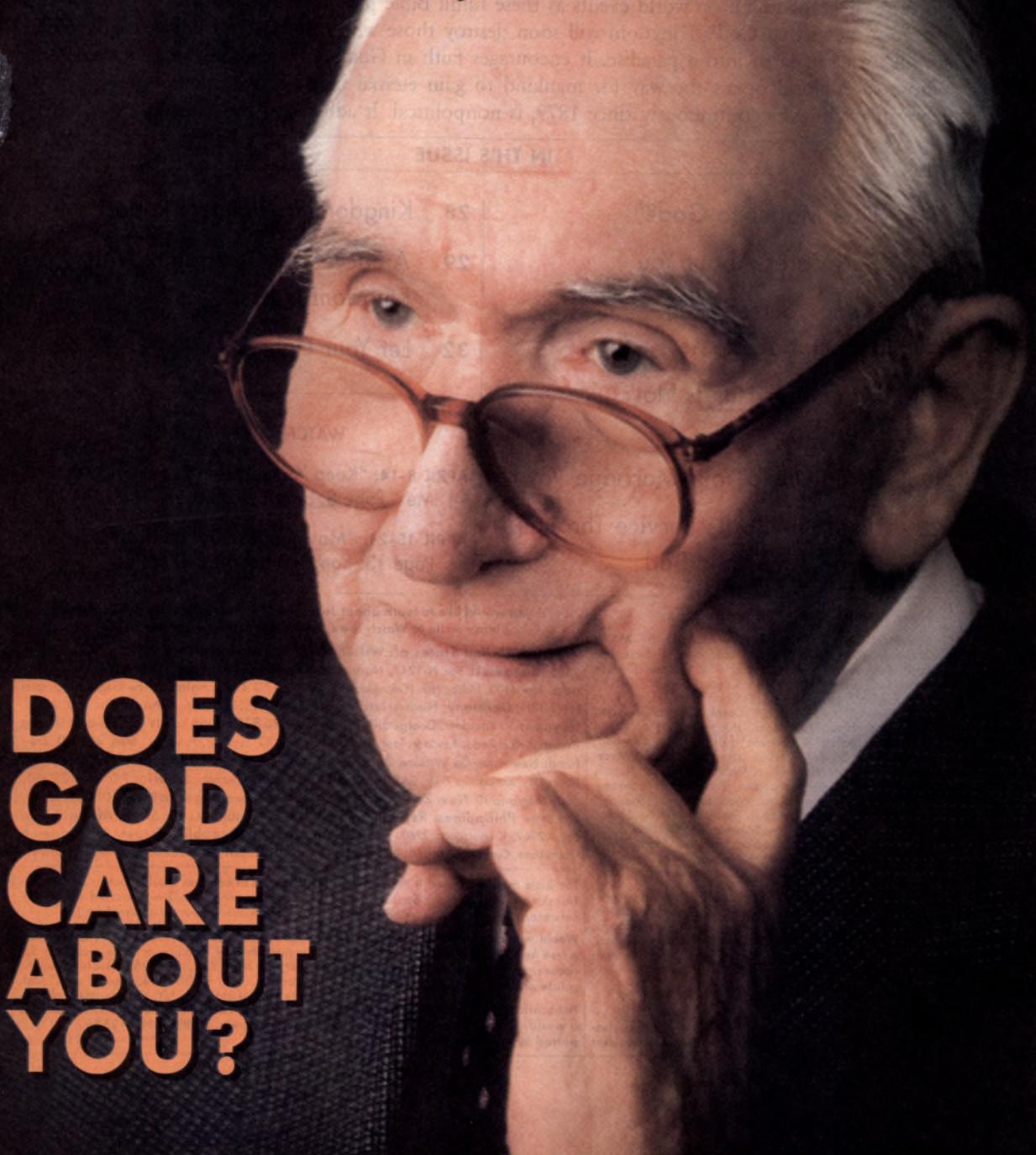


MARCH 1, 1996

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**DOES
GOD
CARE
ABOUT
YOU?**

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

March 1, 1996

Average Printing Each Issue: 18,950,000

Vol. 117, No. 5

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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The Bible translation used is the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References, unless otherwise indicated.

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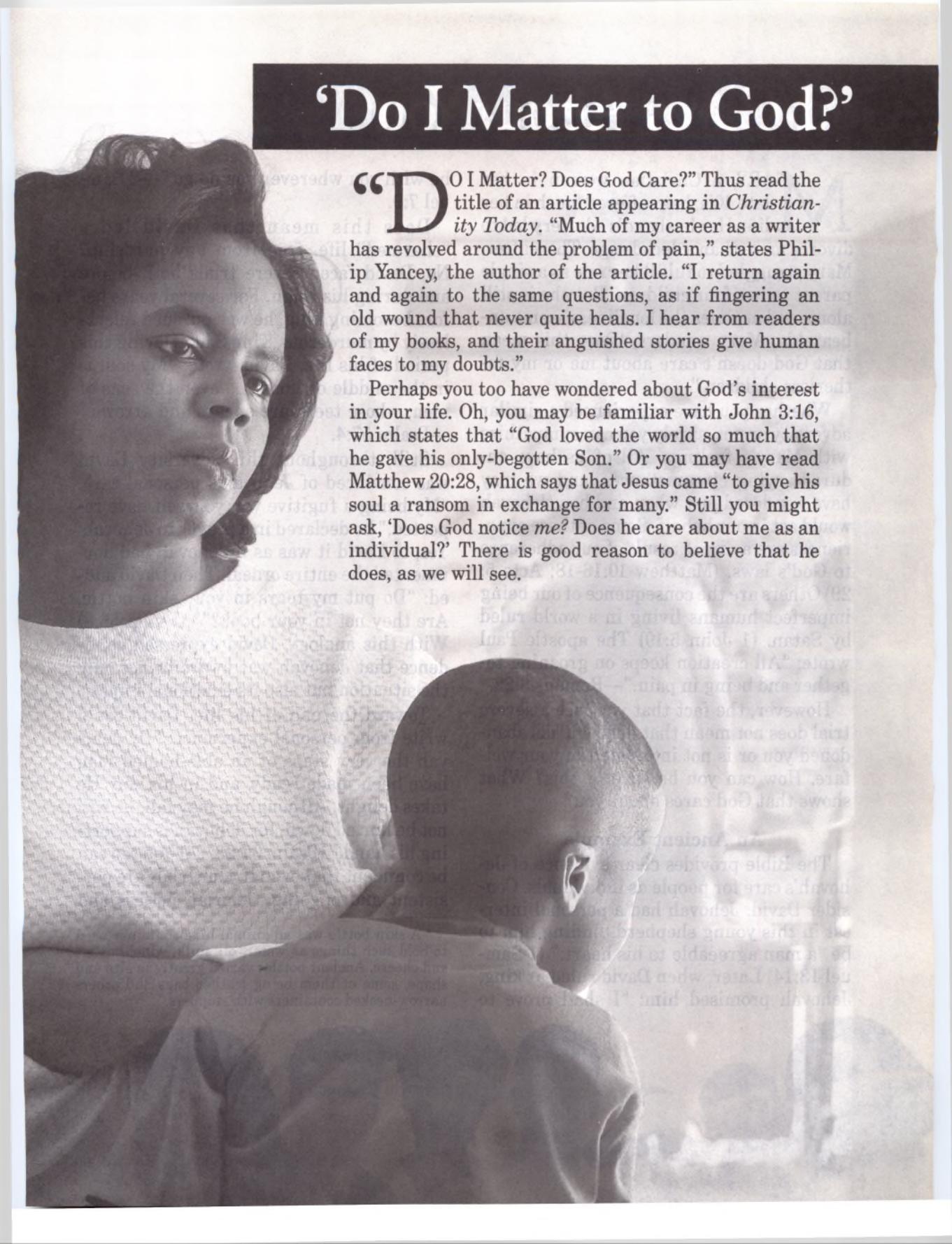
Publication of "The Watchtower" is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations.

