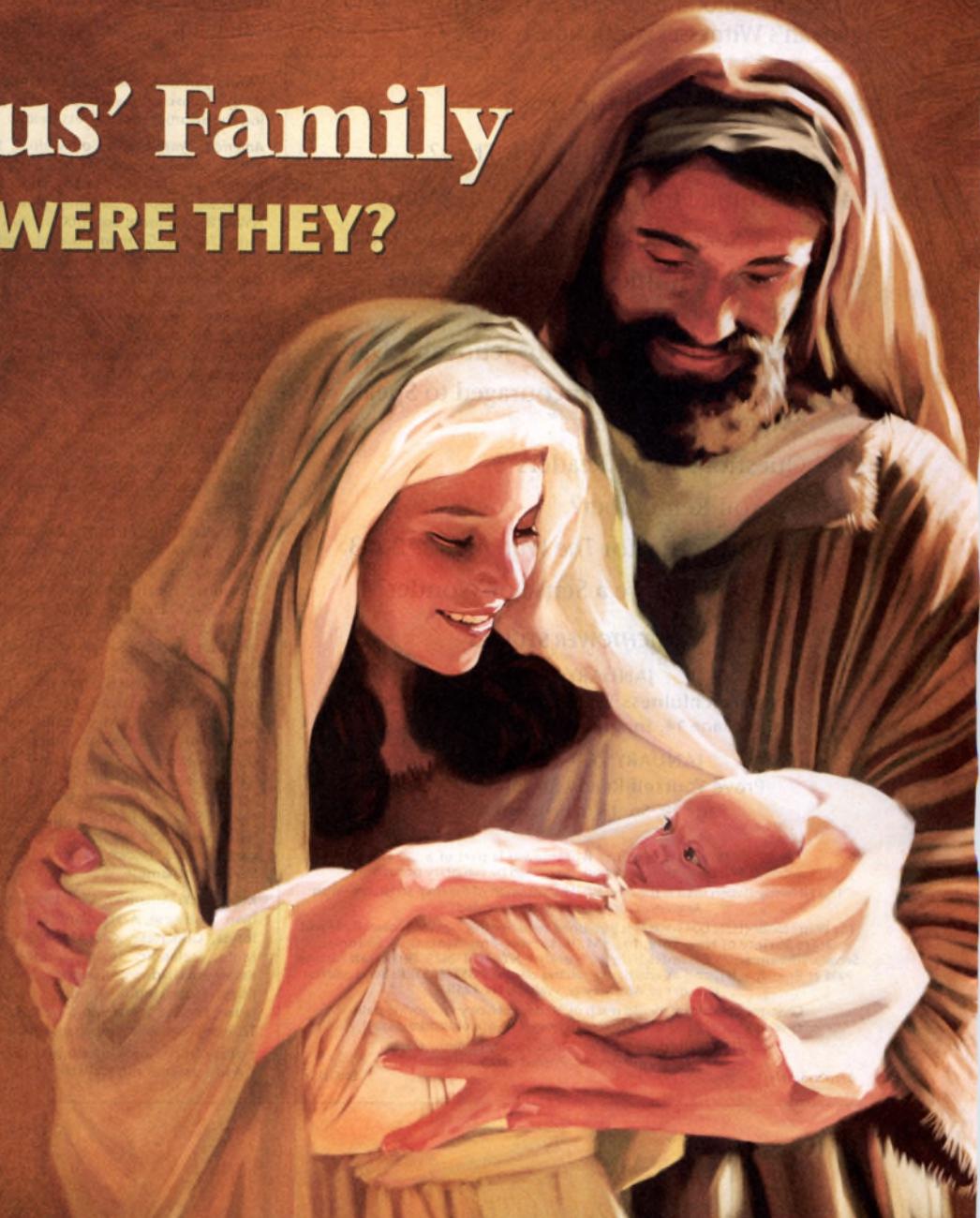


DECEMBER 15, 2003

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Jesus' Family **WHO WERE THEY?**



THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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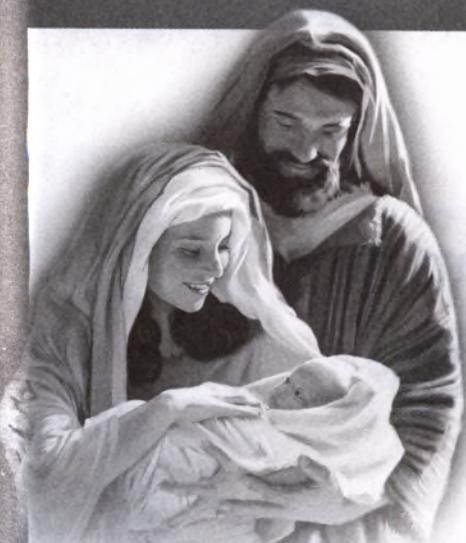
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ENGLISH



Jesus' Family Who Were They?

IN MANY parts of the world, during December you often see scenes of the infant Jesus in the tender care of his mother, Mary, and his adoptive father, Joseph. Such family scenes may attract even those who do not profess to be Christians. Since the focus is on Jesus, what do the Scriptures tell us about Jesus' human family?

Jesus had a most interesting family background. He was born to a virgin named Mary, thus becoming a member of the human family. According to the Bible, his life was transferred from heaven to Mary's womb through holy spirit. (Luke 1:30-35) Before the miraculous conception of Jesus was announced, Mary had become engaged to a man named Joseph, who was thus to become Jesus' adoptive father.

After Jesus' birth, Joseph and Mary had other children, Jesus' half brothers and sisters. That is evident from the question inhabitants of Nazareth later asked about Jesus: "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matthew 1:25; 13:55, 56; Mark 6:3) We can conclude from this that Jesus' immediate family consisted of his parents, four brothers, and at least two sisters.

However, some today do not believe that Jesus' brothers and sisters were children of Joseph and Mary. Why? "The Church," says the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, "from its earliest days taught that Mary was always a virgin. In view of this, then, there can be no doubt that Mary did not have any other children." The same reference work claims that the words "brother" and "sister" can refer to "some one or ones united in a religious or other common bond" or to relatives, perhaps cousins.

Is that really the case? Even some Catholic theologians, disagreeing with the traditional doctrine, support the view that Jesus had fleshly brothers and sisters. John P. Meier, former president of the Catholic Bible Association of America, wrote: "In the N[ew] T[estament] *adelphos* [brother], when used not merely figuratively or metaphorically but rather to designate some sort of physical or legal relationship, means only full or half-brother, and nothing else."^{*} Yes, the Scriptures indicate that Jesus had brothers and sisters who were born to Joseph and Mary.

The Gospels mention other relatives of Jesus, but let us now focus on Jesus' immediate family and see what we can learn from them.

* "The Brothers and Sisters of Jesus in Ecumenical Perspective," by J. P. Meier, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, January 1992, page 21.

Learning From Jesus' Human Family



WHAT do you know about Jesus' immediate family, those with whom he lived until his baptism, for the first 30 years of his life on earth? What do the Gospel accounts tell us? What can we learn from examining his family? You can benefit from the answers.

Was Jesus born, as it were, with a silver spoon in his mouth? Joseph, his adoptive father, was a carpenter by trade. That called for strenuous physical work, which often involved cutting down trees for timber. When Jesus' human parents went to Jerusalem some 40 days after his birth, they pre-

Joseph took Mary as his wife and became involved in the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies

sented a sacrificial offering prescribed by the Law. Did they offer a ram along with a turtle-dove or a pigeon, as stipulated by the Law? No. It appears that they could not afford such offerings. Yet, the Law had a provision for the poor. In line with that, Joseph and Mary offered "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons." The choice of the less expensive animals showed that they were a family of limited means.—Luke 2:22-24; Leviticus 12:6, 8, 22.

You can see that Jesus Christ, the future Ruler of all mankind, was born among the humble, among those who had to work hard

to make ends meet. He grew up to be a carpenter, just like his adoptive father. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) "Though [Jesus] was rich" as a powerful spirit creature in heaven, the Bible says that he "became poor" for our sakes. He took a lower position as a human and grew up in a family of common people. (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:5-9; Hebrews 2:9) Jesus was not born into a well-to-do family, and this may have helped some people to identify with him. They were not distracted by his status or position. They could appreciate him for his teachings, for his appealing qualities, and for his wonderful works. (Matthew 7:28, 29; 9:19-33; 11:28, 29) We can see Jehovah God's wisdom in letting Jesus be born into an ordinary family.

Now let us consider members of Jesus' family and see what we can learn from them.

Joseph—A Righteous Man

When Joseph found out that his fiancée was pregnant "before they were united," he must have been torn between his love for Mary and his aversion to even the appearance of immorality. The whole situation seemed to be an infringement upon his right as her future husband. In his day, an engaged woman was considered as good as the man's wife. After considerable thought, Joseph decided to divorce Mary secretly so that she would be spared being stoned as an adulteress.—Matthew 1:18; Deuteronomy 22:23, 24.

Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife home, for that which has been begotten in her is by holy spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you must call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." Upon receiving that divine direction, Joseph acted accordingly and took Mary home.—Matthew 1:20-24.

With this decision, that righteous and faithful man became involved in the fulfill-

ment of what Jehovah had spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Look! The maiden herself will actually become pregnant, and she is giving birth to a son, and she will certainly call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) Joseph was surely a spiritual man who appreciated the privilege of becoming the adoptive father of the Messiah, despite the fact that Mary's firstborn son would not be his own.

Joseph refrained from having intercourse with Mary until after she had given birth to her son. (Matthew 1:25) For the now newlywed couple, abstinence might have been a challenge, but they apparently did not want any misunderstanding as to who the Father of the baby was. What a wonderful example of self-control! Joseph put spiritual values ahead of his natural desires.

On four occasions, Joseph received angelic direction about raising his adoptive son. Three of these were regarding where to raise the boy. Prompt obedience was vital for the survival of the child. In all instances, Joseph immediately acted, taking the young child first to Egypt and then back to Israel. This protected young Jesus from Herod's massacre of babes. Also, Joseph's obedience resulted in the fulfillment of prophecies concerning the Messiah.—Matthew 2:13-23.

Joseph taught Jesus a trade so that he could care for himself. Thus, Jesus was known not only as "the carpenter's son" but also as "the carpenter." (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) The apostle Paul wrote that Jesus was "tested in all respects like ourselves." This naturally





would have included working hard to help support the family.—Hebrews 4:15.

Finally, we see evidence of Joseph's devotion to true worship in the last episode in which he appears in the Christian Greek Scriptures. Joseph took his family to Jerusalem for the Passover. Only males were required to attend, but Joseph made it a custom to take his family to Jerusalem "from year to year." He made great sacrifices, for they had to walk some 65 miles from Nazareth to Jerusalem. On the occasion reported on in the Scriptures, though, Jesus got separated from the group. He was found at the temple, listening to and questioning the teachers of the Law. Though but 12 years old, Jesus manifested great wisdom and knowledge of God's Word. From this incident, we see that Jesus' parents must have taught him well, bringing him up to be a spiritually-minded boy. (Luke

2:41-50) Joseph apparently died some time after this, since there is no mention of him in later Scriptural accounts.

Yes, Joseph was a righteous man who cared well for his family, both spiritually and physically. Do you, like Joseph, put spiritual interests first in your life when you discern what God's will is for us today? (1 Timothy 2:4, 5) Do you willingly obey God's voice as expressed in the Word of God, thereby showing Josephlike submission? Do you teach your children so that they can carry on spiritually meaningful conversations with others?

Mary—An Unselfish Servant of God

Mary, Jesus' mother, was an excellent servant of God.

When the angel Gabriel

Joseph and Mary taught their children spiritual values and the role of work

announced that she was to give birth, she manifested surprise. Being a virgin, she had not had "intercourse with a man." On learning that the birth was to be by means of holy spirit, she humbly accepted the message, saying: "Look! Jehovah's slave girl! May it take place with me according to your declaration." (Luke 1:30-38) She valued the spiritual privilege so much that she was willing to bear any hardship that her decision might entail.

Indeed, accepting the commission changed her entire life as a woman. When she went to Jerusalem for her purification, a reverent older man named Simeon told her: "A long sword will be run through the soul of you yourself." (Luke 2:25-35) Evidently, he was referring to how Mary would feel upon

seeing Jesus rejected by many and finally nailed to a torture stake.

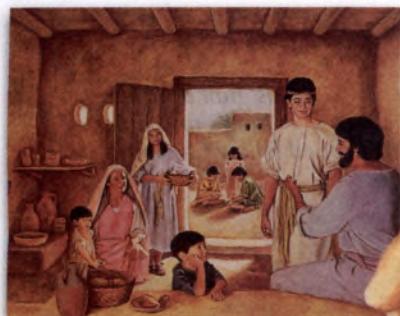
As Jesus grew up, Mary kept a mental note of what took place in his life, "drawing conclusions in her heart." (Luke 2:19, 51) Like Joseph, she was a spiritual person and treasured up the events and sayings that fulfilled prophecies. What the angel Gabriel said to her must have stuck in her mind: "This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule as king over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of his kingdom." (Luke 1:32, 33) Yes, she took seriously the privilege of being the human mother of the Messiah.

Mary's spirituality again became evident when she met Elizabeth, her relative who also had become pregnant miraculously. Upon seeing her, Mary lauded Jehovah and revealed her love for the Word of God. She alluded to Hannah's prayer recorded in 1 Samuel chapter 2 and included thoughts from other books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Such knowledge of the Scriptures showed that she was qualified to become a devoted and God-

fearing mother. She would cooperate with Joseph in spiritually nurturing her son.—Genesis 30:13; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Malachi 3:12; Luke 1:46-55.

Mary had strong faith in her son as the Messiah, and that did not wane even after Jesus' death. Soon after his resurrection, she was among the faithful disciples who met for prayer along with the apostles. (Acts 1:13, 14) She maintained her faithfulness, despite having to go through the agony of seeing her dear son die on a torture stake.

How can you benefit from learning about Mary's life? Do you accept the privilege of serving God regardless of the sacrifices involved? Are you concerned with the seriousness of this privilege today? Do you keep in mind what Jesus foretold and compare that with what is happening today, 'drawing conclusions in your heart'? (Matthew, chapters 24 and 25; Mark, chapter 13; Luke, chapter 21) Do you imitate Mary in becoming well-versed in the Word of God, using it freely in your conversation? Would you maintain your faith in Jesus despite mental anguish that you might have to go through because of being his follower?



Although raised in a spiritual household, Jesus' brothers did not put faith in him until after his death



Jesus' Brothers—Change Is Possible

It seems that Jesus' brothers did not exercise faith in Jesus until after his death. It likely was no coincidence that they were not present when he died on the torture stake and that he had to entrust his mother to the apostle John. Jesus' relatives showed that they did not appreciate him, even saying on one occasion that Jesus was "out of his mind." (Mark 3: 21) Since Jesus had family members who were unbelievers, those who today have unbelievers in their household can rest assured that Jesus understands how they feel when relatives mock them for their faith.

After Jesus' resurrection, however, his brothers apparently began to exercise faith in him. They were in the group who met in Jerusalem before Pentecost of 33 C.E. and fervently prayed together with the apostles. (Acts 1:14) Obviously, their half brother's resurrection moved them to a change of heart, to the point of becoming his disciples. We should never give up on relatives who do not share our faith.

James, Jesus' half brother to whom He appeared personally, is presented in the Scrip-

tures as having an outstanding role in the Christian congregation. He wrote a divinely inspired letter to his fellow Christians, admonishing them to maintain their faith. (Acts 15:6-29; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:18, 19; 2:9; James 1:1) Another half brother, Jude, wrote an inspired letter to encourage fellow believers to put up a hard fight for the faith. (Jude 1) It is noteworthy that neither James nor Jude appealed in their letters to their fleshly tie with Jesus so as to convince fellow Christians. What a wonderful lesson of modesty we can learn from them!

So, what are some things that we learn from Jesus' family? Certainly, lessons in devotion that can be manifested in such ways as these: (1) Faithfully submit to the expressed will of God and face all the trials that doing so implies. (2) Put spiritual values first, even when that means making sacrifices. (3) Train your children in harmony with the Scriptures. (4) Do not give up on family members who do not share your faith. (5) Do not boast about any connection you may have with ones prominent in the Christian congregation. Yes, learning about Jesus' human family draws us closer to him and enhances our appreciation for Jehovah's choosing an ordinary family to nurture Jesus during his childhood.

