So Jesus' teachings had a powerful, uplifting effect on those who listened to him. They did not 'numb the human conscience or fill the human brain with escapist fantasies.' On the contrary, Jesus' teachings set people free from religious error and human philosophies produced by a world that was "in darkness mentally" because of the Devil's deception.—Ephesians 4:18; Matthew 15:14; John 8:31, 32.

True Christians were identified, not by a mere profession of piety, but by a faith that reflected the beautiful qualities produced by God's holy spirit. (Galatians 5:22, 23; James 1:22; 2:26) Outstanding among these qualities—and the identifying mark of genuine Christianity—is the sublime quality of love.—John 13:34, 35.

Note this crucial point, however: Neither Jesus nor his apostles expected the Christian congregation to continue in the form in which it was originally established. They knew that apostasy would develop and that the true religion would be overshadowed for a time.

## True Religion Hidden for a Time

In an illustration about wheat and weeds, Jesus foretold that true religion would be virtually obscured for a time. Read the account for yourself at Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43. Jesus sowed a field with wheat, "the fine seed," which pictured his faithful disciples who would make up the original Christian congregation. He warned that "an enemy," Satan the Devil, would in time oversow the wheat field with "weeds"—people who

professed to follow Jesus Christ but who in fact rejected his teachings.

Very soon after the death of Jesus' apostles, individuals appeared who proved to be "weeds," favoring twisted human teachings over "the very word of Jehovah." (Jeremiah 8:8, 9; Acts 20:29, 30) As a consequence, a perverted, counterfeit Christianity appeared on the world stage. It was dominated by what the Bible calls "the lawless one"—a corrupt clergy class that was itself steeped in "every unrighteous deception." (2 Thessalonians 2: 6-10) Jesus foretold that this situation would change "in the conclusion of the system of things." The wheatlike Christians would be collected together in unity and "the weeds" would eventually be destroyed.

It is this counterfeit Christianity that bears responsibility for the "centuries of unredeemed barbarism" and spiritual darkness that enveloped Christendom in the centuries that followed. Foreseeing this and all the other depraved and violent acts done since then in the name of religion, the apostle Peter rightly predicted that "on account of these [professed Christians] the way of the truth [would] be spoken of abusively."—2 Peter 2: 1, 2.

### **"A Theology of Rage and Hatred"**

It certainly is not just Christendom that has given religion a poor reputation. Think of the fundamentalist versions of "militant piety," for example, that former nun Karen Armstrong says have been spawned by "every major religious tradition." According to Armstrong, one crucial test of any religion is that it should lead to "practical compassion." What has been the record of fundamentalist religions in this regard? "Fundamentalist faith," she writes, "be it Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, fails this crucial test if it becomes a theology of rage and hatred." (*The Battle for God—Fundamentalism in Ju-*

*diasm, Christianity and Islam*) But is it only the "fundamentalist" brand of religion that has failed this test and become "a theology of rage and hatred"? History shows otherwise.

Satan has, in fact, built up a world empire of false religion, identified by rage, hatred, and almost endless bloodshed. The Bible calls this empire "Babylon the Great, the mother . . . of the disgusting things of the earth," and it is pictured as a prostitute who rides on the back of a beastlike political system. It is noteworthy that she is held accountable for "the blood . . . of all those who have been slaughtered on the earth."—Revelation 17:4-6; 18:24.

### **Not Everyone Has Been Deceived**

History proves, however, that not everyone has been deceived. Even in the darkest of times, notes Melvyn Bragg, "many fine souls did good when most around them were evil." Genuine Christians continued to "worship [God] with spirit and truth." (John 4:21-24) They stood apart from a worldwide religious system that had prostituted itself as "a reinforcer of military power." They refused to be drawn into a working relationship of Church and State that history reveals as "more a pact made by Satan than any Jesus of Nazareth."—*Two Thousand Years—The Second Millennium: From Medieval Christendom to Global Christianity*.

In more recent times, Jehovah's Witnesses have been noted for their influence for good. To keep free from any taint of false religion, they have based their beliefs and actions solely on God's inspired Word, the Bible. (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) And like first-century Christians, they have followed Jesus' command to be "no part of the world." (John 15: 17-19; 17:14-16) In Nazi Germany, for example, they refused to compromise Christian principles and therefore were not acceptable according to Nazi ideology. Hitler hated



*People of all backgrounds have found joy in the pure religion*

them for it. Says one school textbook: "Jehovah's Witnesses . . . followed the teaching of the Bible not to take up weapons in any cause. So they refused to serve in the army or to have anything to do with the Nazis. In retaliation, the SS imprisoned whole families of Jehovah's Witnesses." (*Germany—1918-45*) Indeed, hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany died as a result of the Nazi persecution.

Of course, other courageous individuals of various religions suffered for their beliefs. But Jehovah's Witnesses did this as a united religious body. By far the majority held firm to the fundamental Scriptural principle: "Obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29; Mark 12:17.

### The Root of the Problem

So it is only partly true that religion lies at the root of all of mankind's problems. *False* religion does. Yet, God intends to remove all false religion very soon now. (Revelation 17:16, 17; 18:21) His command to anyone who

loves justice and righteousness is: "Get out of her [that is, Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion], my people, if you do not want to share with her in her sins, and if you do not want to receive part of her plagues. For her sins have massed together clear up to heaven, and God has called her acts of injustice to mind." (Revelation 18:4, 5) Yes, God himself is deeply offended by religion that 'encourages strife, numbs the human conscience, fills the brain with escapist fantasies, and causes people to be narrow-minded, superstitious, and full of hatred and fear'!

In the meantime, God is gathering into the pure religion those who love truth. It is the religion that adheres to the principles and teachings of a loving, just, and compassionate Creator. (Micah 4:1, 2; Zephaniah 3:8, 9; Matthew 13:30) You can be part of it. If you would like more information on how to identify pure religion, feel free to write to the publishers of this magazine, or ask any of Jehovah's Witnesses for assistance.

# Comfort for the *Afflicted*

WHEN faithful men and women in the past suffered affliction, they prayed earnestly to God for guidance. Yet, they also took the initiative to alleviate the affliction, such as by using ingenuity to escape oppressors. For example, reliance on Jehovah combined with personal effort enabled David to endure his adversity. What about us today?

When experiencing affliction, you likely take the initiative to solve your problem. For instance, if you find yourself unemployed, do you not put forth effort to find a suitable job that will sustain you and your family? (1 Timothy 5:8) Or if you suffer from a physical ailment, do you not seek adequate medical help? It is interesting that Jesus, who had power from God to cure all types of illnesses, acknowledged that 'the ailing need a physician.' (Matthew 9:12) Still, your adversities may not always be removed; you may have to continue enduring them to some extent.

Why not take the matter to Jehovah God in prayer? For instance, when searching for employment, prayerful reliance on God will help us to resist any temptation to accept work that conflicts with Bible principles. We will also avoid being "led astray from the faith" by greed or the love of money. (1 Timothy 6:10) Really, when making important



decisions regarding employment or family or health concerns, we can follow David's exhortation: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself, and he himself will sustain you. Never will he allow the righteous one to totter."—Psalm 55:22.

Heartfelt prayer will also help us to keep our mental balance so that our affliction does not overwhelm us. A genuine Christian, the apostle Paul wrote: "In everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God." In what way can sincere prayer comfort us? "The peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6, 7) The peace of God "excels all thought." Therefore, it can stabili-

lize us when we are burdened with distressing emotions. It will ‘guard our hearts and our mental powers,’ thus helping us to avoid reacting rashly and unwisely, which could add to our affliction.

Prayer can even make a difference in how a situation works out. When the apostle Paul became a prisoner in Rome, he humbly asked fellow Christians to pray in his behalf. Why did Paul make this request? “I exhort you more especially to do this,” he wrote to them, “that I may be restored to you the sooner.” (Hebrews 13:19) In other words, Paul knew that Jehovah’s hearing the persistent prayers of his fellow believers might make a difference as to *when* he would be released.—Philemon 22.

Will prayer change the outcome of our affliction? It may. Yet, we should realize that Jehovah God may not answer our prayers in a way that we would prefer. Paul prayed several times about his “thorn in the flesh,” perhaps a physical problem. Rather than removing the affliction, however, God told Paul: “My undeserved kindness is sufficient for you; for my power is being made perfect in weakness.” —2 Corinthians 12:7-9.

So, then, our affliction may not disappear immediately. However, we will have the opportunity to prove our reliance on our heavenly Father. (James 1:2-4) Be assured that even if Jehovah God does not remove the affliction, he can “make the way out in order for [us] to be able to endure it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13) It is noteworthy that Jehovah is called “the God of all comfort, who

comforts us in all our tribulation.” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) God can give us what we need to endure, and we have the hope of everlasting life.