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The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Second-class postage paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589.

Printed in U.S.A.

'Do I Matter to God?'



DO I Matter? Does God Care?" Thus read the title of an article appearing in *Christianity Today*. "Much of my career as a writer has revolved around the problem of pain," states Philip Yancey, the author of the article. "I return again and again to the same questions, as if fingering an old wound that never quite heals. I hear from readers of my books, and their anguished stories give human faces to my doubts."

Perhaps you too have wondered about God's interest in your life. Oh, you may be familiar with John 3:16, which states that "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son." Or you may have read Matthew 20:28, which says that Jesus came "to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." Still you might ask, 'Does God notice *me*? Does he care about me as an individual?' There is good reason to believe that he does, as we will see.

God Cares About You

MARY, a Christian woman in her late 40's, has suffered much in her life. Her husband's adultery led to divorce more than a decade ago. Thereafter, Mary struggled to fulfill her role as a single parent to her four children. But she is still alone, and at times the loneliness seems unbearable. Mary wonders, 'Does this mean that God doesn't care about me or my fatherless children?'

Whether you have experienced a similar adversity or not, surely you can sympathize with Mary's feelings. All of us have endured trying circumstances, and we may have wondered just when and how Jehovah would act in our behalf. Some of these experiences are a direct result of our adherence to God's laws. (Matthew 10:16-18; Acts 5:29) Others are the consequence of our being imperfect humans living in a world ruled by Satan. (1 John 5:19) The apostle Paul wrote: "All creation keeps on groaning together and being in pain."—Romans 8:22.

However, the fact that you face a severe trial does not mean that Jehovah has abandoned you or is not interested in your welfare. How can you be sure of this? What shows that God cares about you?

An Ancient Example

The Bible provides clear evidence of Jehovah's care for people as individuals. Consider David. Jehovah had a personal interest in this young shepherd, finding him to be "a man agreeable to his heart." (1 Samuel 13:14) Later, when David ruled as king, Jehovah promised him: "I shall prove to

be with you wherever you do go."—2 Samuel 7:9.

Does this mean that David led a "charmed" life, free from any hardship? No, David faced severe trials both before and during his reign. For several years before becoming king, he was pursued relentlessly by murderous King Saul. During this period of his life, David wrote: "My soul is in the middle of lions . . . even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows."—Psalm 57:4.

Still, throughout this adversity David was convinced of Jehovah's personal care. "My being a fugitive you yourself have reported," he declared in a prayer to Jehovah. Yes, to David it was as if Jehovah had documented the entire ordeal. Then David added: "Do put my tears in your skin bottle. Are they not in your book?"* (Psalm 56:8) With this analogy, David expressed confidence that Jehovah was aware of not only the situation but also its emotional impact.

Toward the end of his life, David could write from personal experience: "By Jehovah the very steps of an able-bodied man have been made ready, and in his way He takes delight. Although he may fall, he will not be hurled down, for Jehovah is supporting his hand." (Psalm 37:23, 24) You too can be confident that even if your trials are persistent and ongoing, Jehovah notices and

* A skin bottle was an animal-hide container used to hold such things as water, oil, milk, wine, butter, and cheese. Ancient bottles varied greatly in size and shape, some of them being leather bags and others narrow-necked containers with stoppers.



values your endurance. Paul wrote: "God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name, in that you have ministered to the holy ones and continue ministering."—Hebrews 6:10.

Furthermore, Jehovah can *act* in your behalf by giving you the strength to endure whatever obstacle is placed in your path. "Many are the calamities of the righteous one," wrote David, "but out of them all Jehovah delivers him." (Psalm 34:19) Indeed, the Bible tells us that the eyes of Jehovah "are roving about through all the earth to show his strength in behalf of those whose heart is complete toward him." —2 Chronicles 16:9.

Jehovah Has Drawn You

Additional evidence of Jehovah's personal care can be found in the words of Jesus. "No man can come to me," he said, "unless the Father, who sent me, draws him." (John 6:44) Yes, Jehovah helps people individually to take advantage of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. How? To a large extent, it is through the Kingdom preaching work. True, this work serves as "a witness to all the nations," yet it reaches people on an individual basis. The fact that you are listening and responding to the message of the good news is evidence of Jehovah's personal concern for you.—Matthew 24:14.

By means of holy spirit, Jehovah draws individuals toward his Son and the hope of eternal life. This enables each one to grasp and apply spiritual truths despite any inherent limitations and imperfections. Really, one cannot understand the purposes of God without the help of God's spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:11, 12) As Paul wrote to the

Thessalonians, "faith is not a possession of all people." (2 Thessalonians 3:2) Jehovah supplies his spirit only to those who display a willingness to be drawn by him.

Jehovah draws people because he loves them as individuals and wants them to attain to salvation. What firm evidence of Jehovah's personal care! Jesus said: "It is not a desirable thing with my Father who is in heaven for one of these little ones to perish." (Matthew 18:14) Yes, in God's eyes every person is important as a distinct individual. That is why Paul could write: "He will render to each one according to his works." (Romans 2:6) And the apostle Peter said: "God is not partial, but in every nation the man [the individual person] that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him."—Acts 10:34, 35.