*Jesus' half brothers
James and Jude
encouraged fellow Christians*

They Searched for the CRAMPED ROAD

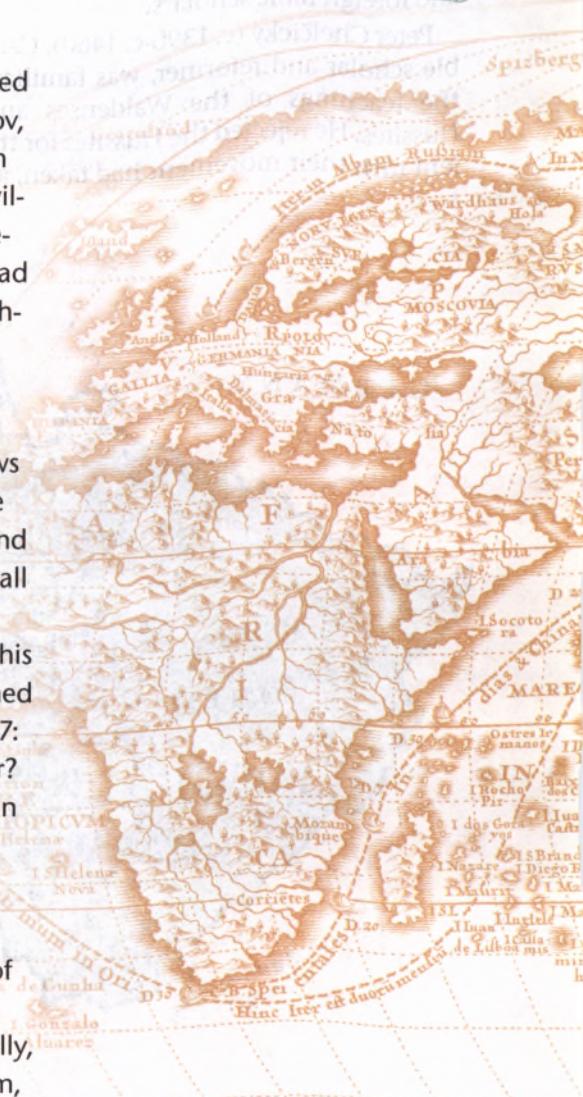


NEARLY 550 years ago, small groups of professed Christians living in Prague, Chelčice, Vilémov, Klatovy, and other cities in what is now the Czech Republic left their homes. They settled near the village of Kunwald, in a valley in northeastern Bohemia, where they built cottages, tilled the land, read their Bibles, and named themselves Unity of Brethren, or *Unitas Fratrum* in Latin.

The settlers included people from varied backgrounds. They were peasants, nobles, university students, rich and poor, men and women, widows and orphans, who all had a common desire. "We turned in prayer to God Himself," they wrote, "and besought Him to reveal to us His gracious will in all things. We wanted to walk in His ways." Indeed, this Unity of Brethren, or the Czech Brethren, as this community of believers came to be called, searched for the 'cramped road leading to life.' (Matthew 7: 13, 14) What Bible truths did their search uncover? How did their beliefs differ from those accepted in that era, and what can we learn from them?

No Violence—No Compromise

Several religious movements contributed in the middle of the 15th century to the formation of the Unity of Brethren. One was the Waldenses, a movement dating back to the 12th century. Initially, the Waldenses withdrew from Roman Catholicism,



the State religion in Central Europe. Later, however, they partially returned to Catholic teachings. Another influential group was the Hussites, followers of Jan Hus. They represented the religion of the majority of the Czech population, but they were far from being united. One faction fought over social issues, while another used religion to further political causes. The Brethren were also influenced by chiliastic groups as well as by local and foreign Bible scholars.

Peter Chelčický (c. 1390-c. 1460), Czech Bible scholar and reformer, was familiar with the teachings of the Waldenses and the Hussites. He rejected the Hussites for the violent turn their movement had taken, and he

turned away from the Waldenses because of their compromising stand. He condemned war as unchristian. He felt that “the law of the Christ” should govern a Christian, no matter what consequences that would have. (Galatians 6:2; Matthew 22:37-39) In 1440, Chelčický penned his teachings in the book *Net of the Faith*.

Gregory of Prague, a younger contemporary of scholar Chelčický, was so taken with Chelčický’s teachings that he left the Hussite movement. In 1458, Gregory persuaded small groups of former Hussites to abandon their homes in different parts of Czechia. They were among those who followed him to the village of Kunwald, where they





Left: Peter Chelčický; below: page from "Net of the Faith"

established a new religious community. Later, groups of Czech and German Waldenses joined them there.

A Window on the Past

From 1464 to 1467, this fledgling but growing group held a number of synods in the region of Kunwald and accepted several resolutions that defined their new religious movement. All resolutions were painstakingly recorded in a series of books, now known as the *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* (Acts of the Unity of Brethren), which still exist. The *Acta* serve as a window on the past, providing a vivid picture of what the Brethren believed. The books contain letters, transcripts

of speeches, and even details of their disputes.

Concerning the beliefs of the Brethren, the *Acta* state: "We are resolved to set our administration by the sole Reading and by the examples of our Lord and the holy apostles in silence, humility and long-suffering, loving our enemies, doing and wishing good to them, and praying for them." The writings also show that initially the Brethren engaged

What About the Major Party?

What became of the Major Party? After the Minor Party disappeared from the scene, the Major Party continued as a religious movement, still known as the Unity of Brethren. In time, this group adjusted its original beliefs. At the end of the 16th century, the Unity of Brethren formed a confederation with the Czech Utraquists,* who were essentially Lutheran. The Brethren remained active, however, in translating and publishing the Bible as well as other religious books. Interestingly, the title pages of their early publications featured the Tetragrammaton, as the four Hebrew letters of God's personal name are known.

In 1620, the Czech kingdom was forced back under Roman Catholic dominion. Consequently, many Brethren of the Major Party left the country and continued their activities abroad. There, the group later became known as the Moravian Church (Moravia being a part of the Czech lands), which still exists.

* From the Latin word *utraque*, which means "each of two." Unlike the Roman Catholic priests, who withheld the wine from the laity during Holy Communion, the Utraquists (diverse groups of Hussites) administered bread and wine.

in preaching. They traveled in pairs, and women proved to be successful missionaries locally. The Brethren abstained from political office, took no oaths, did not involve themselves in military activity, and did not carry weapons.

From Unity to Disunity

After some decades, though, the Unity of Brethren failed to live up to its name. Disputes about how literally their beliefs should be practiced led to divisions. In 1494 the

Brethren split into two groups—the Major and the Minor parties. While the Major Party watered down its original beliefs, the Minor Party preached that the Brethren should remain firm in their stand against politics and the world.—See box “What About the Major Party?”

For instance, one Minor Party member wrote: “People walking on two roads have little guarantee that they will stay with God, as only rarely and in minor things are they willing to offer themselves and submit to Him,

What the Brethren of the Minor Party Believed

The following quotes from the 15th- and 16th-century *Acta Unitatis Fratrum* show some of the beliefs held by the Minor Party. The statements, written by leaders of the Minor Party, are primarily directed to the Major Party.

Trinity: “If you glance throughout the entire Bible, you will not find that God is divided into a kind of Trinity, three persons by names, as people fabricated in their fancies.”

Holy spirit: “The holy spirit is God’s finger and a gift of God, or a comforter, or God’s Power, which the Father gives to believers on the basis of Christ’s merits. We do not find in the Holy Scriptures that the holy spirit should be called a God or a Person; nor do the apostolic teachings show that.”

Priesthood: “They falsely give you the title ‘priest’; if you take away your tonsure and finger ointment, you do not have anything above the most common lay person. Saint Peter calls on all Christians to be priests, saying: You are the holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices. (1 Peter 2)”

Baptism: “The Lord Christ told his apostles: Go into all the world, preach the Gospel to all creation, to those who would believe. (Mark, chapter 16) And only after these words: and being baptized, they will be saved. And you teach to baptize little children who lack their own faith.”

Neutrality: “What your early brothers viewed as bad and unclean, to join the army and murder or to walk the very roads clothed with weapons, all that you consid-

er to be good . . . So we feel that you, along with other teachers, look only with your left eye at the prophetic words that point out: Thus he broke the power of the bow, the shields and the sword and the battle. (Psalm 75) And again: They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the Lord’s earth shall be full of the divine knowledge, and so forth. (Isaiah, chapter 11).”

Preaching: “We well know that, initially, females have brought more people to repentance than all the priests along with a bishop. And now the priests settled at their places and their apportioned rectories. What a mistake! Go into the entire world. Preach . . . to all creation.”



All images: Štastavým svolením knihovny Národního muzea v Praze, Česko

Fifty of the 60 Bohemian (Czech) books printed from 1500 to 1510 are said to have been by members of the Unity of Brethren

whereas in major things they take their own way. . . . The ones who are of untouched mind and good conscience—every day following the Lord Christ on the cramped road with their cross—among those we long to be counted.”

Members of the Minor Party viewed the holy spirit as God’s active force, his “finger.” Their understanding of Jesus’ ransom was that the perfect man Jesus paid with his human life for what the sinner Adam lost. They did not venerate Mary, Jesus’ mother.

They restored the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers without the vow of celibacy. They encouraged public preaching by all congregation members and expelled unrepentant sinners. They exercised strict separation from military and political activities. (See box “What the Brethren of the Minor Party Believed.”) Since the Minor Party clung to the resolutions in the *Acta*, it considered itself to be the true heir of the original Unity of Brethren.

Outspoken and Persecuted

The Minor Party outspokenly criticized other religions, including the Major Party. “You teach to baptize little children who lack their own faith,” they wrote about such religions, “and in this you follow the institution of a bishop called Dionysius, who at the instigation of some unwise people emphasized infant baptism The same do almost all teachers and doctors, Luther, Melanchthon, Bucer, Korvín, Jileš, Bullinger, . . . the Major Party, all gravitating together.”