God’s Word, the Bible, promises that Jehovah “will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore.” (Revelation 21:3, 4) Does a world without affliction sound almost too good to be true? It may if you have been accustomed to living with adversity. Nonetheless, freedom from fear and calamity is what God has promised, and his purpose will definitely succeed.—Isaiah 55:10, 11.

#### ***From despair to relief***



# MAINTAIN CHASTITY BY SAFEGUARDING YOUR HEART

*"More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart, for out of it are the sources of life."*—PROVERBS 4:23.

THE painting may have seemed old-fashioned. Perhaps it did not fit in with the decor of the house. At any rate, the owner evidently had little use for it. The picture wound up at a rummage sale, bearing a price tag of 29 dollars (U.S.). A few years later, though, it was found to be worth nearly a million dollars! Yes, it turned out to be a rare masterpiece. Imagine the feelings of the former owner, who had undervalued this treasure!

<sup>2</sup> Something similar often happens with chastity, an individual's moral cleanliness, or purity. All too many people today put a low value on their own chastity. Some regard it as an old-fashioned notion, one that does not fit in with a modern life-style. Thus, they give it up for a small return. Some trade in their chastity for a few moments of sexual gratification. Others sacrifice it in hopes of acquiring greater standing in the eyes of their peers or a member of the opposite sex. —Proverbs 13:20.

<sup>3</sup> Many discover too late just how valuable a possession their chastity really was. Their loss is often tragic. As the Bible puts it, the aftereffects of immorality can be like poison, "as bitter as wormwood." (Proverbs 5:3, 4) In

- 1-3. (a) How do people often show that they do not value their chastity? Illustrate. (b) Why is it important to examine the value of chastity?



view of today's corrupt moral climate, how can you cherish and maintain your chastity? We will focus on three related steps we can take.

## Safeguard Your Heart

<sup>4</sup> The key to maintaining chastity is to safeguard the heart. The Bible says: "More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart, for out of it are the sources of life." (Proverbs 4:23) What is "your heart," referred to here? It is not the literal organ. This heart is figurative. It refers to the person you are inside, including your thoughts, feelings, and motivations. The Bible says: "You must love Jehovah your God with *all your heart* and all your soul and all your vital force." (Deuteronomy 6:5) Jesus referred to this commandment as the greatest of all. (Mark 12:29, 30) Clearly, this heart of ours is of enormous value. It is worth safeguarding.

<sup>5</sup> However, the Bible also says that "the heart is more treacherous than anything else and is desperate." (Jeremiah 17:9) How can the heart be treacherous—a danger to us? Well, an automobile, for example, is a valuable tool, even a lifesaver in an emergency.

4. What is the figurative heart, and why should we safeguard it?  
5. How can the heart be valuable and dangerous at the same time?

But if the driver does not control the car, constantly guiding the steering wheel, that same car may easily become a deadly weapon. Similarly, unless you safeguard your heart, you will be at the mercy of your every inner desire and impulse, and your life course will veer into disaster. God's Word says: "He that is trusting in his own heart is stupid, but he that is walking in wisdom is the one that will escape." (Proverbs 28:26) Yes, you can walk in wisdom and escape disaster if you use God's Word to guide you, much as you would consult a road map before beginning a trip.—Psalm 119:105.

<sup>6</sup> Our heart will not naturally veer toward chastity. We must steer it that way. One way to do so is to contemplate the true value of chastity. This quality is closely related to holiness, which signifies cleanliness, purity, separation from sinfulness. Holiness is a precious quality that is part of the very nature of Jehovah God. Hundreds of Bible verses associate that quality with Jehovah. In fact, the Bible says that "Holiness belongs to Jehovah." (Exodus 28:36) What, though, does that lofty quality have to do with us imperfect humans?

<sup>7</sup> In his Word, Jehovah tells us: "You must be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:16) Yes, we can imitate Jehovah's holiness; we can be clean before him, maintaining our chastity. So when we refrain from unclean, defiling acts, we are reaching out for a lofty, thrilling privilege—that of reflecting a beautiful trait of the Most High God! (Ephesians 5:1) We should not assume that it is out of our reach to do so, for Jehovah is a wise and reasonable Master who never demands more of us than we are able to do. (Psalm 103:13, 14; James 3:17) Granted, remaining

6, 7. (a) What is holiness, and why is it important to servants of Jehovah? (b) How do we know that imperfect humans can reflect Jehovah's holiness?

spiritually and morally chaste requires effort. The apostle Paul noted, though, that "sincerity and . . . chastity . . . are due the Christ." (2 Corinthians 11:3) Do we not owe it to Christ and to his Father to make every effort to keep morally chaste? After all, they have shown us more love than we can ever begin to repay. (John 3:16; 15:13) It is a privilege for us to express our gratitude by living



*A car can be dangerous if not guided properly*

a clean, moral life. By thinking of our chastity in this way, we will value it, safeguarding our heart.

<sup>8</sup> We also safeguard our heart by the way we feed ourselves. We need to nourish our mind and heart regularly with good spiritual food, keeping our focus on the good news of God's Kingdom. (Colossians 3:2) Even our conversation should reflect such a focus. If we are known for talking about fleshly, immoral subjects, we are revealing something about the condition of our heart. (Luke 6:45) Let us be known, rather, for talking about matters that are spiritual and upbuilding. (Ephesians 5:3) To safeguard our heart, there

8. (a) How can we nourish the figurative heart? (b) What may our conversation reveal about us?

are serious dangers we must avoid. Let us discuss two of these.

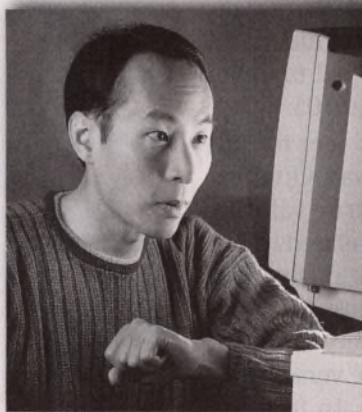
### Flee From Fornication

<sup>9</sup> Jehovah inspired the apostle Paul to pen some counsel that has helped many to safeguard their heart and maintain chastity. Paul said: "Flee from fornication." (1 Corinthians 6:18) Note that he went further than simply saying, "Avoid fornication." Christians should do more. They should run away from such immoral acts, just as they would run from a life-threatening danger. If we ignore that counsel, we increase the likelihood of becoming involved in serious immorality and losing God's favor.

<sup>10</sup> To illustrate: A mother has washed and dressed her small boy in preparation for an important occasion. He asks if he can play outdoors before the family departs, and she agrees—on one condition. She says: "Don't go anywhere *near* that puddle outside. If you get muddy, you will be punished." Within minutes, though, she sees the boy teetering on his toes at the very edge of the puddle. He is not muddy—yet. Still, he is ignoring her warning not to go *near* the puddle, and trouble is almost sure to ensue. (Proverbs 22:15) Many youths and adults who should know better make a similar mistake. How so?

<sup>11</sup> In these times when so many have given in to disgraceful sexual appetites, an entire industry has arisen around the promotion of

9-11. (a) Why are those who ignore the counsel of 1 Corinthians 6:18 more likely to get involved in serious immorality? Illustrate. (b) If we are *fleeing* from fornication, what do we avoid? (c) The faithful man Job set what positive example for us?



*What can happen if we ignore warnings?*

illicit sexual relations. (Romans 1:26, 27) The pornography plague has proliferated in magazines, books, videos, and on the Internet. Those who choose to take such images into their mind are hardly *fleeing* from fornication. They are toying with it, teetering on the verge, disregarding the Bible's warning. Instead of safeguarding the heart, they are poisoning it with vivid images that may take years to fade from memory. (Proverbs 6:27) Let us learn from faithful Job, who made a covenant—a formal agreement—with his own eyes, not to expose them to what would only tempt him to do wrong. (Job 31:1) Now, that is an example to follow!

<sup>12</sup> It is particularly vital to "flee from fornication" during courtship. That period should be a joyful time, full of hope and

12. How may Christian couples "flee from fornication" during courtship?

anticipation, but some young couples mar it by toying with immorality. In the process, they deprive each other of the best foundation for a good marriage—a relationship based on unselfish love, self-control, and obedience to Jehovah God. One Christian couple engaged in immoral behavior during their courtship. After they married, the wife admitted that her conscience tormented her, even ruining the joy of her wedding day. She confessed: "I have asked Jehovah's forgiveness many times, but even though seven years have passed since then, my conscience continues to accuse me." It is vital that those who commit such sins seek help from Christian elders. (James 5:14, 15) However, many Christian couples act wisely and avoid these dangers during courtship. (Proverbs 22:3) They limit their expressions of affection. They make use of chaperons and carefully avoid being alone together in isolated places.