The Miracles of Jesus

God's personal interest in humans was poignantly demonstrated in the miracles performed by his Son, Jesus. These healings were accompanied by deep feeling. (Mark 1:40, 41) Since Jesus "cannot do a single thing of his own initiative, but only what he beholds the Father doing," his compassion paints a touching portrait of Jehovah's concern for each one of his servants. —John 5:19.

Consider the account of a miracle Jesus performed, recorded at Mark 7:31-37. Here Jesus healed a man who was deaf and who suffered from a speech impediment. He "took [the man] away from the crowd privately," the Bible relates. Then, "with a look up into heaven he sighed deeply and said to him: '*Eph'pha·tha*,' that is, 'Be opened.'"

Why did Jesus take this man away from



the crowd? Well, it is likely that a deaf person who is hardly able to speak would feel self-conscious in front of spectators. Jesus may have noted this man's discomfort, and that was why he chose to heal him in privacy. "The whole story," observes one Bible scholar, "shows us most vividly that Jesus did not consider the man merely *a case*; he considered him as *an individual*. The man had a special need and a special problem, and with the most tender considerateness Jesus dealt with him in a way that spared his feelings and in a way that he could understand."

This account shows that Jesus had a personal concern for people. You can be sure that he is just as interested in you. True, his

sacrificial death was an expression of love for the whole world of redeemable mankind. Yet, you can take that act personally, as did Paul, who wrote: "The Son of God . . . loved *me* and handed himself over *for me*." (Galatians 2:20) And since Jesus noted that 'he that had seen him had seen the Father also,' we can be certain that Jehovah has the same interest in each of his servants.

—John 14:9.

Jehovah Becomes a Rewarder

Taking in knowledge of God involves coming to know each facet of his personality as it is revealed in the Bible. The very name Jehovah means "He Causes to Become," implying that Jehovah can be-

The Resurrection—Proof That God Cares

CONVINCING proof of God's interest in each individual is found in the Bible at John 5:28, 29: "The hour is coming in which all those in the memorial tombs will hear [Jesus'] voice and come out."

Interestingly, the Greek word *mne-mei'on* (memorial tomb) is here used instead of *ta'phos* (grave). The word *ta'phos* simply conveys the thought of a burial. But *mne-mei'on* suggests that the record of the person who has died is remembered.

In this regard, just think about what the resurrection will require of Jehovah God. To bring someone back to life, he has to know everything about that one—including his or her inherited traits and complete memory. Only

then could that individual be restored with the same identity.

Of course, this is impossible from a human standpoint, but "all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:27) He can even ascertain what is in the heart of a person. Even if a person has been dead for many centuries, God's memory of him is unfailing; it does not fade. (Job 14:13-15) Thus, when mentioning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus could say even centuries after they died that Jehovah "is a God, not of the dead, but of the living, for they are all living to him."—Luke 20:38.

Thus, billions who have died are in Jehovah God's memory in full detail. What stunning proof that God cares about humans on an individual basis!

come whatever he chooses in order to carry out his will. Throughout history, he has taken on various roles, including those of Creator, Father, Sovereign Lord, Shepherd, Jehovah of armies, Hearer of prayer, Judge, Grand Instructor, and Repurchaser.*

To appreciate the full meaning of God's name, we must also come to know Jehovah in the role of Rewarder. Paul wrote: "Without faith it is impossible to please him well, for he that approaches God must believe that he is and that he becomes the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him."

—Hebrews 11:6.

Jehovah has promised everlasting life on a paradise earth to those today who choose to serve him wholeheartedly. It is not selfish to look forward to the fulfillment of that grand promise, nor is it presumptuous to imagine oneself living there. Moses "looked intently toward the payment of the reward." (Hebrews 11:26) Paul likewise keenly anticipated the fulfillment of God's promise for faithful anointed Christians. He wrote: "I am pursuing down toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God by means of Christ Jesus."—Philippians 3:14.

You too may look forward to the reward that Jehovah promises to those who endure. Anticipating that reward is an integral part of your knowledge of God and your endurance in his service. So meditate daily on

* See Judges 11:27; Psalm 23:1; 65:2; 73:28; 89:26; Isaiah 8:13; 30:20; 40:28; 41:14; see also *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*, Appendix 1J, page 1568, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



Jesus took a personal interest in those whom he healed

the blessings that Jehovah has in store for you. Mary, mentioned at the outset, has made a special effort to do this. "For the first time in my life," she says, "I recently accepted that Jesus' ransom sacrifice applies to me. I am beginning to feel that Jehovah cares for me as a person. I have been a Christian for more than 20 years, but only recently did I really begin to believe this."

Through study and heartfelt meditation on the Bible, Mary, along with millions of others, is coming to learn that Jehovah cares about his people not only as a group but also as individuals. The apostle Peter was so convinced of this that he wrote: "Throw all your anxiety upon [God], because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Yes, God cares about you!

"KEEP YOURSELVES IN EXPECTATION OF ME"

"Therefore keep yourselves in expectation of me,"
is the utterance of Jehovah."—ZEPHANIAH 3:8.

THE great day of Jehovah is near." This warning cry was uttered by the prophet Zephaniah in the middle of the seventh century B.C.E. (Zephaniah 1:14) Within 40 or 50 years, the prophecy was fulfilled when the day of executing Jehovah's judgments came upon Jerusalem and upon those nations that had defied Jehovah's sovereignty by mistreating his people. Why is this of interest to people living at the close of the 20th century? We are living at the time when Jehovah's final "great day" is fast approaching. Just as in Zephaniah's time, Jehovah's "burning anger" is about to blaze against the modern-day equivalent of Jerusalem—Christendom—and all the nations that mistreat Jehovah's people and defy his universal sovereignty.—Zephaniah 1:4; 2:4, 8, 12, 13; 3:8; 2 Peter 3:12, 13.

Zephaniah—A Courageous Witness

² Little is known of the prophet Zephaniah, whose name (Hebrew, *Tsephanyah*) means "Jehovah Has Concealed (Treasured Up)." In contrast with other prophets, how-

1. What warning was given by the prophet Zephaniah, and of what interest is this to people living today?
- 2, 3. (a) What do we know about Zephaniah, and what indicates that he was a courageous witness of Jehovah? (b) What facts enable us to locate the time and place of Zephaniah's prophesying?

ever, Zephaniah provided his genealogy to the fourth generation, back to "Hezekiah." (Zephaniah 1:1; compare Isaiah 1:1; Jeremiah 1:1; Ezekiel 1:3.) This is so unusual that most commentators identify his great-great-grandfather as faithful King Hezekiah. If he was, then Zephaniah was of royal descent, and this would have added weight to his harsh condemnation of the princes of Judah and have shown that he was a courageous witness and prophet of Jehovah. His intimate knowledge of the topography of Jerusalem and of what was going on in the royal court suggests that he may have proclaimed Jehovah's judgments in the capital itself.—See Zephaniah 1:8-11, footnotes.