Not surprisingly, the Minor Party was persecuted. In 1524 one of its leaders, Jan Kallenec, was flogged and scorched. Later three members of the Minor Party were burned at the stake. The Minor Party seems to have faded away about 1550, after the death of their last leader.

Even so, the believers of the Minor Party left their mark on the religious landscape of medieval Europe. Granted, since “the true knowledge” had not yet become abundant in the days of the Minor Party, they did not succeed in dispelling the long-standing spiritual darkness. (Daniel 12:4) Nevertheless, their strong desire to search for the cramped road and to follow it in the face of opposition is something for Christians today to note.

OUR WATCHFULNESS TAKES ON GREATER URGENCY

"Keep on the watch, therefore, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." —MATTHEW 24:42.

ABOVE all other things, the twentieth century was shaped by war," says author Bill Emmott. While admitting that all periods of human history have felt the weight of wars and violence, he adds: "The twentieth century did not differ in kind, it differed in degree. It was the first century to feature a truly world-spanning conflict . . . And, as if to emphasize the point, it featured not just one such worldwide conflict, but two."

² Wars that involve 'nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom' were foretold by Jesus Christ. However, they are just one aspect of 'the sign of Christ's presence and of the conclusion of the system of things.' In this great prophecy, Jesus also mentioned famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. (Matthew 24:3, 7, 8; Luke 21:6, 7, 10, 11) In many respects, such calamities have increased in scope and severity. The badness of man is abundant, as seen in his attitude toward God and fellowman. Moral breakdown and increase in crime and violence are evident. Men have become lovers of money rather than lovers of God, obsessed with pleasure. All this testifies that we are living in "critical times."—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

³ How do you view the worsening trend in human affairs? Many are indifferent, even callous, to distressing events of the day. The world's influential and intellectual men do

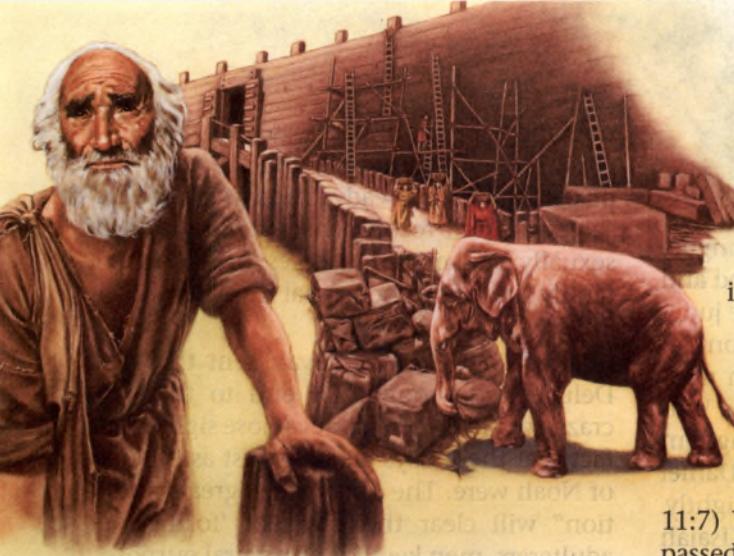
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- 1, 2. What shows that we are living in the conclusion of the present system of things?
 3. How should "the signs of the times" affect us?

not discern the meaning of "the signs of the times"; neither have religious leaders given proper guidance in this matter. (Matthew 16: 1-3) But Jesus admonished his followers: "Keep on the watch, therefore, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24:42) Jesus here encourages us not only to be watchful but to "keep on the watch." To keep on the watch, we must remain alert and vigilant. This requires more than simply acknowledging that we are living in the last days, more than recognizing that times are hard. We must have firm conviction that "the end of all things has drawn close." (1 Peter 4:7) Only then will our watchfulness take on a sense of urgency. Hence, the question that we must reflect on is: 'What will help us to strengthen our conviction that the end is near?'

⁴ Consider the conditions prevailing during the time preceding a one-of-a-kind event in human history—the great Deluge of Noah's day. People were so bad that Jehovah "felt hurt at his heart." He declared: "I am going to wipe men whom I have created off the surface of the ground." (Genesis 6:6, 7) And he did just that. Drawing a parallel between then and now, Jesus said: "Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be."—Matthew 24:37.

⁵ It is reasonable to assume that Jehovah

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- 4, 5. (a) What will strengthen our conviction that the end of this wicked system is near, and why? (b) What is one similarity between Noah's day and the presence of the Son of man?



**Noah heeded a divine warning.
Do we respond similarly?**

feels about the present world as he felt about the pre-Flood world. Since he brought an end to the ungodly world of Noah's day, he will certainly destroy the wicked world of today. Having a clear understanding of the parallel between that time and our day should fortify our conviction that the end of the present world is near. What, then, are the similarities? There are at least five. The first is that a warning of coming destruction is given in no uncertain terms.

Warned of "Things Not Yet Beheld"

⁶ In Noah's day, Jehovah declared: "My spirit shall not act toward man indefinitely in that he is also flesh. Accordingly his days shall amount to a hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:3) The issuance of this divine decree in 2490 B.C.E. marked the beginning of the end for that ungodly world. Just think what that meant for those then living! Only 120 years more and Jehovah would bring "the deluge of waters upon the earth to bring to ruin all flesh in which the force of life is active from under the heavens."—Genesis 6:17.

6. What did Jehovah determine to do in Noah's day?

⁷ Noah received the warning of the upcoming catastrophe decades in advance, and he wisely used the time to prepare for survival. "After being given divine warning of things not yet beheld," says the apostle Paul, "[Noah] showed godly fear and constructed an ark for the saving of his household." (Hebrews 11:7) What about us? Some 90 years have passed since the last days of this system of things began in 1914. We are certainly in "the time of the end." (Daniel 12:4) How should we respond to warnings we have been given? "He that does the will of God remains forever," states the Bible. (1 John 2:17) Now is therefore the time to do Jehovah's will with a keen sense of urgency.

⁸ In modern times, sincere students of the Bible have learned from the inspired Scriptures that this system is doomed to destruction. Do we believe this? Notice what Jesus Christ clearly stated: "There will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now, no, nor will occur again." (Matthew 24:21) Jesus also said that he would come as God's appointed Judge and would separate people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. Those found unworthy would "depart into everlasting cutting-off, but the righteous ones into everlasting life."—Matthew 25:31-33, 46.

⁹ Jehovah has kept these warnings in front of his people by means of timely reminders through the spiritual food provided by "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45-

7. (a) What was Noah's response to the warning about the Flood? (b) How should we respond to warnings about the end of this system?

8, 9. What warnings have been given in modern times, and how are these being declared?



47) Moreover, every nation, tribe, tongue, and people are called upon to "fear God and give him glory, because the hour of the judgment by him has arrived." (Revelation 14: 6, 7) An integral part of the Kingdom message preached earth wide by Jehovah's Witnesses is the warning that God's Kingdom will soon remove human rulership. (Daniel 2:44) This warning is not to be taken lightly. Almighty God always keeps his word. (Isaiah 55:10, 11) He did in Noah's day, and he will in our day.—2 Peter 3:3-7.

Sexual Depravity Becomes Rampant

¹⁰ Our time corresponds to Noah's day in another respect. Jehovah had commanded the first man and woman to "fill the earth" with their kind, using their God-given sexual powers honorably within the marriage arrangement. (Genesis 1:28) In Noah's day, disobedient angels contaminated humanity with unnatural sex. They came down to earth, materialized bodies, and cohabited with beautiful women, producing offspring that were half human, half demon—the Nephilim. (Genesis 6:2, 4) The sin of these lustful angels is likened to the perversions of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Jude 6, 7) Consequently, sexual depravity was widespread in those days.

¹¹ What about the moral climate of today? In these final days, the lives of many revolve around sex. Paul graphically describes such ones as "having come to be past all moral sense"; many have given themselves over "to loose conduct to work uncleanness of every sort with greediness." (Ephesians 4:19) Por-

10. What can be said about sexual depravity in Noah's day?
11. What moral climate makes our time similar to the days of Noah?

nography, premarital sex, sexual abuse of children, and homosexuality are commonplace. Some are already "receiving in themselves the full recompense" in the form of sexually transmitted diseases, breakdown of family life, and other social ills.—Romans 1: 26, 27.

¹² In Noah's day, Jehovah sent the great Deluge and brought an end to that sex-crazed world. We must never lose sight of the fact that these days are truly just as the days of Noah were. The upcoming "great tribulation" will clear the earth of 'fornicators, adulterers, men kept for unnatural purposes, and men who lie with men.' (Matthew 24: 21; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Revelation 21:8) How urgent it is that we cultivate hatred for what is bad and stay clear of circumstances that could lead to immorality!—Psalm 97:10; 1 Corinthians 6:18.