<sup>13</sup> Christians who enter into courtship with those who do not serve Jehovah are likely to face terrible challenges. For example, how could you join yourself to one who does not love Jehovah God? It is vital that Christians yoke themselves only to those who love Jehovah and respect his standards of chastity. God's Word tells us: "Do not become unevenly yoked with unbelievers. For what fellowship do righteousness and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness?"—2 Corinthians 6:14.

<sup>14</sup> Knowledge is also essential. We cannot properly flee from fornication if we do not really know what it is. Some in today's world have adopted a false idea as to the meaning of "fornication." They imagine that they can

13. Why should Christians not court someone who does not serve Jehovah?

14, 15. (a) What mistaken view do some entertain regarding the meaning of "fornication"? (b) "Fornication" includes what sort of acts, and how may Christians "flee from fornication"?

satisfy their sexual impulses outside of marriage as long as they refrain from actual sexual intercourse. Even some respected health institutions that seek to reduce the number of unwanted teenage pregnancies have encouraged youths to engage in deviant sexual behavior that does not result in pregnancy.



*A chaste courtship is joyful and honors God*

Such advice is sadly misguided. Avoiding pregnancy out of wedlock is not the same thing as maintaining chastity, and the real definition of "fornication" is not so limited or narrow.

<sup>15</sup> The Greek word *por-nei'a*, translated "fornication," has a fairly broad meaning. It relates to sexual relations involving persons not married to each other and focuses on the misuse of the sexual organs. *Por-nei'a* includes such acts as oral sex, anal sex, and masturbating another person—conduct commonly associated with houses of prostitution. People who think that such acts are not "fornication" are fooling themselves and have fallen victim to one of Satan's snares. (2 Timothy 2:26) Furthermore, maintaining chastity means more than merely refraining

from any act that constitutes fornication. To "flee from fornication," we must avoid all forms of sexual uncleanness and loose conduct that could lead to the gross sin of *porneia*. (Ephesians 4:19) In that way we maintain chastity.

### Avoid the Dangers of Flirting

<sup>16</sup> If we are to maintain our chastity, another danger we need to beware of is flirting. Some may insist that flirting is innocent, harmless fun between members of the opposite sex. Admittedly, there is a time and place for amorous behavior. Isaac and Rebekah were observed "having a good time" together, and it was evident to onlookers that they were not merely brother and sister. (Genesis 26:7-9) However, they were husband and wife. Expressions of affection between them were appropriate. Flirting is another matter.

<sup>17</sup> Flirting may be defined this way: to signal romantic interest when there is no real intention to marry. Humans are complex creatures, so there are no doubt countless ways to flirt, some of them very subtle. (Proverbs 30:18, 19) Hard-and-fast rules, then, cannot really address the matter. Rather, something more elevated is called for

16. Amorous behavior is appropriate in what setting, as illustrated by what Scriptural example?

17. What is flirting, and how may the problem be controlled?

### How Would You Answer?

- What is chastity, and why is it so important?
- How can we safeguard our heart?
- What is involved in fleeing from fornication?
- Why should we avoid flirting?

—honest self-examination and the conscientious application of Bible principles.

<sup>18</sup> If we are honest with ourselves, most of us will likely have to admit that when we sense that someone of the opposite sex has a romantic interest in us, we feel flattered. That is natural. But do we flirt in order to elicit such interest—just to give our ego a little boost or to evoke such a response in another? If so, have we considered the pain that we might be causing? For example, Proverbs 13:12 says: "Expectation postponed is making the heart sick." If we deliberately flirt with someone, we probably do not know just how that person is affected. He or she may develop expectations about courtship and even an eventual marriage. The ensuing disappointment can be crushing. (Proverbs 18:14) To toy with the feelings of others intentionally is cruel.

<sup>19</sup> It is particularly important to guard against flirting when it comes to married people. To signal romantic interest in a married person—or for a married person to show such interest in someone outside the marriage bond—is wrong. Sadly, some Christians have held the mistaken belief that it is acceptable to cultivate romantic feelings for members of the opposite sex other than their mate. Some reveal their innermost concerns to such a "friend," even confiding private thoughts that they do not share with their mate. As a result, romantic feelings have blossomed into an emotional dependency that may undermine and even destroy a marriage. Married Christians do well to remember Jesus' wise warning about adultery—it begins in the heart. (Matthew 5:

18. What impels some to flirt, and why is flirting harmful?

19. How may flirting endanger Christian marriages?

28) Let us, then, safeguard the heart and avoid situations that could lead to such ruinous results.

<sup>20</sup> Granted, it is not easy to remain chaste in today's immoral world. Remember, though, that it is far easier to maintain your chastity than to regain it once it is lost. Of course, Jehovah can "forgive in a large way"

20. How should we be determined to view our chastity?

and is able to cleanse those who truly repent of their sins. (Isaiah 55:7) However, Jehovah does not shield those who commit immorality from the consequences of their actions. The aftereffects may last for years, even a lifetime. (2 Samuel 12:9-12) By all means, maintain your chastity by safeguarding your heart. View your clean, chaste standing before Jehovah God as a precious treasure—and never let it go!

## GUARD AGAINST DECEPTION

*"Look out: perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey through . . . empty deception."—COLOSSIANS 2:8.*

**H**OW many of you have never had a client lie to you?" Some years ago, a law professor conducted a survey by asking that question. The response? He explains: "Out of thousands of lawyers, only one never had a client lie to him." The reason? "The lawyer had just started practice with a large firm and had not yet talked to a client." This experience illustrates a sad truth—lying and deception are commonplace in today's world.

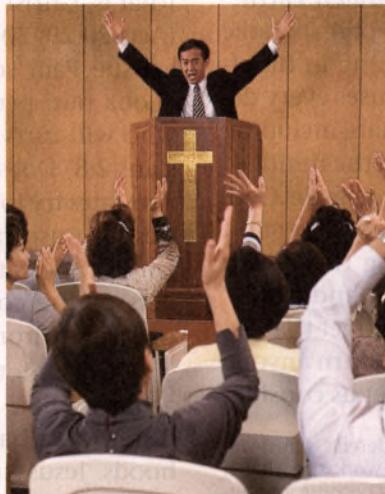
<sup>2</sup> Deception comes in many forms and has crept into nearly all aspects of modern-day life. Media reports abound

1-3. (a) What examples show that deception has crept into nearly all aspects of daily life? (b) Why should we not be surprised by the deception in the world?

with examples—politicians lying about their actions, accountants and lawyers overstating

corporate profits, advertisers misleading consumers, litigants cheating insurance companies, just to name a few. Then there is religious deception. The clergy mislead the masses by teaching false doctrines, such as the immortality of the soul, hellfire, and the Trinity.—2 Timothy 4:3, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Should we be surprised by all this deception? Not really. Regarding "the last days," the Bible warned: "Wicked men and impostors will advance from bad to worse, misleading and being misled." (2 Timothy 3:1, 13) As Christians, we need to be alert to misleading ideas that could turn us away from the truth. Two questions naturally arise: Why is deception so prevalent



today, and how can we guard against being deceived?

### Why So Much Deception Today?

<sup>4</sup> The Bible clearly explains the reason why deception is rampant in this world. The apostle John wrote that “the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one.” (1 John 5:19) That “wicked one” is Satan the Devil. Concerning him, Jesus said: “He did not stand fast in the truth, because truth is not in him. When he speaks the lie, he speaks according to his own disposition, because he is a liar and the father of the lie.” Is it any wonder, then, that this world reflects the spirit, the values, and the deceptive traits of its ruler?—John 8:44; 14:30; Ephesians 2:1-3.

<sup>5</sup> In this time of the end, Satan has intensified his efforts. He has been hurled down to the earth. He knows that his time is short, and he has “great anger.” Determined to bring down as many humans as possible, he “is misleading the entire inhabited earth.” (Revelation 12:9, 12) Satan is not a sporadic deceiver. Rather, he is unrelenting in his efforts to mislead mankind.\* He uses every deceptive method in his arsenal—including trickery and treachery—to blind the minds of unbelievers and keep them away from God. (2 Corinthians 4:4) This master of deception is especially bent on devouring those who are worshiping God “with spirit and truth.” (John 4:24; 1 Peter 5:8) Never forget that Satan has, in effect, claimed: ‘I can turn anyone away from God.’ (Job 1:9-12) Let us consider

\* Regarding the form of the verb rendered “is misleading” at Revelation 12:9, one reference work says that it “indicates a continuous action that has become a habitual character.”

4. How does the Bible explain why deception is rampant in the world?
5. How has Satan intensified his deceptive efforts in this time of the end, and whom has he especially targeted?

some of Satan’s “deceptive tactics” and how to guard against them.—Ephesians 6:11, Jewish New Testament.