³ Noteworthy is the fact that, while Zephaniah proclaimed divine judgments against the civil "princes" of Judah (nobles, or tribal chiefs) and "the sons of the king," he never mentioned the king himself in his criticism.* (Zephaniah 1:8; 3:3) This suggests that young King Josiah had already shown a propensity for pure worship, although, in view of the situation decried by Zephaniah, obviously he had not yet started his religious reforms. All of this suggests that Zephaniah prophesied in Judah during the early years of Josiah, who

* It would appear that the expression "sons of the king" refers to all the royal princes, since Josiah's own sons were very young at the time.

reigned from 659 to 629 B.C.E. The energetic prophesying of Zephaniah undoubtedly heightened young Josiah's awareness of the idolatry, violence, and corruption that prevailed in Judah at that time and encouraged his later campaign against idolatry.
—2 Chronicles 34:1-3.

Reasons for Jehovah's Burning Anger

⁴ Jehovah had good reason to feel anger toward the leaders and inhabitants of Judah and its capital city Jerusalem. Through his prophet Zephaniah, he stated: "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off from this place the remaining ones of the Baal, the name of the foreign-god priests along with the priests, and those who are bowing down upon the roofs to the army of the heavens, and those who are bowing down, making sworn oaths to Jehovah and making sworn oaths by Malcam."
—Zephaniah 1:4, 5.

⁵ Judah was sullied with the degrading fertility rites of Baal worship, demonic astrology, and the worship of the pagan god Malcam. If Malcam is the same as Molech, as some suggest, then Judah's false worship included the abominable sacrificing of children. Such religious practices were disgusting in Jehovah's eyes. (1 Kings 11:

4. In what words did Jehovah express his anger against Judah and Jerusalem?
- 5, 6. (a) What was the religious situation in Judah at the time of Zephaniah? (b) What was the condition of Judah's civil leaders and their subordinates?



The Moabite Stone confirms that Moab's King Mesha spoke reproachful words against ancient Israel

5, 7; 14:23, 24; 2 Kings 17: 16, 17) They incurred his wrath all the more so since the idolaters still made oaths in Jehovah's name. He would no longer tolerate such religious uncleanness and would cut off pagan and apostate priests alike.

⁶ Moreover, Judah's civil leaders were corrupt. Her princes were like rapacious "roaring lions," and her

judges were comparable to ravenous "wolves." (Zephaniah 3:3) Their subordinates were accused of "filling the house of their masters with violence and deception." (Zephaniah 1:9) Materialism was rife. Many were taking advantage of the situation to amass wealth.—Zephaniah 1:13.

Doubts About Jehovah's Day

⁷ As we have already seen, the disastrous religious situation that prevailed in Zephaniah's day indicates that he carried out his work as witness and prophet before King Josiah began his campaign against idolatry, about 648 B.C.E. (2 Chronicles 34:4, 5) Likely, then, Zephaniah prophesied at least 40 years before "the great day of Jehovah" came upon the kingdom of Judah. In the interval, many Jews entertained doubts and 'drew back' from serving Jehovah, becoming indifferent. Zephaniah

7. How long before "the great day of Jehovah" did Zephaniah prophesy, and what was the spiritual condition of many Jews?

speaks of those who "have not sought Jehovah and have not inquired of him." (Zephaniah 1:6) Evidently, individuals in Judah were apathetic, not troubling themselves about God.

⁸ Jehovah made known his purpose to inspect those claiming to be his people. Among his professed worshipers, he would seek out those who in their hearts harbored doubts as to his ability or intention to intervene in human affairs. He stated: "It must occur at that time that I shall carefully search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will give attention to the men who are congealing upon their dregs and who are saying in their heart, 'Jehovah will not do good, and he will not do bad.'" (Zephaniah 1:12) The expression "men who are congealing upon their dregs" (a reference to wine making) refers to those who have settled down, like dregs at the bottom of a vat, and who do not want to be disturbed by any proclamation of imminent divine intervention in the affairs of mankind.

⁹ Jehovah would give attention to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and to their priests who had mixed his worship with paganism. If they felt secure, as if under the cover of night within the walls of Jerusalem, he would seek them out as with bright lamps that would penetrate the spiritual darkness wherein they had taken refuge. He would shake them out of their religious apathy, first by awesome messages

8, 9. (a) Why would Jehovah inspect "men who are congealing upon their dregs"? (b) In what ways would Jehovah give attention to the inhabitants of Judah and their civil and religious leaders?



Supporting Zephaniah's prophecy, this cuneiform tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle records Nineveh's destruction by a coalition of armies

of judgment, then by executing those judgments.

"The Great Day of Jehovah Is Near"

¹⁰ Jehovah inspired Zephaniah to proclaim: "The great day of Jehovah is near. It is near, and there is a hurrying of it very much. The sound of the day of Jehovah is bitter." (Zephaniah 1:14) Bitter days indeed were ahead for everyone—priests, princes, and the people—who refused to heed the warning and return to pure worship. Describing that day of executing judgment, the prophecy continues:

"That day is a day of fury, a day of distress and of anguish, a day of storm and of desolation, a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick gloom, a day of horn and of alarm signal, against the fortified cities and against the high corner towers."—Zephaniah 1:15, 16.

¹¹ Within a few short decades, the armies of Babylon would invade Judah. Jerusalem would not escape. Its residential and business sections would be devastated. "There must occur on that day," is the utterance of Jehovah, 'the sound of an outcry from the Fish Gate, and a howling from the second quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. Howl, you inhabitants of Maktesh

10. How did Zephaniah describe "the great day of Jehovah"?

11, 12. (a) What judgment message was pronounced against Jerusalem? (b) Would material prosperity save the Jews?

[a section of Jerusalem], for all the people who are tradesmen have been silenced; all those weighing out silver have been cut off.'”—Zephaniah 1:10, 11, footnote.

¹² Refusing to believe that Jehovah's day was near, many Jews were deeply involved in lucrative business ventures. But through his faithful prophet Zephaniah, Jehovah foretold that their wealth would be “for pillage and their houses for a desolate waste.” They would not drink the wine they produced, and “neither their silver nor their gold [would] be able to deliver them in the day of Jehovah's fury.”—Zephaniah 1:13, 18.