Earth Becomes "Filled With Violence"

¹³ Pointing to yet another characteristic of Noah's day, the Bible states: "The earth came to be ruined in the sight of the true God and the earth became filled with violence." (Genesis 6:11) Violence was not actually new.

12. Why should we cultivate hatred for what is bad?
13. In Noah's day, why was the earth "filled with violence"?

"Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be"



Adam's son Cain murdered his righteous brother. (Genesis 4:8) Reflecting the violent spirit of his day, Lamech composed a poem boasting about how he had killed a young man, allegedly in self-defense. (Genesis 4:23, 24) What was new in Noah's day was the degree of violence. As disobedient angelic sons of God married women on earth and produced progeny—the Nephilim—violence increased to a level previously unknown. These violent giants were "the Fellers"—"those who cause others to fall down." (Genesis 6:4, footnote) As a result, the earth was "full of violence." (Genesis 6:13) Imagine the problems Noah must have faced bringing up his family in such an environment! Yet, Noah proved to be 'righteous before Jehovah among that generation.'—Genesis 7:1.

¹⁴ Violence has been with mankind throughout the ages. But as was true in the days of Noah, our time has also witnessed it on an unprecedented scale. We regularly hear about domestic violence, acts of terrorism, campaigns of genocide, and mass killings by gunmen with little apparent motive. Add to all of this the bloodshed caused by wars. The earth has again become filled with violence. Why? What has contributed to the increase? The answer reveals another similarity to Noah's day.

¹⁵ When God's Messianic Kingdom was established in heaven in 1914, the enthroned King, Jesus Christ, took epoch-making action. Satan the Devil and his demons were ousted from heaven to the vicinity of the earth. (Revelation 12:9-12) Before the Flood, disobedient angels forsook their heavenly position voluntarily; in modern times, how-

14. How has the world today become "filled with violence"?

15. (a) What has contributed to the increase in violence in the last days? (b) Of what outcome can we be confident?

ever, they were forcibly evicted. Furthermore, they now lack the ability to materialize human bodies on earth in order to enjoy illicit fleshly pleasures. So in frustration, anger, and fear of impending judgment, they influence men and organizations to perform inhuman acts of crime and violence of even greater magnitude than those of Noah's day. Jehovah obliterated the pre-Flood world after disobedient angels and their offspring had filled it with badness. Make no mistake about it, he will not do any less in our day! (Psalm 37:10) However, those staying

(Is. 43:1-2)

The yeartext for 2004 will be: "Keep on the watch . . . Prove yourselves ready."—Matthew 24:42, 44.

watchful today know that their deliverance is near.

The Message Is Preached

¹⁶ The fourth point of similarity between the present day and the pre-Flood world is seen in the work that Noah was commissioned to do. Noah constructed a huge ark. He was also "a preacher." (2 Peter 2:5) What message did he preach? Noah's preaching evidently included a call for repentance and a warning of coming destruction. Jesus said that the people of Noah's day "took no note until the flood came and swept them all away."—Matthew 24:38, 39.

¹⁷ Similarly, as Jehovah's Witnesses diligently fulfill their commission to preach, the message of God's Kingdom is being declared worldwide. In almost every part of the globe, people can hear and read the Kingdom message in their own language. The *Watchtower* magazine, announcing Jehovah's Kingdom, has a circulation of over 25,000,000 and is printed in more than 140 languages. Indeed, the good news of God's Kingdom is being preached "in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." When that work is completed to God's satisfaction, the end is certain to come.—Matthew 24:14.

¹⁸ Given the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the days preceding the Flood, it is not hard to imagine how Noah's family became the laughingstock of incredulous neighbors and the object of abuse and ridicule. The end did come though. Similarly, "ridiculers with

16, 17. What is the fourth similarity between the days of Noah and our day?

18. How does the response of many to our preaching activity compare with that of most people in Noah's day?

their ridicule" abound in the last days. "Yet Jehovah's day will come as a thief," states the Bible. (2 Peter 3:3, 4, 10) Come it will at the appointed time. It will not be late. (Habakkuk 2:3) How wise we are to keep on the watch!

Only a Few Survive

¹⁹ The parallel between Noah's day and our day does not end with the badness of the people and their destruction. As there were Flood survivors, so there will be those who survive the end of the present system of things. The Flood survivors were meek ones who did not live as the people in general did. They heeded the divine warning and kept separate from the wicked world of that time. "Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah," states the Bible. "[Noah] proved himself faultless among his contemporaries." (Genesis 6:8, 9) Out of all mankind, one family, "a few people, that is, eight souls, were carried safely through the water." (1 Peter 3:20) And to them Jehovah God gave a mandate saying: "Be fruitful and become many and fill the earth."—Genesis 9:1.

²⁰ God's Word assures us that "a great crowd" will "come out of the great tribulation." (Revelation 7:9, 14) How many will there be in the great crowd? Jesus himself said: "Narrow is the gate and cramped the road leading off into life, and few are the ones finding it." (Matthew 7:13, 14) Compared to the billions living on earth now, the survivors of the upcoming great tribulation will be few. But they may well have a privilege similar to that given to the Flood survivors.

19, 20. What parallel can we draw between the Flood and the destruction of the present system of things?

vors. The survivors may for a time be able to have offspring as a part of the new earthly society.—Isaiah 65:23.

"Keep on the Watch"

²¹ Although the Flood seems remote from our day, it clearly provides a warning that we must not ignore. (Romans 15:4) The similarities between Noah's day and our day should make us increasingly aware of the significance of what is happening and alert us to the thief-like coming of Jesus to execute judgment upon the wicked.

²² Today, Jesus Christ is directing a tremendous spiritual building work. For the security and survival of true worshipers, an arklike spiritual paradise exists. (2 Corinthians 12:

21, 22. (a) How has this consideration of the Flood account benefited you? (b) What is the year-text for 2004, and why should we heed the advice it gives?

PROVE YOURSELF READY FOR JEHOVAH'S DAY

"Prove yourselves ready, because at an hour that you do not think to be it, the Son of man is coming."—MATTHEW 24:44.

IT WILL be a day of battle and fury, of anguish and distress, of darkness and desolation. Jehovah's "great and fear-inspiring day" is certain to come upon this wicked system of things, even as the Flood drowned the wicked world in Noah's day. There is no escaping it. Yet, "everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe." (Joel 2:30-32; Amos 5:18-20) God will destroy his enemies

1. Why should we be concerned about Jehovah's day?

3, 4) To be preserved through the great tribulation, we must remain in that paradise. Surrounding the domain of the spiritual paradise is Satan's world, ready to assimilate any who have become spiritually drowsy. It is imperative that we "keep on the watch" and prove ourselves ready for Jehovah's day. —Matthew 24:42, 44.

Do You Recall?

- What admonition did Jesus give concerning his coming?
- With what does Jesus compare the time of his presence?
- In what ways are our times similar to the days of Noah?
- How should reflecting upon the similarities between Noah's day and our day affect our sense of urgency?

and save his people. With a sense of urgency, the prophet Zephaniah declares: "The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much." (Zephaniah 1:14) When, though, will this divine judgment be executed?

² "Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father," said Jesus.

2, 3. Why is it vital that we prepare ourselves for the day of Jehovah?

(Matthew 24:36) Since we do not know the precise time, it is vital that we take to heart the words of our yeartext for 2004: "Keep on the watch . . . Prove yourselves ready."—Matthew 24:42, 44.

³ Indicating how suddenly those who are ready will be gathered to safety while others will be forsaken, Jesus said: "Two men will be in the field: one will be taken along and the other be abandoned; two women will be grinding at the hand mill: one will be taken along and the other be abandoned." (Matthew 24:40, 41) At that critical stage, what will be our personal situation? Will we be ready, or will that day catch us off guard? Much depends on the measures we take now. To prove ourselves ready for Jehovah's day requires that we avoid a certain attitude prevalent today, that we resist falling into a particular spiritual state, and that we shun certain life-styles.

Avoid a Complacent Attitude

⁴ Consider the days of Noah. "By faith Noah, after being given divine warning of things not yet beheld, showed godly fear and constructed an ark for the saving of his household," states the Bible. (Hebrews 11:7) The ark would be unusual and quite visible. Moreover, Noah was "a preacher of righteousness." (2 Peter 2:5) Neither Noah's building project nor his preaching moved the people of his day to act. Why? Because they were "eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage." Those to whom Noah preached were so engrossed in personal affairs and pleasures that "they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away."—Matthew 24:38, 39.