### Guard Against Deception by Apostates

<sup>6</sup> Satan has long used apostates in his efforts to seduce God’s servants. (Matthew 13:36-39) Apostates may claim to worship Jehovah and to believe the Bible, but they reject the visible part of his organization. Some even return to the God-dishonoring doctrines of “Babylon the Great,” the world empire of false religion. (Revelation 17:5; 2 Peter 2:19-22) Under divine inspiration, the Bible writers used strong words to expose the motives and the methods of apostates.

<sup>7</sup> What is it that apostates want? Most are not content to leave the faith that they once perhaps viewed as true. Often, they want to take others with them. Rather than going out and making their own disciples, many apostates seek to “draw away the disciples [that is, Christ’s disciples] after themselves.” (Acts 20:29, 30) Regarding false teachers, the apostle Paul sounded this urgent warning: “Look out: perhaps there may be someone who will carry you off as his prey.” (Colossians 2:8) Does that not describe what many apostates try to do? Like a kidnapper who carries an unsuspecting victim away from his family, apostates prey upon trusting members of the congregation, seeking to carry them away from the flock.

<sup>8</sup> What methods do apostates use to achieve their aim? They often resort to distortions, half-truths, and outright falsehoods. Jesus knew that his followers would be victimized by those who would “tell all kinds of evil lies against” them. (Matthew 5:

- 6, 7. (a) What claim may apostates make? (b) How do the Scriptures clearly show what apostates want?
8. What methods do apostates use to achieve their aim?

11, Today's English Version) Such malicious opposers would tell what is not true with the intent to deceive others. The apostle Peter warned about apostates who would use "counterfeit words," spread "deceptive teachings," and 'twist the Scriptures' to their own ends. (2 Peter 2:3, 13; 3:16) Sadly, apostates succeed in "subverting the faith of some."—2 Timothy 2:18.

have learned, and avoid them." (Romans 16:17) We "avoid them" by steering clear of their reasonings—whether in person, in printed form, or on the Internet. Why do we take such a stand? First, because God's Word directs us to do so, and we trust that Jehovah always has our best interests at heart.—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Second, we love the organization that has taught us the precious truths that so plainly separate us from Babylon the Great. At the same time, we recognize that our knowledge of God's purpose is not perfect; our understanding has undergone adjustments over the years. Loyal Christians are content to wait on Jehovah for all such refinements. (Proverbs 4:18) Meanwhile, we will not abandon the organization that God is pleased to use, for we see the clear evidence of his blessing upon it.  
—Acts 6:7; 1 Corinthians 3:6.

### Guard Against Self-Deception

<sup>11</sup> Imperfect humans have a tendency that Satan is quick to exploit—self-deception. "The heart is more treacherous than anything else and is desperate," says Jeremiah 17:9. And James wrote: "Each one is tried by being drawn out and enticed by his own desire." (James 1:14) If our heart gets enticed, it may, in effect, wave sin enticingly before us, making it appear attractive and harmless. Such a view is deceptive, for giving oneself up to sin ultimately leads to ruin.—Romans 8:6.

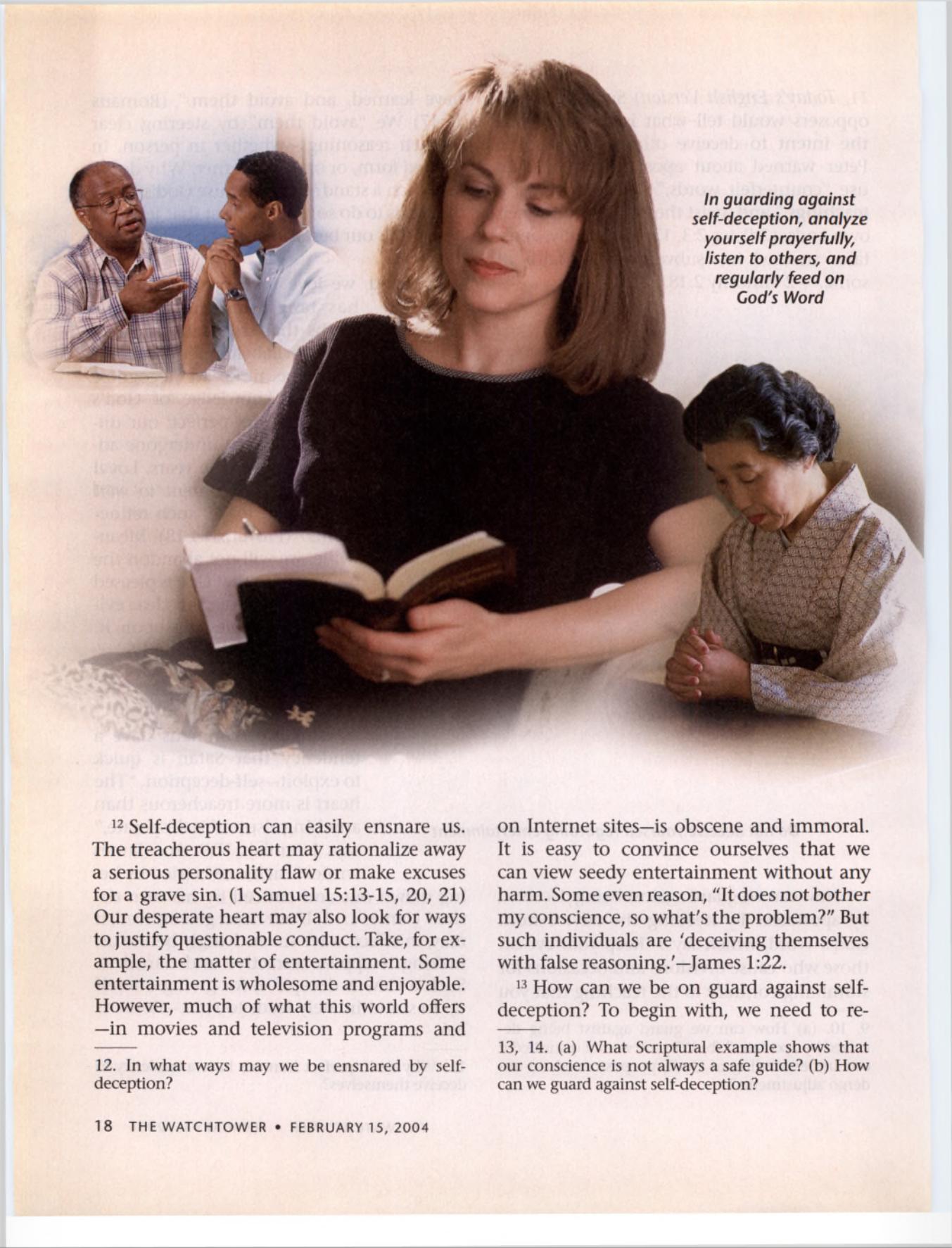
9. How can we guard against being deceived by apostates? By heeding the advice from God's Word, which says: "Keep your eye on those who cause divisions and occasions for stumbling contrary to the teaching that you

9, 10. (a) How can we guard against being deceived by apostates? (b) Why are we not disturbed if our understanding of God's purpose needs to undergo adjustments?

11. Why do imperfect humans have a tendency to deceive themselves?



### Do not deceive yourself regarding entertainment

A composite image featuring three people. In the foreground, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a dark top, is seated at a table, looking down at an open book she is holding. In the background, two men are engaged in conversation; one man, wearing glasses and a plaid shirt, is gesturing with his hands, while the other man, wearing a light blue shirt, listens attentively. The setting appears to be a quiet study or library.

*In guarding against self-deception, analyze yourself prayerfully, listen to others, and regularly feed on God's Word*

<sup>12</sup> Self-deception can easily ensnare us. The treacherous heart may rationalize away a serious personality flaw or make excuses for a grave sin. (1 Samuel 15:13-15, 20, 21) Our desperate heart may also look for ways to justify questionable conduct. Take, for example, the matter of entertainment. Some entertainment is wholesome and enjoyable. However, much of what this world offers—in movies and television programs and

12. In what ways may we be ensnared by self-deception?

on Internet sites—is obscene and immoral. It is easy to convince ourselves that we can view seedy entertainment without any harm. Some even reason, “It does not bother my conscience, so what’s the problem?” But such individuals are ‘deceiving themselves with false reasoning.’—James 1:22.

<sup>13</sup> How can we be on guard against self-deception? To begin with, we need to re-

13, 14. (a) What Scriptural example shows that our conscience is not always a safe guide? (b) How can we guard against self-deception?

member that the human conscience is not always reliable. Consider the case of the apostle Paul. Before becoming a Christian, he persecuted Christ's followers. (Acts 9:1, 2) His conscience may not have bothered him at the time. Obviously, though, it had been misdirected. "I was ignorant and acted with a lack of faith," said Paul. (1 Timothy 1:13) So the mere fact that certain entertainment does not bother our conscience is in itself no guarantee that our course is right. Only a healthy conscience properly trained by God's Word can be a safe guide.