Other Nations Judged

¹³ By means of his prophet Zephaniah, Jehovah also expressed his anger against nations that had mistreated his people. He declared: “I have heard the reproach by Moab and the abusive words of the sons of Ammon, with which they have reproached my people and kept putting on great airs against their territory. Therefore, as I am alive,’ is the utterance of Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, ‘Moab herself will become just like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah, a place possessed by nettles, and a salt pit, and a desolate waste, even to time indefinite. . . . And he will stretch out his hand toward the north, and he will destroy Assyria. And he will make Nineveh a desolate waste, a waterless region like the wilderness.’”—Zephaniah 2:8, 9, 13.

¹⁴ Moab and Ammon were Israel's traditional enemies. (Compare Judges 3:12-14.) The Moabite Stone, in the Louvre Museum in Paris, bears an inscription containing a

13. What judgment message did Zephaniah pronounce against Moab, Ammon, and Assyria?

14. What evidence is there that foreign nations ‘put on great airs’ against the Israelites and their God, Jehovah?

boastful statement by Moabite King Mesha. He proudly relates his taking several Israelite cities with the help of his god Chemosh. (2 Kings 1:1) Jeremiah, a contemporary of Zephaniah, spoke of the Ammonites' occupying the Israelite territory of Gad in the name of their god Malcam. (Jeremiah 49:1) As for Assyria, King Shalmaneser V had besieged and taken Samaria about a century before Zephaniah's day. (2 Kings 17:1-6) A little later, King Sennacherib attacked Judah, took many of its fortified cities, and even threatened Jerusalem. (Isaiah 36:1, 2) The Assyrian king's spokesman did indeed put on great airs against Jehovah when demanding Jerusalem's surrender.—Isaiah 36:4-20.

¹⁵ Psalm 83 mentions a number of nations, including Moab, Ammon, and Assyria, who put on great airs against Israel, and braggingly stated: “Come and let us efface them from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.” (Psalm 83:4) The prophet Zephaniah courageously announced that all these haughty nations and their gods would be humiliated by Jehovah of armies. “This is what they will have instead of their pride, because they reproached and kept putting on great airs against the people of Jehovah of armies. Jehovah will be fear-inspiring against them; for he will certainly emaciate all the gods of the earth, and people will bow down to him, each one from his place, all the islands of the nations.”—Zephaniah 2:10, 11.

“Keep Yourselves in Expectation”

¹⁶ While spiritual lethargy, skepticism,

15. How would Jehovah humiliate the gods of nations who had put on great airs against his people?

16. (a) For whom was the approach of Jehovah's day a source of joy, and why? (b) What rousing call went forth to this faithful remnant?

idolatry, corruption, and materialism prevailed among the leaders and many of the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, apparently some faithful Jews listened to Zephaniah's warning prophecies. They were saddened by the abominable practices of Judah's princes, judges, and priests. Zephaniah's pronouncements were a source of comfort to these loyal ones. Far from being a cause for anguish, the approach of Jehovah's day was a source of joy for them, because it would bring a halt to such detestable practices. This faithful remnant heeded Jehovah's rousing call: "Therefore keep yourselves in expectation of me," is the utterance of Jehovah, "till the day of my rising up to the booty, for my judicial decision is to gather nations, for me to collect together kingdoms, in order to pour out upon them my denunciation, all my burning anger."—Zephaniah 3:8.

¹⁷ Those who heeded that warning were not taken by surprise. Many lived to see the fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy.

17. When and how did Zephaniah's messages of judgment begin to be fulfilled upon the nations?

By Way of Review

- What was the religious situation in Judah in Zephaniah's day?
- What conditions prevailed among the civil leaders, and what was the attitude of many of the people?
- How did nations put on great airs against Jehovah's people?
- What warning did Zephaniah give to Judah and other nations?
- How were those who kept themselves in expectation of Jehovah rewarded?

In 632 B.C.E., Nineveh was taken and destroyed by a coalition of Babylonians, Medes, and hordes from the north, probably Scythians. Historian Will Durant relates: "An army of Babylonians under Nabopolassar united with an army of Medes under Cyaxares and a horde of Scythians from the Caucasus, and with amazing ease and swiftness captured the citadels of the north. . . . At one blow Assyria disappeared from history." This was exactly what Zephaniah had prophesied.—Zephaniah 2:13-15.

¹⁸ Many Jews who kept themselves in expectation of Jehovah also lived to see his judgments executed upon Judah and Jerusalem. Concerning Jerusalem, Zephaniah had prophesied: "Woe to her that is rebelling and polluting herself, the oppressive city! She did not listen to a voice; she did not accept discipline. In Jehovah she did not trust. To her God she did not draw near." (Zephaniah 3:1, 2) Because of her unfaithfulness, Jerusalem was twice besieged by the Babylonians and finally taken and destroyed in 607 B.C.E. (2 Chronicles 36:5, 6, 11-21) As for Moab and Ammon, according to Jewish historian Josephus, in the fifth year after the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonians waged war on them and conquered them. They subsequently ceased to exist, as prophesied.

¹⁹ The fulfillment of these and other details of Zephaniah's prophecy was a faith-strengthening experience for Jews and non-Jews who kept themselves in expectation of Jehovah. Among those who survived the destruction that befell Judah and

18. (a) How was divine judgment executed on Jerusalem, and why? (b) How was Zephaniah's prophecy concerning Moab and Ammon fulfilled?
19, 20. (a) How did Jehovah reward those who kept themselves in expectation of him? (b) Why do these events concern us, and what will be considered in the following article?

Jerusalem were Jeremiah, the Ethiopian Ebed-melech, and the house of Jehonadab, the Rechabite. (Jeremiah 35:18, 19; 39:11, 12, 16-18) The faithful Jews in exile and their offspring, who continued to wait on Jehovah, became a part of the happy remnant who were delivered from Babylon in 537 B.C.E. and returned to Judah to re-establish pure worship.—Ezra 2:1; Zephaniah 3:14, 15, 20.

²⁰ What does all of this mean for our time? In many ways the situation in Zephaniah's day corresponds to the detestable things occurring today in Christendom. Moreover, the various attitudes of the Jews in those times bear a resemblance to attitudes that can be found today, sometimes even among Jehovah's people. These are matters that will be taken up in the following article.

“MAY YOUR HANDS NOT DROP DOWN”

“May your hands not drop down. Jehovah your God is in the midst of you. As a mighty One, he will save.”—ZEPHANIAH 3:16, 17.

ZEPHANIAH'S prophecy pointed far beyond its first fulfillment in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. In his commentary on Zephaniah, Professor C. F. Keil wrote: “Zephaniah's prophecy . . . not only commences with the announcement of a universal judgment upon the whole world, out of which the judgment rises that will fall upon Judah on account of its sins, and upon the world of nations on account of its hostility to the people of Jehovah; but it treats throughout of the great and terrible day of Jehovah.”