⁵ It was the same in the days of Lot. The

4. What attitude did the people of Noah's day have?

5. What was the outlook of the inhabitants of Sodom in Lot's day?

Scriptures tell us: "They were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building. But on the day that Lot came out of Sodom it rained fire and sulphur from heaven and destroyed them all." (Luke 17:28, 29) After angels warned Lot of the impending destruction, he spoke to his sons-in-law about what was coming.

In their eyes, though, "he seemed like a man who was joking."—Genesis 19:14.

⁶ As it was in the days of Noah and Lot, "so the presence of the Son of man" would be, said Jesus. (Matthew 24:39; Luke 17:30) Indeed, the prevailing attitude of many today is that of complacency. We must be on guard against being influenced by such an outlook. There is nothing wrong with enjoying good food and drink in moderation. Similarly, marriage is an arrangement of God. However, if such matters have become all-important in our life and spiritual interests have been pushed aside, are we personally ready for the fear-inspiring day of Jehovah?

⁷ "The time left is reduced," said the apostle Paul. "Henceforth let those who have wives be as though they had none." (1 Corinthians 7:29-31) Only a limited time remains for us to finish our God-given Kingdom-preaching work. (Matthew 24:14) Paul admonished even those who are married not to be so absorbed in their mate that they give Kingdom interests a secondary place in their lives. Clearly, the mental inclination that Paul was

6. What attitude must we avoid?

7. What vital question should we ask before undertaking any pursuit, and why?





People in Noah's day took no note of impending judgment—do you?

obligation to him.—Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 13:7.

Resist Spiritual Drowsiness

⁹ The very prophecy that speaks of the oncoming “war of the great day of God the Almighty” at Armageddon warns

that some may not keep awake. “Look! I am coming as a thief,” says the Lord Jesus Christ. “Happy is the one that stays awake and keeps his outer garments, that he may not walk naked and people look upon his shamefulness.” (Revelation 16:14-16) The outer garments mentioned here refer to what identifies us as Christian Witnesses of Jehovah. This includes our work as Kingdom proclaimers and our Christian conduct. If we slide into sleep-like inactivity, we may be stripped of our Christian identity.



recommending is the opposite of complacency. Jesus said: “Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and [God’s] righteousness.” (Matthew 6:33) When making any decision or before undertaking any pursuit, the imperative question to ask is, ‘How will this affect my keeping Kingdom interests first in my life?’

⁸ What if we realize that we are already involved in the normal day-to-day things of life to such an extent that spiritual interests are being crowded out? Is there little difference between our manner of life and that of our neighbors who lack accurate knowledge of the Scriptures and are not Kingdom proclaimers? If that is the case, then we need to make this a matter of prayer. Jehovah can enable us to have the right mental attitude. (Romans 15:5; Philippians 3:15) He can help us to keep Kingdom interests first, to do what is right, and to fulfill our

8. If day-to-day things of life have become our chief concern, what should we do?

identity. That is shameful and dangerous. We must resist falling into a state of spiritual drowsiness or lethargy. How can we resist such an inclination?

¹⁰ The Bible repeatedly emphasizes the need to keep awake and keep our senses. For example, the Gospel accounts remind us: “Keep on the watch” (Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:35, 37); “prove yourselves

9. According to Revelation 16:14-16, why is it important to resist spiritual drowsiness?

10. Why does daily Bible reading help us to remain spiritually alert?

ready" (Matthew 24:44); "keep looking, keep awake" (Mark 13:33); "keep ready" (Luke 12:40). After stating that the day of Jehovah is going to come unexpectedly upon this world, the apostle Paul urges fellow believers: "Let us not sleep on as the rest do, but let us stay awake and keep our senses." (1 Thessalonians 5:6) In the last book of the Bible, the glorified Christ Jesus stresses the suddenness of his coming, saying: "I am coming quickly." (Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20) Many of the Hebrew prophets also described and warned of the great day of Jehovah's judgment. (Isaiah 2:12, 17; Jeremiah 30:7; Joel 2:11; Zephaniah 3:8) Reading God's Word, the Bible, daily and reflecting on what we read is a fine help in remaining spiritually alert.

¹¹ Yes, what a stimulant to our spiritual wakefulness is diligent personal study of the Scriptures using Bible-based publications provided by "the faithful and discreet slave"! (Matthew 24:45-47) For personal study to produce benefits, however, it must be progressive and consistent. (Hebrews 5:14-6:3) We must take in solid spiritual food regularly. Finding time for it in this day and age may be a challenge. (Ephesians 5:15, 16) Still, reading the Bible and Scriptural publications only when it may be convenient is not enough. Regular personal study is essential if we are to stay "healthy in the faith" and keep awake.—Titus 1:13.

¹² Christian meetings, assemblies, and conventions also help us to fight spiritual drowsiness. How? By means of the instruction we receive. At these gatherings, are we not regularly reminded of the nearness of the day of Jehovah? Weekly Christian meet-

ings also provide opportunities to 'incite one another to love and fine works.' Such inciting, or stirring up, is conducive to spiritual wakefulness. Not surprisingly, we are commanded to gather regularly as we "behold the day drawing near."—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

¹³ We are also helped to remain awake when we share wholeheartedly in the Christian ministry. What better means is there to keep fresh in mind the signs of the times and their meaning than to talk to others about them? And when we see those with whom we study the Bible make progress and begin to act on what they are learning, our own sense of urgency is heightened. "Brace up your minds for activity," said the apostle Peter, "keep your senses completely." (1 Peter 1:13) "Always having plenty to do in the work of the Lord" is a fine remedy for spiritual stupor.—1 Corinthians 15:58.

Shun Spiritually Damaging Life-Styles

¹⁴ In his great prophecy about the sign of his presence, Jesus gave yet another warning. He said: "Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day be instantly upon you as a snare. For it will come in upon all those dwelling upon the face of all the earth. Keep awake, then, all the time making supplication that you may succeed in escaping all these things that are destined to occur, and in standing before the Son of man." (Luke 21:34-36) Jesus accurately described the life-styles that people in general pursue: overindulgence in food, drunkenness, and a way of life that brings anxieties.

11. Why is personal Bible study essential to spiritual wakefulness?
12. How do Christian meetings, assemblies, and conventions help us fight spiritual drowsiness?

13. How does the Christian ministry help keep us awake spiritually?
14. As described at Luke 21:34-36, what life-styles does Jesus warn against?



Can you simplify your life to have more time for spiritual pursuits?

¹⁵ Overeating and heavy drinking are out of harmony with Bible principles and are to be shunned. "Do not come to be among heavy drinkers of wine, among those who are gluttonous eaters of flesh," states the Bible. (Proverbs 23:20) For it to be dangerous, though, eating and drinking does not have to reach that level. It can make one drowsy and lazy long before that. "The lazy one is showing himself desirous," says a Bible proverb, "but his soul has nothing." (Proverbs 13:4) Such a person may want to do God's will, but his desire remains unfulfilled because of negligence.

¹⁶ What are the anxieties of life that Jesus warned about? They involve personal concerns, providing for the family, and the like. How unwise to allow these to weigh us

15. Why should we avoid overindulgence in food and drink?

16. How can we avoid being weighed down by anxieties concerning our family?

down! "Who of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span?" asked Jesus. He admonished his listeners: "Never be anxious and say, 'What are we to eat?' or, 'What are we to drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?'" For all these are the things the nations are eagerly pursuing. For your heavenly Father knows you need all these things." Putting Kingdom interests first in our lives and having confidence that Jehovah will provide for us will keep anxieties at bay and help us stay awake.—Matthew 6:25-34.

¹⁷ Anxiety may also be brought on by materialistic pursuits. For example, some complicate their lives by living beyond their means. Others have been enticed by get-rich-quick schemes and risky financial investments. For others, secular education as a means to attain financial success becomes a snare. Granted, a certain level of schooling

17. How can material pursuits bring on anxiety?

may be useful to obtain employment. However, the truth is that in the time-consuming pursuit of obtaining advanced education, some have harmed themselves spiritually. What a dangerous situation to be in as the day of Jehovah nears! The Bible warns: "Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin."—1 Timothy 6:9.

¹⁸ Essential to not being drawn into a materialistic way of life is cultivating the ability to distinguish between right and wrong when making decisions. This ability is developed by regularly partaking of 'solid spiritual food belonging to mature people' and by 'having our perceptive powers trained through use.' (Hebrews 5:13, 14) Making sure "of the more important things" when setting priorities will also safeguard us from making wrong choices.—Philippians 1:10.

¹⁹ A materialistic life-style can blind us, leaving little or no time for spiritual pursuits. How can we examine ourselves and avoid being ensnared by such a life-style? We need to consider prayerfully how and to what extent we can simplify our life.

18. To avoid being drawn into a materialistic life-style, what ability must we cultivate?
19. If we discern that we have very little time for spiritual pursuits, what should we do?

Do You Recall?