<sup>14</sup> If we are to avoid self-deception, there are some helpful suggestions we need to keep in mind. *Analyze yourself prayerfully.* (Psalm 26:2; 2 Corinthians 13:5) Honest self-analysis may open your eyes to the need to make some changes in your viewpoint or ways. *Listen to others.* (James 1:19) Since self-examination tends to be subjective, it is wise to listen to the objective words of mature fellow Christians. If you find yourself making decisions or acting in ways that are questionable in the eyes of balanced, experienced fellow believers, you might ask yourself, 'Could it be that my conscience has not been properly trained or that my heart is deceiving me?' *Regularly feed on the Bible and Bible-based publications.* (Psalm 1:2) Doing so will help you to keep your thoughts, attitudes, and feelings in harmony with godly principles.

### Guard Against Satan's Lies

<sup>15</sup> Satan uses a variety of lies in his efforts to deceive us. He tries to convince us that material possessions bring happiness and satisfaction, yet the opposite often proves true. (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12) He would have us be-

15, 16. (a) In his efforts to deceive us, what lies does Satan use? (b) How can we avoid being deceived by such lies?

lieve that this wicked world will go on forever, although there is clear evidence that we are living in "the last days." (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Satan promotes the idea that there is no harm in pursuing an immoral life-style, even though pleasure-seekers often reap bitter consequences. (Galatians 6:7) How can we avoid being deceived by such lies?

<sup>16</sup> *Benefit from Biblical examples.* The Bible contains warning examples of individuals who were deceived by Satan's lies. They loved material things, lost sight of the times they were living in, or gave themselves over to immorality—all with bad results. (Matthew 19:16-22; 24:36-42; Luke 16:14; 1 Corinthians 10:8-11) *Learn from modern-day examples.* Sad to say, occasionally some Christians lose their sense of urgency and come to believe that by serving God they are missing out on something good. They may leave the truth to pursue a life of so-called pleasure. However, such individuals are "on slippery ground," for sooner or later their ungodly conduct will catch up with them. (Psalm 73:18, 19) We are wise to learn from the mistakes of others.—Proverbs 22:3.

<sup>17</sup> There is another lie that Satan has effectively used—the lie that Jehovah neither loves us nor values us. Satan has had thousands of years to study imperfect humans. He well knows that discouragement can weaken us. (Proverbs 24:10) Hence, he promotes the lie that we are worthless in God's eyes. If we are "thrown down" and become convinced that Jehovah does not care about us, we may be tempted to give up. (2 Corinthians 4:9) That is just what the great Deceiver wants! How, then, can we guard against being deceived by this satanic lie?

<sup>18</sup> *Personally take to heart what the Bible says about God's love for us.* God's Word uses

17. Why does Satan promote the lie that Jehovah neither loves us nor values us?

18. How does the Bible assure us of Jehovah's love?

some touching word pictures to assure us that Jehovah notices us and loves us as individuals. He puts your tears in his "skin bottle," meaning that he sees and remembers the tears you shed in your struggle to remain faithful. (Psalm 56:8) He knows when you are "broken at heart" and is near to you at such times. (Psalm 34:18) He knows every detail about you, including the number of "the very hairs of your head." (Matthew 10:29-31) Above all, God "gave his only-begotten Son" in your behalf. (John 3:16; Galatians 2:20) At times, you may find it difficult to believe that such scriptures apply to you personally. We must, however, take Jehovah at his word. He wants us to believe that he loves us not only as a group but as individuals.

<sup>19</sup> *Recognize and reject the lie.* If you know that someone is lying, you can protect yourself against being deceived. So, too, just knowing that Satan wants you to believe the lie that Jehovah does not love you can in itself be a powerful help. In response to a *Watchtower* article that warned about Satan's tactics, one Christian said: "I never realized that Satan tries to use my feelings to

19, 20. (a) Why is it important to recognize and reject the satanic lie that Jehovah does not love you? (b) How has one traveling overseer helped downhearted ones?

### Do You Recall?

- Why is there so much deception in the world today?
- How can we guard against being deceived by apostates?
- How can we guard against any tendency toward self-deception?
- How can we avoid being deceived by satanic lies?

discourage me. Knowing this gives me the motivation to fight these feelings."

<sup>20</sup> Consider the experience of a traveling overseer in a South American country. When making shepherding calls on fellow believers who are downhearted, he often asks them, 'Do you believe in the Trinity?' The discouraged one usually answers, 'Of course not,' realizing that this is one of Satan's lies. The traveling elder then asks, 'Do you believe in hellfire?' Again comes the answer, 'Of course not!' The traveling elder then tells them that there is another satanic lie that is usually not recognized as such. He directs their attention to page 249, paragraph 21, of the book *Draw Close to Jehovah*,\* which exposes the lie that Jehovah does not love us as individuals. The traveling overseer reports positive results from thus helping discouraged ones to recognize and reject this satanic lie.

### Safeguard Yourself Against Deception

<sup>21</sup> During this final part of the last days, it is to be expected that Satan will continue to launch an avalanche of lies and deceptions. Thankfully, Jehovah has not left us in the dark regarding Satan's deceptive tactics. The Bible and the Bible-based publications of "the faithful and discreet slave" clearly expose the Devil's evil methods. (Matthew 24:45) Being forewarned, we are forearmed.

—2 Corinthians 2:11.

<sup>22</sup> Let us, then, keep on guard against the reasonings of apostates. May we be determined to avoid the subtle snare of self-deception. And let us recognize and reject all of Satan's lies. By doing so, we will safeguard our relationship with "the God of truth," who detests deception.—Psalm 31:5; Proverbs 3:32.

\* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

21, 22. Why are we not in the dark regarding Satan's deceptive tactics, and what should be our determination?

# Assembling at “the Navel of the World”



*Have you ever heard the words “Te Pito o Te Henua”? In Rapa Nui, the original language spoken in Easter Island, it means “the Navel of the World.” What made an assembly here so special?*

**I**SOLATED, mysterious, exotic. These are some words used to describe Easter Island, or Rapa Nui as its inhabitants call it. It is indeed an isolated area located far out in the South Pacific Ocean, 2,350 miles from Santiago, Chile. It became a province of Chile on September 9, 1888.

With an area of 64 square miles, this triangular island is basically composed of three extinct volcanoes. In fact, like many Pacific islands, it is made up of just the tips of enormous underwater mountains. The entire island has been declared a natural monument. No doubt it is best known for its mysterious statues of stone, known as *moai*.\*

\* See *Awake!* of June 22, 2000, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

Besides the attractive landscapes and historical sites, Easter Island offers an exotic array of delicacies. From the land come such fruits as pineapples, avocados, papayas, and nine varieties of bananas. And the sea provides a great variety of fish and other seafood.

The weather is mild on Easter Island, with regular rains and rainbows, which grant visitors clean air and spectacular views. Currently, there are about 3,800 residents. Modern inhabitants descend from the first settlers, mixed with Europeans, Chileans, and others. Hundreds of tourists from Europe and Asia visit the island, making tourism an important part of the economy.

## Kingdom Seeds First Planted

The 1982 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses* reported: "For a time we had an isolated publisher on Easter Island. She was helped spiritually through correspondence with a missionary sister at the branch [in Chile]. Though she has since returned to the mainland, we do have record of *Watchtower* subscribers on the island. Much to our surprise, in April 1980 we received a long-distance telephone call from an interested person wanting to know when to celebrate the Memorial. Then later on in the same year a married couple from Valparaiso moved there, and they have been conducting Bible studies with interested persons. In April of 1981 a Memorial meeting was held on this island for the first time,

### EASTER ISLAND

### CHILE

there being 13 persons present. How pleased we are that the 'good news' is penetrating this isolated area!"

Later, on January 30, 1991, the branch sent a special pioneer couple, Dario and Winny Fernandez, to the island. Brother Fernandez recalls: "A five-hour flight brought us to the most isolated part of the planet, to a culture enshrouded in mystery." The meetings and preaching activity were immediately organized with the support of a local brother and of a sister who had recently arrived with her two children. In spite of family pressures, religious fervor, and certain life-styles that are common in Polynesian

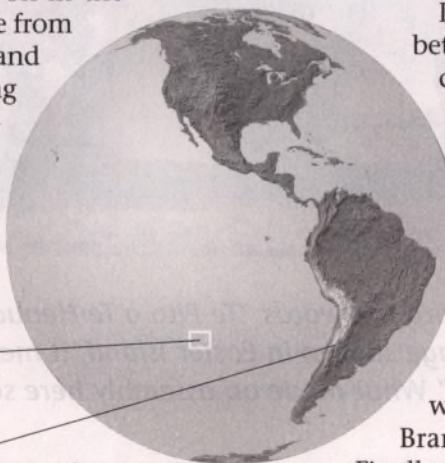
cultures, they saw Jehovah's blessing on their efforts. Brother and Sister Fernandez are no longer special pioneers, but they remain on the island, where they are raising their son, who was born there. Today, there are 32 joyful Kingdom publishers. Among them are Rapa Nui natives, as well as those who settled on the island or moved there to serve where the need for Kingdom proclaimers was greater.