² Today, Jehovah's judicial decision is to gather the nations for destruction on a far

1. What did a Bible scholar state concerning the prophecy of Zephaniah?
2. What similarities exist between conditions in Zephaniah's day and the situation within Christendom today?

wider scale than in Zephaniah's day. (Zephaniah 3:8) Those nations that claim to be Christian are particularly reprehensible in God's sight. Just as Jerusalem paid a terrible price for its unfaithfulness to Jehovah, so Christendom must answer to God for its profligate ways. The divine judgments pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem in Zephaniah's day apply with even greater force to the churches and sects of Christendom. They also have sullied pure worship by their God-dishonoring doctrines, many of pagan origin. They have sacrificed millions of their healthy sons on the modern altar of war. Furthermore, the inhabitants of antitypical Jerusalem mix so-called Christianity with astrology, spiritistic practices, and degrading sexual immorality, reminiscent of Baal worship.—Zephaniah 1:4, 5.

³ Many of Christendom's political leaders love to be seen in church. But like Judah's "princes," a number of them exploit the people like "roaring lions" and ravenous "wolves." (Zephaniah 3:1-3) The political lackeys of such ones "are filling the house of their masters with violence and deception." (Zephaniah 1:9) Bribery and corruption are rife. As for political governments inside and outside Christendom, an increasing number of them 'put on great airs' against the people of Jehovah of armies, his Witnesses, treating them as a despised "sect." (Zephaniah 2:8; Acts 24:5, 14) Concerning all such political leaders and their followers, Zephaniah prophesied: "Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them in the day of Jehovah's fury; but by the fire of his zeal the whole earth will be devoured, because he will make an extermination, indeed a terrible one, of all the inhabitants of the earth." —Zephaniah 1:18.

"Concealed in the Day of Jehovah's Anger"

⁴ Not all of the inhabitants of Judah were exterminated in the seventh century B.C.E. Similarly, there will be survivors of Jehovah's great day. To such ones Jehovah stated by means of his prophet Zephaniah: "Before the statute gives birth to anything, before the day has passed by just like chaff, before there comes upon you people the burning anger of Jehovah, before there comes upon you the day of Jehovah's anger, seek Jehovah, all you meek ones of the earth, who have practiced His own judicial decision. Seek righteousness, seek meekness. Prob-

3. What can be said of many secular leaders and political governments today, and what did Zephaniah prophesy?
4. What shows that there will be survivors of Jehovah's great day, but what must they do?

ably you may be concealed in the day of Jehovah's anger."—Zephaniah 2:2, 3.

⁵ In this world's time of the end, the first to heed the prophetic invitation were the remnant of spiritual Israelites, anointed Christians. (Romans 2:28, 29; 9:6; Galatians 6:16) Having sought righteousness and meekness and having shown respect for Jehovah's judicial decisions, they were delivered from Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion, and restored to divine favor in 1919. Since then, and particularly since 1922, this faithful remnant have been fearlessly proclaiming Jehovah's judgments against the churches and sects of Christendom and against the political nations.

⁶ Of this faithful remnant, Zephaniah prophesied: "I shall certainly let remain in the midst of you a people humble and lowly, and they will actually take refuge in the name of Jehovah. As regards the remaining ones of Israel, they will do no unrighteousness, nor speak a lie, nor will there be found in their mouths a tricky tongue; for they themselves will feed and actually lie stretched out, and there will be no one making them tremble." (Zephaniah 3:12, 13) These anointed Christians have always kept Jehovah's name to the fore, but especially so since 1931, when they adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses. (Isaiah 43:10-12) By highlighting the issue of Jehovah's sovereignty, they have honored the divine name, and this has proved to be a refuge for them. (Proverbs 18:10) Jehovah has fed them spiritually in abundance, and they dwell without fear in a spiritual paradise.—Zephaniah 3:16, 17.

5. In this time of the end, who were the first to heed Zephaniah's warning, and how has Jehovah used them?

6. (a) What did Zephaniah prophesy concerning the faithful remnant? (b) How has this prophecy been fulfilled?



Like Zephaniah, the faithful remnant of anointed Christians have been fearlessly proclaiming Jehovah's judgments

"A Name and a Praise Among All the Peoples"

⁷ The remnant's deep attachment to Jehovah's name and to the righteous principles of his Word has not gone unnoticed. Sincere people have come to see the difference between the conduct of the remnant and the corruption and hypocrisy of this world's political and religious leadership. Jehovah has blessed "the remaining ones of [spiritual] Israel." He has honored them with the privilege of bearing his name, and he has caused them to have a fine reputation among the peoples of the earth. This is as prophesied by Zephaniah: "'At that time I shall bring you people in, even in the time of my collecting you together. For I shall make you people to be a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I gather back your captive ones before your eyes,' Jehovah has said."

—Zephaniah 3:20.

7, 8. (a) What further prophecy has been fulfilled upon the remnant of spiritual Israel? (b) What have millions of people come to recognize, and what are your own feelings in this regard?

⁸ Since 1935, literally millions of people have come to recognize that Jehovah's blessing is upon the remnant. They gladly follow these spiritual

Jews, or Israelites, saying: "We will go with you people, for we have heard that God is with you." (Zechariah 8:23) These "other sheep" see in the anointed remnant "the faithful and discreet slave," appointed by Christ "over all his [earthly] belongings." They thankfully partake of the spiritual food prepared by the slave class "at the proper time."—John 10:16; Matthew 24:45-47.

⁹ Alongside the remnant, these millions of other sheep are learning to live and speak in harmony with the "pure language."* Jehovah prophesied through Zephaniah:

* For a full discussion of the "pure language," see *The Watchtower*, April 1, 1991, pages 20-5, and May 1, 1991, pages 10-20.

9. What "language" have millions of people learned to speak, and in what great work are the other sheep serving "shoulder to shoulder" with the anointed remnant?

"Then I shall give to peoples the change to a pure language, in order for them all to call upon the name of Jehovah, in order to serve him shoulder to shoulder." (Zephaniah 3:9) Yes, the other sheep unitedly serve Jehovah "shoulder to shoulder" with the anointed members of the "little flock" in the urgent work of preaching "this good news of the kingdom . . . for a witness to all the nations." —Luke 12:32; Matthew 24:14.

"Jehovah's Day Will Come"

¹⁰ The anointed remnant have constantly kept in mind the apostle Peter's inspired statement: "Jehovah is not slow respecting his promise, as some people consider slowness, but he is patient with you because he does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance. Yet Jehovah's day will come as a thief." (2 Peter 3:9, 10) Members of the faithful slave class have never entertained any doubts about the coming of Jehovah's day in our time. That great day will begin with the execution of God's judgments against Christendom, antitypical Jerusalem, and the remainder of Babylon the Great.—Zephaniah 1:2-4; Revelation 17:1, 5; 19:1, 2.