- Why should we prove ourselves ready for Jehovah's day?
- If normal pursuits of life have become our chief concern, what should we do?
- What will help us to resist spiritual drowsiness?
- What damaging life-styles must we shun, and how?

King Solomon of ancient Israel said: "Sweet is the sleep of the one serving, regardless of whether it is little or much that he eats; but the plenty belonging to the rich one is not permitting him to sleep." (Ecclesiastes 5:12) Does taking care of unnecessary material possessions consume a lot of our time and energy? The more we own, the more we have to maintain, insure, and protect. Could it be to our advantage to simplify our life by freeing ourselves of certain belongings?

By All Means, Prove Yourself Ready

²⁰ Time ran out for the world of Noah's day, and it will run out for the present system of things. The apostle Peter assures us: "Jehovah's day will come as a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a hissing noise, but the elements being intensely hot will be dissolved, and earth and the works in it will be discovered." Neither the symbolic heavens—wicked governments—nor the symbolic earth—mankind alienated from God—will survive the heat of God's burning anger. Indicating how we can prove ourselves ready for that day, Peter exclaims: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion, awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah!"—2 Peter 3:10-12.

²¹ Our regularly attending Christian meetings and sharing in preaching the good news are included among these acts and deeds of godly devotion. May we perform them with heartfelt devotion to God while we wait patiently for Jehovah's great day. Let us "do [our] utmost to be found finally by [God] spotless and unblemished and in peace."—2 Peter 3:14.

- 20, 21. (a) What assurance does the apostle Peter give concerning Jehovah's day? (b) What acts and deeds must we go on performing as we prove ourselves ready for Jehovah's day?

Gilead Graduates Encouraged to Speak “Magnificent Things”



A FINE crowd of 6,635 from 52 lands was present at the graduation program of the 115th class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead on September 13, 2003.

They heard Bible-based encouragement given to the 48 students of the class for them to take “the magnificent things of God” to people of 17 lands. (Acts 2:11) That is where the graduates would now be carrying on their missionary work.

In his opening remarks, Stephen Lett, who is a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses and who served as chairman for the graduation, reminded the students: “When you leave for your assignments, no matter where you go or what circumstances you find yourself in, more are with you than are against you.” Drawing on chapter 6 of Second Kings, Brother Lett reminded the students that they can count on the backing of Jehovah God and myriads of angels as they make known “the magnificent things of God.” (2 Kings 6:15, 16) First-century Christians faced opposition and apathy in their preaching and teaching work, and Christian missionaries today face similar circumstances. However, they can rely on support from heaven as well as from Jehovah’s earthly organization.—Psalm 34:7; Matthew 24:45.

Speak “the Magnificent Things of God”

Following the chairman’s opening comments, Harold Corkern of the United States Branch Committee spoke on the theme “Realistic Expectations—Key to Joyful and Successful Service.” Brother Corkern pointed out that unfulfilled hopes can lead to disappointment, as Proverbs 13:12 shows. However, disappointment often comes from having *unrealistic* expectations that are not fulfilled. The graduates need to have a balanced, realistic view of themselves and others. They should expect to make some mistakes, but these ought not to make them overly sad as they strive to help others appreciate “the magnificent things of God.” Brother Corkern encouraged the new missionaries to rely on Jehovah, “the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him.”—Hebrews 11:6.

Next on the program was Daniel Sydlik, a member of the Governing Body, who spoke on the theme “The Christian Hope—What Is It?” He stated: “Hope is a Christian virtue. It is a standard of right that brings one into a proper relationship with God. For a non-Christian to hope as we do is an impossibility.” Brother Sydlik went on to describe different aspects of the Christian hope that help one remain optimistic in the face of life’s difficulties. “With hope we can face life with renewed diligence and a triumphant spirit.” A Christian’s hope helps him to see Jehovah as a God

CLASS STATISTICS

Number of countries represented: 7

Number of countries assigned to: 17

Number of students: 48

Average age: 33.7

Average years in truth: 17.8

Average years in full-time ministry: 13.5



115th Graduating Class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead

In the list below, rows are numbered from front to back, and names are listed from left to right in each row.

- (1) Brown, T.; Goller, C.; Hoffman, A.; Buzzese, J.; Trahan, S. (2) Smart, N.; Cashman, F.; Garcia, K.; Lojan, M.; Seyfert, S.; Gray, K. (3) Beckett, M.; Nichols, S.; Smith, K.; Gugliara, A.; Rappenecker, A. (4) Gray, S.; Vacek, K.; Fleming, M.; Bethel, L.; Hermansson, T.; Hermansson, P. (5) Rappenecker, G.; Lojan, D.; Dickey, S.; Kim, C.; Trahan, A.; Washington, A.; Smart, S. (6) Goller, L.; Burghoffer, T.; Gugliara, D.; Nichols, R.; Washington, S.; Kim, J. (7) Beckett, M.; Dickey, J.; Smith, R.; Garcia, R.; Hoffman, A.; Seyfert, R.; Brown, H. (8) Fleming, S.; Buzzese, P.; Burghoffer, W.; Bethel, T.; Cashman, J.; Vacek, K.

of purpose and to rejoice in serving him.
—Romans 12:12.

Wallace Liverance, registrar of Gilead School, encouraged the students to "Keep Walking by Spirit." (Galatians 5:16) He showed how Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, almost drifted away from walking by spirit. At one point, Baruch grew weary and began pursuing great things for himself. (Jeremiah 45:3, 5) Brother Liverance then pointed out that some left off following Jesus and rejected spiritual truth, which is necessary for salvation. That was because they did not comprehend what he was teaching, and they were disappointed at not having their fleshly ex-

pectations fulfilled at that time. (John 6:26, 27, 51, 66) What can missionaries, whose work is to direct attention to the Creator and his purpose, learn from these accounts? The students were encouraged not to be concerned about occupying a position, receiving recognition from men, or using a theocratic assignment for personal gain.

"Will You Be a Giver or a Taker?" was the question Gilead instructor Mark Noumair raised. He based his comments on Judges 5:2, where individual Israelites were lauded for unselfishly volunteering to serve in Barak's army. The Gilead students were commended for their spirit in responding to the call of the

Greater Barak, Jesus Christ, to get more involved in spiritual warfare. Soldiers of Christ should be interested in gaining the approval of the one who enrolled them. Brother Noumair reminded the students: "When we begin to concentrate on pleasing ourselves, we stop fighting the enemy. . . . Missionary service is not about you. It's about Jehovah, his sovereignty, and his will being accomplished. We don't serve as missionaries because we want Jehovah to make us happy, we serve him because we love him."—2 Timothy 2:4.

Gilead instructor Lawrence Bowen next served as the moderator of the part "Sanctify Them by Means of the Truth." (John 17:17) He noted that the students of the 115th class are sanctified ministers of God. While in school, they also shared in the field ministry, seeking out honesthearted lovers of truth. Like Jesus and his early disciples, the students did not speak out of their "own impulse." (John 12:49, 50) They zealously presented the inspired, life-giving word of truth. The reenactments and experiences of the students demonstrated the powerful effect that the Bible had on those whom they contacted.

Advice and Experience Provide Encouragement

Anthony Pérez and Anthony Griffin, members of the Service Department of the United States branch, conducted interviews with Branch Committee members from around the world. These men discussed challenges that new missionaries face and provided practical counsel based on personal experience. Some of the challenges include cultural differences, a tropical climate all year round, or a religious and political climate different from what the students have been accustomed to. What can help new missionaries cope with their new surroundings? Love for Jehovah, love for the people, not looking back, and not acting rashly. One branch committee member said: "People in our assignment had lived there for centuries and centu-

ries before us. Surely we could live there and adapt. Every time we encountered difficulties, we looked upon them as character builders. You rely on prayer and on Jehovah's spirit, and you experience the truthfulness of Jesus' words, 'I am with you.'"—Matthew 28:20.

Samuel Herd, a member of the Governing Body, brought the program to a high point with his talk, "Keep Speaking About the Magnificent Things of God." The outpouring of holy spirit on the day of Pentecost 33 C.E. energized Jesus' disciples to speak about "the magnificent things of God." What can help new missionaries today to speak with similar zeal about God's Kingdom? The same holy spirit. Brother Herd encouraged the graduating students to "be aglow with the spirit," to get excited about their assignments, never forgetting the training that has been invested in them. (Romans 12:11) "The Bible is a magnificent thing of God," said Brother Herd. "Never underestimate its worth. Its message is alive. It cuts right to the heart of matters. Use it to set things straight in your lives. Let it change the way you think. Guard your thinking ability by studying, reading, and meditating on the Scriptures . . . Make it your aim and determination to use your Gilead training to keep speaking 'the magnificent things of God.'"