## Preparations for a Circuit Assembly

In view of the great distance between the island and the continent, three times a year the congregation would receive video tapes of the special assembly day, circuit assembly, and district convention programs. But by the end of 2000, the idea of having their own assembly, the first of its kind there, was being considered by the Branch Committee in Chile.

Finally, it was decided to hold a circuit assembly in November 2001, and an invitation to attend this special occasion was extended to a limited number of brothers and sisters from different parts of Chile. Because of the airline schedule, the assembly would be held on Sunday and Monday.

The 33 invited delegates were excited at the thought of traveling to the island to participate in the first circuit assembly to be held in that remote area. After a long flight over the Pacific Ocean, the delegates were relieved to be welcomed by the local brothers waiting for them at the airport. The delegates were greeted with beautiful leis (necklaces made from flower petals), a typical gift on the island. Then they were taken to their





accommodations, and after a short sightseeing tour of the island, all those who would participate in the assembly program met at the Kingdom Hall.

### Publicity From an Unexpected Source

While driving to the assembly, some delegates were surprised to hear on the radio the local priest commenting about their visit. He mentioned tourists from the continent who would be visiting homes to talk about the coming end of the world. Although he urged his parishioners not to listen to the visitors, his announcement helped to publicize the presence of a large group of Jehovah's Witnesses on the island. This stimulated expectation among the islanders. During the following days, the delegates tactfully shared with them the encouraging message of the good news.

### The Assembly Begins

On Sunday morning, the local brothers were waiting in the entranceway of the Kingdom Hall to welcome the delegates as they arrived for the first day of the assembly. "Iorana Koe! Iorana Koe!" "Welcome!" Some sisters wore traditional dress and adorned their hair with beautiful flowers in true Polynesian style.

After a pleasant musical prelude, a hundred voices joined in singing "Be Steadfast,

### Two of those baptized at the circuit assembly

"Unmovable!" as it had never been heard in the island before. The local brothers were moved to tears when the chairman extended a warm welcome in their native language, Rapa Nui. During the midday intermission, three new Witnesses

symbolized their dedication to God by water baptism. When the first day's program ended, everyone felt closer to Jehovah and to the entire brotherhood.—1 Peter 5:9.

### Morning Witnessing

Because of special circumstances on the island, the program on the second day of the circuit assembly began after lunch. Therefore, the delegates took advantage of the situation and used the morning to participate in the field ministry. What experiences awaited them?

An elderly woman with eight sons and daughters told the Witnesses that she could not talk to them because she was a Catholic. After they told her that they wanted to talk about the problems that everybody faces, such as drug abuse and family troubles, she agreed to listen.

An elderly local woman gave a Witness couple a cool reception. She told them to go and talk to the people on the continent who were so cruel to others. The couple told her that the message of the "good news of the kingdom" is offered to everyone and that their purpose in coming to the island was to attend an assembly that would help all to grow in love for God. (Matthew 24:14) They asked her if she would enjoy a long life in paradisaic conditions, similar to those on the island but without sickness and death. After they reasoned with her about how

many years the volcanic craters on the island have existed, she meditated on the shortness of life and asked: "Why do we live only for such a short time?" She was surprised when she read Psalm 90:10.

At that point, the Witnesses suddenly heard shouting from next door. Although they did not understand the yelling, the woman told them that the neighbors were shouting insults and were making clear that they did not want to be visited by the Witnesses. However, this woman was the *nua*, or eldest daughter of the family. Since her father had died, it was her duty to decide what was in the best interests of the family. In front of her relatives, she defended the brothers in her native language and kindly accepted the publications she was offered. Later that week, when driving past the Witnesses, she told her brother to stop the car. Despite his evident displeasure, she bade farewell to the brothers and wished them success in their ministry.

Although some islanders initially seemed to reject the message preached by the Witnesses from the continent, it became obvious to the visitors that the Rapa Nui are

naturally kind and friendly. Most of them gladly listened to the good news. In fact, 6 of the 20 Witnesses who have been baptized on the island are local residents. One first learned Bible truth by listening from a nearby room to a Bible study being conducted with his wife. He and his wife are now baptized Witnesses, and he is a ministerial servant in the congregation.

### The Spiritual Program Continues

After lunch, the second day's program began. Once again, the 32 local brothers and sisters and the 33 delegates were joined by a number of interested people. Close to one hundred listened to the program, including the public talk "How Love and Faith Conquer the World." In fact, those present were seeing a living demonstration of the love that exists among Jehovah's people, even among those of different cultures.—John 13:35.

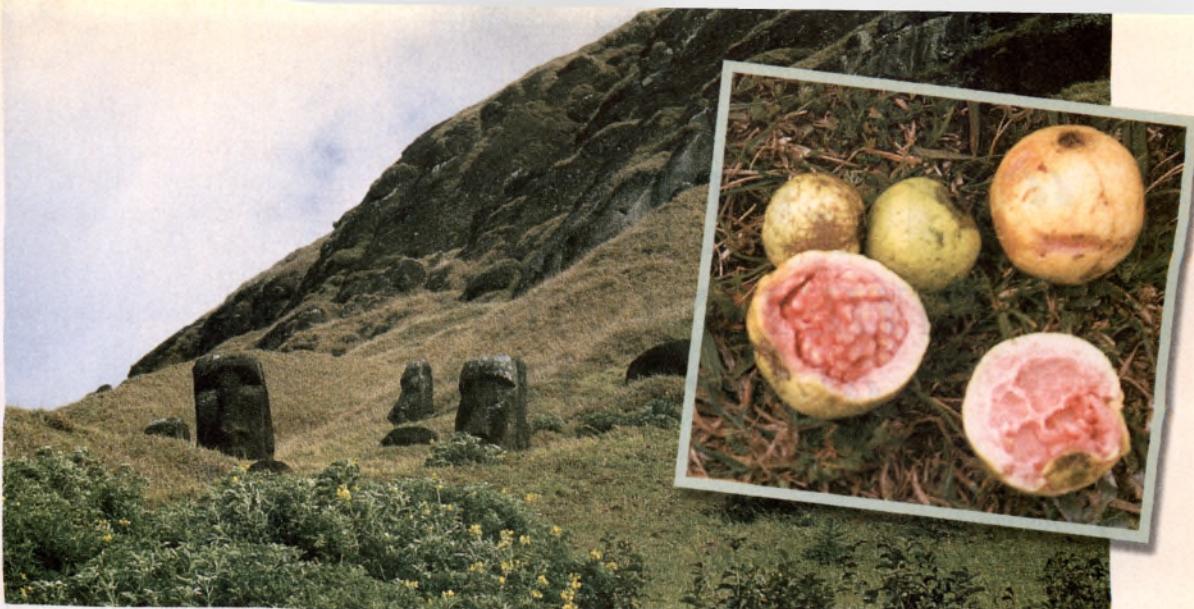
At the time of the circuit assembly, the circuit and district overseers held a special session with the pioneer ministers. The three regular pioneers from the island were accompanied by delegates who were regular or

## Witnessing on Easter Island

About two years before this memorable assembly, a circuit overseer and his wife visited the island and enjoyed many pleasant experiences. For example, imagine their surprise when the sister who took them to their accommodations reminded them that they had studied the Bible with her in southern Chile when she was a teenager some 16 years earlier. Later that seed bore fruit on Rapa Nui.

They also had this amusing experience:

The owner of a souvenir shop accepted the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* and the Bible study aid *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*, both published by Jehovah's Witnesses. When they returned to visit him, he told them that he could not read that Bible. They had left with him a Bible in French, not in Spanish! The problem was quickly solved, and he found out with the help of local Witnesses and, of course, a Bible in his own language that the Bible was not so hard to understand after all.



*Slope of the Rano Raraku volcano; inset: Wild fruit called guayaba grows on the island*

special pioneers. All were greatly encouraged.