¹¹ The faithful remnant rejoice to have been delivered in 1919 from spiritual captivity to Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. They have experienced the fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy: "Joyfully cry out, O daughter of Zion! Break out in cheers, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! Jehovah has removed the judg-

10. Of what have the anointed remnant always been convinced, and what, as a class, will they live to see?

11, 12. (a) What other part of Zephaniah's prophecy has been fulfilled upon the remnant? (b) How have the anointed remnant heeded the call, "May your hands not drop down"?

ments upon you. He has turned away your enemy. The king of Israel, Jehovah, is in the midst of you. You will fear calamity no more. In that day it will be said to Jerusalem: 'Do not be afraid, O Zion. May your hands not drop down. Jehovah your God is in the midst of you. As a mighty One, he will save.'”—Zephaniah 3:14-17.

¹² With the conviction and abundant proof that Jehovah is in their midst, the anointed remnant have fearlessly gone forward in fulfilling their divine commission. They have preached the good news of the Kingdom and have made known Jehovah's judgments against Christendom, the rest of Babylon the Great, and Satan's entire wicked system of things. Through thick and thin, over the decades since 1919, they have obeyed the divine command: "Do not be afraid, O Zion. May your hands not drop down." They have not slacked their hand in distributing billions of tracts, magazines, books, and booklets announcing Jehovah's Kingdom. They have been a faith-inspiring example to the other sheep who, since 1935, have flocked to their side.

"May Your Hands Not Drop Down"

¹³ While we 'keep ourselves in expectation' of Jehovah's great day, how can we draw practical help from the prophecy of Zephaniah? First, we should beware of becoming like the Jews in Zephaniah's day who drew back from following Jehovah because they entertained doubts about the nearness of Jehovah's day. Such Jews did not necessarily express their doubts openly, but their course of action revealed that

13, 14. (a) Why did some Jews draw back from serving Jehovah, and how did this become manifest? (b) What would it be unwise for us to do, and in what work should we not let our hands drop down?

they did not *really* believe that Jehovah's great day was near. They concentrated on amassing wealth instead of keeping themselves in expectation of Jehovah.—Zephaniah 1:12, 13; 3:8.

¹⁴ Today is no time to allow doubts to take root in our hearts. It would be very unwise to put off in our minds or hearts the coming of Jehovah's day. (2 Peter 3: 1-4, 10) We should avoid drawing back from following Jehovah or 'letting our hands drop down' in his service. This includes not "working with a slack hand" in our preaching "the good news."—Proverbs 10:4; Mark 13:10.

Fighting Indifference

¹⁵ Second, we should be on guard against the debilitating effects of indifference. In many Western countries, unconcern about spiritual matters can become a cause for discouragement among some preachers of the good news. Such indifference existed in Zephaniah's day. Jehovah stated through his prophet: "I will give attention to the men who are . . . saying in their heart, 'Jehovah will not do good, and he will not do bad.'" (Zephaniah 1:12) Writing on this passage in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, A. B. Davidson stated that it refers to people who have "sunk down into unfeeling indifference or even into incredulity regarding any interference of a higher power in the affairs of mankind."

¹⁶ Indifference is the prevalent attitude today in many parts of the earth, partic-

15. What could cause us to slack our hand in Jehovah's service, and how was this problem foretold in the prophecy of Zephaniah?

16. What state of mind exists among many members of Christendom's churches, but what encouragement does Jehovah give us?

ularly in the more affluent nations. Even members of Christendom's churches simply do not believe that Jehovah God will intervene in human affairs in our day. They brush off our efforts to reach them with the good news of the Kingdom either with a skeptical smile or with a curt "I'm not interested!" Under these conditions, perseverance in the witnessing work can be a real challenge. It tests our endurance. But by means of Zephaniah's prophecy, Jehovah invigorates his faithful people, saying: "May your hands not drop down. Jehovah your God is in the midst of you. As a mighty One, he will save. He will exult over you with rejoicing. He will become silent in his love. He will be joyful over you with happy cries."—Zephaniah 3:16, 17.

¹⁷ It is a fact in the modern-day history of Jehovah's people that the remnant, as well as older ones among the other sheep, have accomplished a tremendous ingathering work in these last days. All these

17. What fine example should newer ones among the other sheep follow, and how?

In Review

- In what respects does the religious situation within Christendom correspond to that of Zephaniah's day?
- How do many political leaders today resemble the secular "princes" at the time of Zephaniah?
- What promises in Zephaniah have been fulfilled upon the remnant?
- What have millions of people come to recognize?
- Why should we not let our hands drop down in Jehovah's service?