Following the reading of greetings from around the globe and the presentation of diplomas, one graduate read a letter from the class expressing appreciation for the training received. Brother Lett then brought the joyous occasion to a fitting end by referring to 2 Chronicles 32:7 and Deuteronomy 20:1, 4. Tying in his final comments with his opening remarks, he concluded: "So dear graduates, remember as you go forth, as you march into spiritual battle in your new assignments, that Jehovah will be marching with you. Never lose sight of the fact that more are with you than are against you."

Questions From Readers

In his model prayer, did Jesus imply that God's will was being done in heaven even though the wicked angels had not yet been cast out?

As recorded at Matthew 6:10, Jesus said: "Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth." This request could be understood in either of two ways. First, as a petition for God's will to be done on earth as it was already being done in heaven or, second, as a request that it be done fully both in heaven and on earth.* The meaning behind Jesus' preceding words, "let your kingdom come," indicates that the second view is more in harmony with the Scriptures. And it reflects the situation when Jesus was on earth and the long period thereafter. How so?

The book of Revelation points to two distinct results of the establishment of God's Kingdom in heaven. The first affects heaven itself, the second, the earth. Says Revelation 12:7-9, 12: "War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels battled with the dragon, and the dragon and its angels battled but it did not prevail, neither was a place found for them any longer in heaven. So down the great dragon was hurled, the original serpent, the one called Devil and Satan, who is misleading the entire inhabited earth; he was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him. On this account be glad, you heavens and you who reside in them! Woe for the earth and for the sea, because the Devil has come down to you, having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time."

The expelling of Satan and the demons from heaven after 1914 purged that realm of all spirit rebels, bringing much joy to Jehovah's loyal angelic sons, who represent by far the majority of his spirit creation. (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Revelation 12:10) Thus, the request in Jesus' model prayer,

* *The Bible—An American Translation*, renders this part of Jesus' model prayer, "Your kingdom come! Your will be done on earth as well as in heaven!"—Matthew 6:10.



as far as it applied to heaven, was fulfilled. All who remained in that heavenly realm were loyal to Jehovah and fully submissive to his sovereignty.

It must be stressed that even before that, when the wicked angels still had access to heaven, they were outcasts from God's family and under definite restrictions. For instance, Jude 6 reveals that already in the first century C.E., they were "reserved with eternal bonds under dense [spiritual] darkness for the judgment of the great day." Likewise, 2 Peter 2:4 says: "God did not hold back from punishing the angels that sinned, but, by throwing them into Tartarus [a state of utter debasement], delivered them to pits of dense [spiritual] darkness to be reserved for judgment."*

In marked contrast with their status as outcasts while yet in heaven, the wicked angels

* The apostle Peter likened this spiritually outcast condition to being in "prison." However, he did not mean the future "abyss" that the demons will be cast into for a thousand years.—1 Peter 3:19, 20; Luke 8:30, 31; Revelation 20:1-3.



have exercised great authority over earth. In fact, God's Word calls Satan "the ruler of this world," and it calls the demons "the world rulers of this darkness." (John 12:31; Ephesians 6:11, 12; 1 John 5:19) Because of his authority, the Devil could offer Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory" in exchange for one act of worship. (Matthew 4:8, 9) Clearly, then, when God's Kingdom 'comes' as far as the earth is concerned, it will effect radical changes.

Here on earth, the 'coming' of God's Kingdom will result in a completely new system of things. The Kingdom will crush all man-made rulerships and become earth's sole government. At the same time, its God-fearing human subjects will be "a new earth." (2 Peter 3:13; Daniel 2:44) The Kingdom will also eradicate sin from obedient humankind and in time make the earth into a global paradise, thus eliminating every single trace of satanic rule.—Romans 8:20, 21; Revelation 19:17-21.

At the conclusion of the Millennium, when the Messianic Kingdom has accomplished God's will for it, "the Son himself will also subject himself to the One who subjected all things to him, that God may be all things to everyone." (1 Corinthians 15:28) Then there will be a final test, after which Satan, his demons, and any misled human rebels will be permanently eliminated in "the second death." (Revelation 20:7-15) Thereafter, all intelligent creation in heaven and on earth will forever exercise joyful submission to Jehovah's loving sovereignty. In every respect, that will be the complete fulfillment of the words of Jesus' model prayer.—1 John 4:8.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

An End to War

Let All Declare the Glory of Jehovah

Jehovah's Word Is Alive—Highlights
From the Book of Genesis—

Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*?

Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

- How many chapters are there in the book of Micah, when was it written, and what was the situation at the time?

The book of Micah contains seven chapters. The prophet Micah wrote the book in the eighth century B.C.E., at which point God's covenant people were divided into two nations—Israel and Judah.—8/15, page 9.

- According to Micah 6:8, what does God require of us?

We are "to exercise justice." God's way of doing things is the standard of justice, so we must uphold his principles of honesty and integrity. He tells us "to love kindness." Christians have shown loving-kindness in responding to the needs of others, such as after disasters. For us "to be modest in walking with" Jehovah, we must recognize our limitations and depend on him.—8/15, pages 20-2.

- If faced with the loss of a job, what might a Christian want to do?

It would be wise to reexamine one's life-style. It might be possible to simplify one's life by moving to a smaller dwelling or by eliminating unnecessary material possessions. Certainly, it is important to stop being anxious about daily needs, trusting that God can make it possible to keep us going. (Matthew 6:33, 34)—9/1, pages 14-15.

- What should we remember when giving or receiving wedding gifts?

Costly gifts are not needed, nor should they be expected. The giver's heart attitude is what is most precious. (Luke 21:1-4) It is not kind to announce the name of the giver of a present. To do that could be embarrassing. (Matthew 6:3)—9/1, page 29.

- Why should we pray incessantly?

Regular prayer can help cement our relationship with God and equip us to face severe trials. Our prayers may be brief or lengthy, depending on the need and circumstances. Prayer builds faith and helps us to handle problems.—9/15, pages 15-18.

- How should we understand 1 Corinthians 15:29, which in some versions is translated "baptized for the dead"?

The apostle Paul meant that anointed Christians are

baptized, or immersed, into a course of life that will lead to a death of integrity like that of Christ. Afterward, they are resurrected to spirit life as Christ was.—10/1, page 29.

- How do we know that becoming a Christian involves more than avoiding the wrongs mentioned at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11?

The apostle Paul did not stop at mentioning such wrongs as fornication, idolatry, and drunkenness. Showing that additional changes may be needed, he continued in the next verse: "All things are lawful for me; but not all things are advantageous."—10/15, pages 18-19.

- Who were some of the women of ancient times who made God's heart rejoice?

They include the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who would not obey Pharaoh and kill newborn Israelite males. (Exodus 1:15-20) The Canaanite prostitute Rahab protected two Israelite spies. (Joshua 2:1-13; 6:22, 23) Displaying sensibleness, Abigail helped to save lives and to protect David from bloodguilt. (1 Samuel 25:2-35) They are examples for women today.—11/1, pages 8-11.

- How was it that "from heaven did the stars fight" against Sisera, as stated at Judges 5:20?

Some feel that this refers to divine assistance. Others point to angelic help, meteorite showers, or Sisera's dependence on astrological predictions. Lacking Biblical details, we can take the statement as indicating some form of divine intervention in behalf of Israel's army.—11/15, page 30.

- With apathy and indifference to religion sweeping the globe, why do so many people still profess belief in God?

Some go to church seeking peace of mind. Others hope for eternal life after death, or for health, riches, and success. In some areas, people seek to fill a spiritual void that resulted as capitalistic aspirations displaced Communist ideology. Being aware of such reasons can help a Christian to initiate meaningful conversations.—12/1, page 3.

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DO YOU NURTURE A *Sense of Wonder?*

HAVE you noted that Bible writers repeatedly evoke a sense of wonder when acknowledging the works and attributes of God? "I am wonderfully made," declared the psalmist. (Psalm 139:14) "O Jehovah," wrote the prophet Isaiah, "you are my God. I exalt you, I laud your name, for you have done wonderful things." (Isaiah 25:1) Or think of the wonderment and awe expressed in the apostle Paul's words: "O the depth of God's riches and wisdom and knowledge!"—Romans 11:33.

The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary defines "wonder" as "an emotion excited by what is unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable, esp. surprise mingled with admiration or curiosity etc."

Is it not a joy to observe little children exhibit wide-eyed wonder when they see, feel,

or hear things new to them? Sadly, such wonder based on curiosity or novelty often diminishes with the passage of years.

However, for the Bible writers just quoted, a feeling of awe ran deep. It was durable. Why so? They nurtured their sense of wonder by meditating appreciatively on the works of God. Prayed the psalmist: "I dwell upon the years long past, upon the memory of all that thou hast done; the wonders of thy creation fill my mind."—Psalm 143:5, *The New English Bible*.

How commendable it is that this sense of wonder can be found among modern-day worshipers of God! Do you have it? Are you nurturing it?