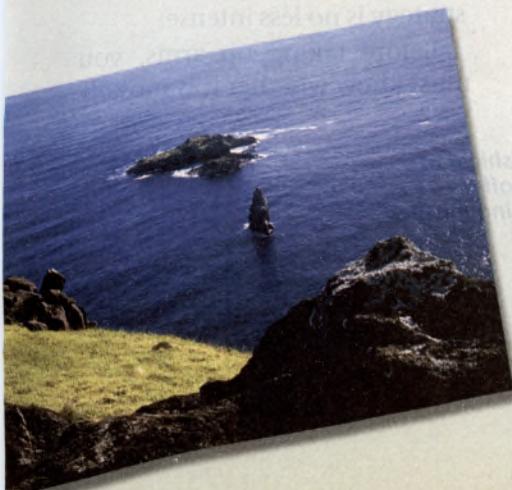
The next day, some of the local brothers who work as guides gave the delegates a tour of the island. They visited a stone quarry where *moai* were carved, as well as volcanoes where ancient competitions were held and, of course, the beautiful golden-sand Anakena beach, where the first settlers of the island disembarked.\*

\* On the crater of the Rano Raraku volcano, there are many petroglyphs. The starting point of a competition among those who wanted to rule the island was located on Rano Kau. It consisted in going down the cliff, swimming to one of the small islands, fetching an egg of a local bird, swimming back to the main island, and climbing up the cliff with the egg undamaged.

The last opportunity to be with the local brothers was at the Congregation Book Study. After the meeting, the local Witnesses surprised their guests with a typical meal. Later, in their characteristic garb, they presented a fine demonstration of folk dancing. The delegates, as well as the Rapa Nui brothers and sisters, were sure that the efforts made to prepare the assembly had been well worth the effort.

All who had come as delegates felt deeply attached to their isolated brothers and sisters, with whom they had spent a thrilling week. Leaving the island was hard. They will always cherish the new friends they made as well as the spiritual encouragement received. At the airport, the local brothers adorned the necks of the delegates with sea-shell necklaces that they had made.

As the delegates left, they promised: "Iorana! Iau he hoki mai e Rapa Nui ee," which means: "Good-bye! I will return to you, Rapa Nui." Yes, they long to return to visit their newfound friends and spiritual family members on the exotic, isolated, mysterious, and friendly Easter Island!



# **“FIGHT**

## ***THE FINE FIGHT of the FAITH”***

CAN you imagine any soldier in wartime who would be unhappy to be instructed: “You are to return home and spend some time with your wife and family”?

A soldier in the time of King David of Israel received such a directive. Uriah the Hittite

was summoned by the king himself and encouraged to return home. Yet, Uriah refused to go to his house. When asked about his unusual behavior, Uriah replied that the ark of the covenant, representing God’s presence, and the Israelite army were on the field of battle. “And I,” he asked, “shall I go into my own house to eat and drink and to lie down with my wife?” To Uriah, this was unthinkable at such a critical time.—2 Samuel 11:8-11.

Uriah’s conduct raises important questions, for we too are living in a time of war. A war is currently raging unlike any that the nations of the world have fought. It makes the two world wars seem inconsequential by comparison, and you are involved in this war. The stakes are great, the enemy formidable. In this war, no shots are fired, no bombs are dropped, but war strategy is no less intense.

Before taking up arms, you must know whether it is morally

*The helmet of salvation  
will help us combat  
discouragement*



*Use the large shield  
of faith to ward off  
Satan’s “burning missiles”*

right and what you are fighting for. Is the battle worth the price? The purpose of this unique fight is clarified by the apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy: "Fight the fine fight of the faith." Yes, in this war you must defend, not a fortress, but "the faith"—the sum of Christian truth as revealed in the Bible. Clearly, you must believe "the faith" implicitly to fight for it and win.—1 Timothy 6:12.

A prudent warrior strives to know his enemy. In this fight, the enemy has years of experience in war strategy, with tremendous resources and weaponry at his disposal. He is also superhuman. He is vicious, violent, and unscrupulous; he is Satan. (1 Peter 5:8) Material weapons as well as human cunning and trickery are useless against this adversary. (2 Corinthians 10:4) What can you use to wage this war?

The primary weapon is "the sword of the spirit, that is, God's word." (Ephesians 6:17) The apostle Paul shows how effective it is: "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." (Hebrews 4:12) A weapon so sharp, so precise, that it can pierce into the inner thoughts and motives of an individual must surely be used with skill and care.

You likely know that an army may have the most advanced weapons, but those weapons are useless if its soldiers lack the skill to use them. You likewise need instruction to use your sword effectively. Happily, training by the most experienced fighters is available to you. Jesus called these fighter-teachers a "faithful and discreet slave," entrusted with the responsibility of providing timely spiritual food, or instruction, for his followers. (Matthew 24:45) You can recognize this collective slave by observing its in-

dustrious teaching and timely warnings of enemy tactics. The evidence points to the spirit-anointed members of the Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.—Revelation 14:1.

This composite slave has done more than instruct. It has shown the spirit of the apostle Paul, who wrote to the congregation in Thessalonica: "We became gentle in the midst of you, as when a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, having a tender affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not only the good news of God, but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8) It is up to each Christian soldier to make use of the loving training provided.

## No shots are fired, no bombs are dropped, but war strategy is no less intense

### The Full Suit of Armor

A full suit of figurative armor is provided for your protection. You can find an inventory of this suit of armor at Ephesians 6:13-18. A wary soldier will not venture out if some of his spiritual armor is missing or in need of repair.

A Christian needs all his protective armor, but the large shield of faith is particularly valuable. That is why Paul wrote: "Above all things, take up the large shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the wicked one's burning missiles."—Ephesians 6:16.

The large shield, which could cover the entire body, represents the quality of faith. You must have strong faith in Jehovah's direction, accepting without doubt that all his

promises will come true. You should feel as though those promises have already been fulfilled. Do not doubt for a moment that Satan's entire world system will soon be destroyed, that the earth will be transformed into a paradise, and that people loyal to God will be restored to perfection.—Isaiah 33:24; 35:1, 2; Revelation 19:17-21.

In the current extraordinary fight, however, you need something more—a friend. In wartime, close bonds of camaraderie are formed as fellow fighters offer encouragement and mutual protection, at times even saving one another from death. While companions are valued, to survive this fight, you need the friendship of none other than Jehovah himself. That is why Paul concludes his list of what makes up the suit of armor with these words: "While with every form of prayer and supplication you carry on prayer on every occasion in spirit."—Ephesians 6:18.

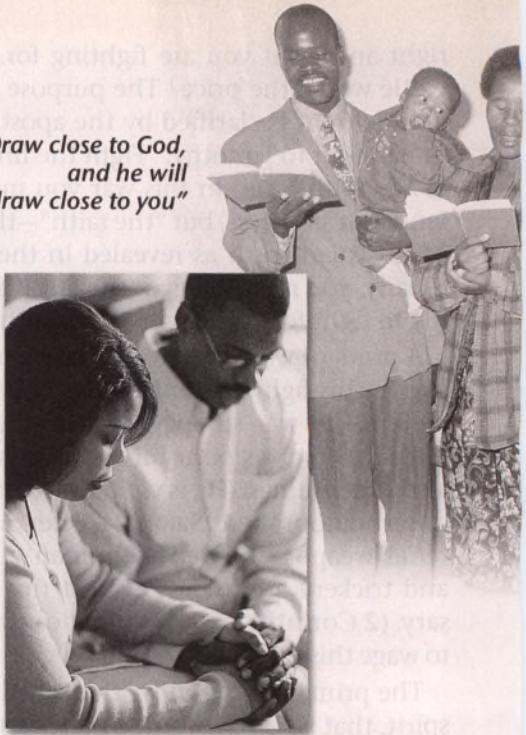
We love to be with a close friend. We seek out his company. By regularly talking to Jehovah in prayer, he becomes real to us, a trustworthy friend. The disciple James encourages us: "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you."—James 4:8.

### Enemy Tactics

Contending with this world can at times be like walking through a field sown with land mines. Attack can come from any quarter, and the enemy tries to catch you unawares. Rest assured, though, that Jehovah has supplied all the protection you need.—1 Corinthians 10:13.

The enemy may aim a blow by attacking Bible truths that are fundamental to your faith. Apostates may use smooth words, flattery, and twisted reasoning to try to defeat you. But the apostate does not have your well-being at heart. Proverbs 11:9 notes: "By his mouth the one who is an apostate brings

*"Draw close to God,  
and he will  
draw close to you"*

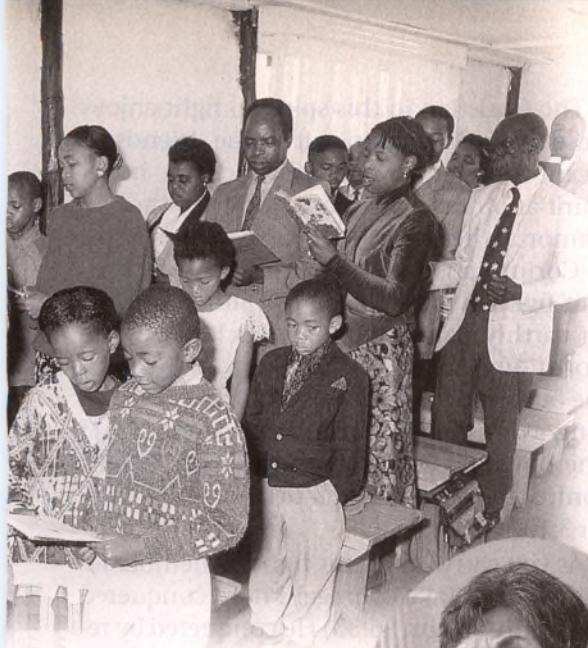


his fellowman to ruin, but by knowledge are the righteous rescued."

It would be a mistake to think that you need to listen to apostates or to read their writings to refute their arguments. Their twisted, poisonous reasoning can cause spiritual harm and can contaminate your faith like rapidly spreading gangrene. (2 Timothy 2:16, 17) Rather, imitate God's response to apostates. Job said of Jehovah: "Before him no apostate will come in."—Job 13:16.

The enemy may try a different tactic, one that has met with a measure of success. If an army on the march can be lured to break rank to pursue licentious, immoral conduct, this can cause disorder.

Worldly entertainment, such as immoral films and television shows and wild music, is effective bait. Some claim that they can watch immoral scenes or read immoral literature without being affected. But one person who regularly watched sexual-



*We should have faith in the fulfillment of God's promises*

ly explicit films frankly admitted: "You never forget those scenes, the more you think about them the more you find yourself wanting to do what you've seen . . . The movie makes you think you're really missing out on something." Is it worth running the risk of being wounded by this subtle attack?

Another missile in the enemy's arsenal is the lure of materialism. The danger can be difficult to discern because we all have material needs. We need a home, food, and clothing, and it is not wrong to have nice things. The danger lies in one's perspective. Money may become more important than spiritual matters. We could become lovers of



money. It is good to remind ourselves of the limitations of wealth. It is transitory, whereas spiritual riches last forever.—Matthew 6:19, 20.

If an army's morale is low, the chances of victory decline. "Have you shown yourself discouraged in the day of distress? Your power will be scanty." (Proverbs 24:10) Discouragement is a weapon that Satan has used effectively. Wearing "as a helmet the hope of salvation" will help you to combat discouragement. (1 Thessalonians 5:8) Try to keep your hope as strong as Abraham's. When asked to offer up his only son, Isaac, in sacrifice, Abraham did not hesitate. He believed that God would fulfill His promise to bless all nations through his offspring and that God could raise Isaac from the dead if necessary in order to fulfill that promise.—Hebrews 11:17-19.

### Do Not Give Up the Fight

Some who have fought bravely for a long time may be growing weary and are therefore not fighting with the same vigilance. The example of Uriah, mentioned at the outset of this article, can help all engaged in the fight to maintain the right perspective. Many of our fellow Christian warriors have to endure privations, are exposed to dangers, or suffer from cold and hunger. Like Uriah, we do not want to think about all the comforts we might enjoy now or to give in to a desire to lead a life of ease. We want to remain with Jehovah's global army of loyal fighters and keep up the fight till we can enjoy the wonderful blessings in store for us.—Hebrews 10:32-34.

It would be dangerous to let our guard down, perhaps thinking that the final attack is still far in the future. The example of King David highlights the danger. For some reason he was not with his troops in battle. As a result, David committed gross sin that

caused him anguish and suffering for the rest of his life.—2 Samuel 12:10-14.

Is it worthwhile to engage in this fight, face the hardship of battle, endure ridicule, and forgo questionable worldly pleasures? Those who are carrying on the fight successfully agree that what the world has to offer could look attractive, like glittering tinsel, but on closer examination, it has little substance. (Philippians 3:8) Moreover, often those pleasures end up causing pain and disappointment.

## The outcome for us in this battle is assured as long as we remain faithful

The Christian in this spiritual fight enjoys close companionship with true friends, a clean conscience, and a wonderful hope. Spirit-anointed Christians look forward to immortal heavenly life with Christ Jesus. (1 Corinthians 15:54) The majority of Christian fighters hope for perfect human life in an earthly paradise. Surely such prizes are worth any price. And unlike worldly wars, the outcome for us in this battle is assured as long as we remain faithful. (Hebrews 11:1) The outcome for this system under Satan's control, however, is total destruction.—2 Peter 3:10.

As you carry on in this fight, remember Jesus' words: "Take courage! I have conquered the world." (John 16:33) He conquered by remaining vigilant and keeping integrity under trial. We can do the same.



## Questions From Readers

**After the Flood, Noah sent out from the ark a dove that returned with "an olive leaf." Where did the dove find the leaf?**

The Bible tells us that "the waters overwhelmed the earth so greatly that all the tall mountains that were under the whole heavens came to be covered." (Genesis 7:19) As the floodwaters receded, Noah on three occasions sent out a dove—a week apart. The second time, the dove returned with "an olive leaf freshly plucked in its bill, and so Noah got to know that the waters had abated from the earth."—Genesis 8:8-11.

Of course, there is now no way of telling how long a particular portion of the earth was flooded, for the earth's topography was undoubtedly changed by the Deluge. Nonetheless, it is likely that water covered most regions long enough for many trees to die. Yet, some apparently retained their vitality, enabling them to sprout fresh shoots when the waters receded.

Concerning the olive tree, *The New Bible Dictionary* states: "If cut down, new shoots spring up from the root, so that as many as five new trunks could thus come into being. Moribund [near dead] olives usually sprout

in this manner also." It is "as if its vitality were indestructible," says *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. No human today knows the details, such as salinity and temperature, of the floodwaters. Hence, we cannot be sure about their potential effect on olive trees and other vegetation.

However, the wild olive cannot survive in cold temperatures, such as those found on higher mountains. It generally grows in areas below 3,000 feet, where the average temperature is above 50 degrees Fahrenheit. "Thus," says the book *The Flood Reconsidered*, "Noah could deduce from the freshly plucked leaf that the lower valleys were becoming free of water." When Noah released the dove a week later, it did not return, indicating a greater abundance of vegetation and potential resting places for the dove.—Genesis 8:12.

### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

True Christianity Is Flourishing

'The Faithful Slave' Passes the Test!

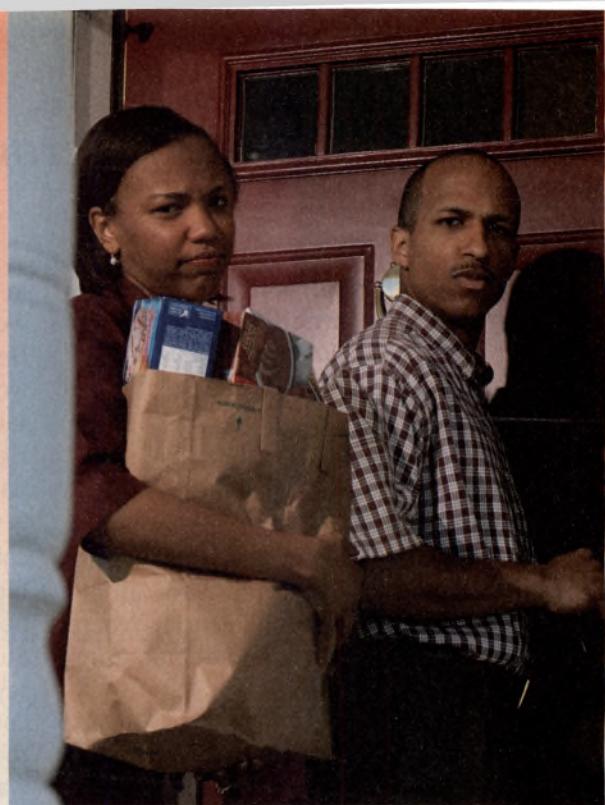
How We Show Our Love for God



# Why Do Jehovah's Witnesses Keep Calling on You?

**W**ORLDWIDE, the persistence with which Jehovah's Witnesses engage in their house-to-house ministry is well-known. Some people wonder why the Witnesses keep calling on them, especially if they have previously shown little interest in the Witnesses' message. Two letters from Russia help to explain the reason.

"To be honest," admits Masha, a 19-year-old girl in Khabarovsk, "in the past, I would avoid Jehovah's Witnesses like the plague." However, after reading a few copies of the magazines published by the Witnesses, she changed her attitude. "It is all so very interesting and enlightening," writes Masha, "but most important, it makes you look at the world differently. I slowly began to understand why people are given a life to live."



From the city of Ussuriysk, about 50 miles north of Vladivostok, Svetlana wrote: "I have just recently begun to read *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* These magazines are very much needed in our day and age. I enjoy all the articles. They are very interesting, informative, and enlightening. Thank you! Thank you very much for being in this world and for doing such a kind and needed work."

Jehovah's Witnesses the world over take seriously the apostle Paul's thought-provoking question: "How, in turn, will [people] hear without someone to preach?" (Romans 10:14) Why not take a few minutes to listen the next time the Witnesses visit you? You too may enjoy the message of comfort found in God's Word, the Bible.