The "other sheep" have not allowed people's indifference to discourage them



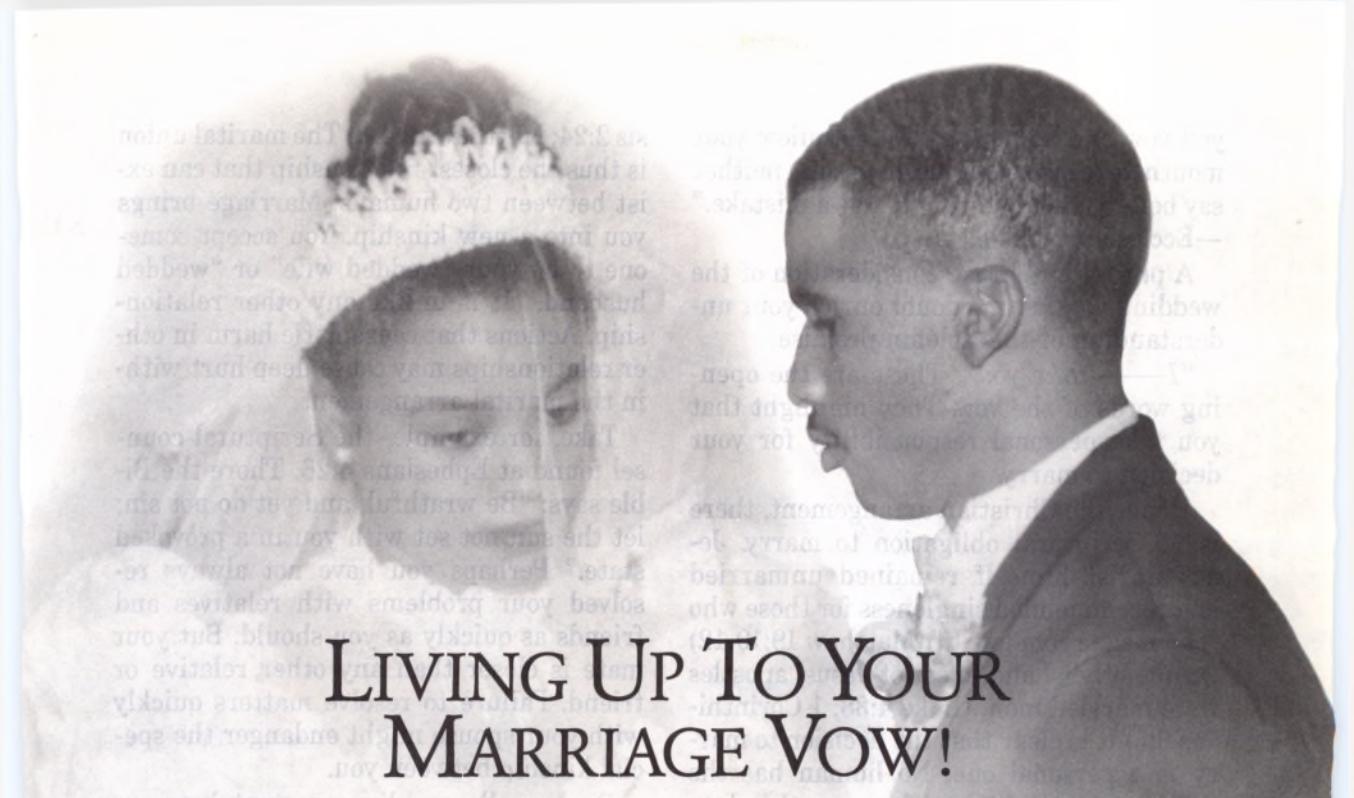
faithful Christians have shown endurance over the decades. They have not allowed indifference on the part of the majority in Christendom to discourage them. So may the newer ones among the other sheep not let themselves be disheartened by the indifference toward spiritual matters that is so prevalent today in many lands. May they not allow their 'hands to drop down,' or fall limp. May they use every opportunity to present *The Watchtower, Awake!*, and other fine publications specially designed to help sheeplike people learn the truth about Jehovah's day and the blessings to follow.

Forward While Awaiting the Great Day!

¹⁸ Jesus stated: "He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved." (Matthew 24:13) So, no "weak hands" or 'wobbly knees' as we await Jehovah's great day! (Isaiah 35:3, 4) Zephaniah's prophecy reassuringly states concerning Jehovah: "As a mighty One, he will save." (Zephaniah 3:17) Yes, Jehovah will save the "great crowd" through the final phase of "the great tribulation," when he orders his Son to dash to pieces the political nations who keep "putting on great airs" against his people.—Revelation 7:9, 14; Zephaniah 2:10, 11; Psalm 2:7-9.

¹⁹ As the great day of Jehovah approaches, may we go forward zealously, serving him "shoulder to shoulder"! (Zephaniah 3:9) So doing, we ourselves and countless others will be put in line to be "concealed in the day of Jehovah's anger" and witness the sanctification of his holy name.

18, 19. (a) What encouragement to endure do we find at Matthew 24:13 and Isaiah 35:3, 4? (b) How will we be blessed if we unitedly go forward in Jehovah's service?



LIVING UP TO YOUR MARRIAGE VOW!

THE wedding day is a joyful day. It is also a very serious occasion. The bride and groom make a solemn promise that will affect the rest of their lives. Those present at the wedding as guests are witnesses to this solemn promise, but Jehovah God is the principal Witness.

The Bible does not require specific procedures or a special kind of wedding ceremony. Yet, in recognition of its divine origin, marriage is customarily solemnized through the use of wedding vows during a religious ceremony. For some years Jehovah's Witnesses have been using the following marriage vow: "*I —— take you —— to be my wedded (wife/husband), to love and to cherish (Bride: and deeply respect) in accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures for Christian (wives/husbands), for as long as we both*

shall live together on earth according to God's marital arrangement."*

Something to Think About

If you are contemplating marriage, it would be very valuable to think about the depth and meaning of this vow *before* the wedding day. Solomon said: "Do not hurry yourself as regards your mouth; and as for your heart, let it not be hasty to bring forth a word before the true God." (Ecclesiastes 5:2) What if you are already married? Then you would benefit from meditating on the importance of the solemn promise that you made before Jehovah. Are you living up to it? Christians take their promises seriously. Solomon continued: "What you vow, pay. Better is it that you vow not than that

* In some places there may be a need to use an adjusted version of this vow in order to comply with local laws. (Matthew 22:21) However, in most countries Christian couples use the above vow.

you vow and do not pay. Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh to sin, neither say before the angel that it was a mistake.” —Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

A phrase-by-phrase consideration of the wedding vow will no doubt enrich your understanding of this solemn promise.

“I—— take you”: These are the opening words of the vow. They highlight that you take personal responsibility for your decision to marry.

Under the Christian arrangement, there is no Scriptural obligation to marry. Jesus Christ himself remained unmarried and recommended singleness for those who “can make room for it.” (Matthew 19:10-12) On the other hand, most of Jesus’ apostles were married men. (Luke 4:38; 1 Corinthians 9:5) It is clear that the decision to marry is a personal one. No human has the Scriptural authority to force another into marriage.

Hence, you are responsible for choosing to get married. Likely, you selected the one whom you are marrying. When you make the marriage vow, saying, ‘I take you——,’ you take or accept that person with his or her virtues—but also with his or her faults.

In time you will likely discover unsuspected aspects of your mate’s personality. There will be occasional disappointments. The Bible says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) So you may need to make adjustments in order to accommodate your mate. This may be difficult, and at times you may feel like giving up. But remember, the marriage vow is made in the presence of Jehovah. He can help you succeed.

“To be my wedded (wife/husband)”: At the very first wedding, when Eve was given in marriage to Adam, Jehovah God said that “they must become one flesh.” (Gene-

sis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6) The marital union is thus the closest relationship that can exist between two humans. Marriage brings you into a new kinship. You accept someone to be your “wedded wife” or “wedded husband.” It is unlike any other relationship. Actions that cause little harm in other relationships may cause deep hurt within the marital arrangement.

Take, for example, the Scriptural counsel found at Ephesians 4:26. There the Bible says: “Be wrathful, and yet do not sin; let the sun not set with you in a provoked state.” Perhaps you have not always resolved your problems with relatives and friends as quickly as you should. But your mate is closer than any other relative or friend. Failure to resolve matters quickly with your spouse might endanger the special kinship between you.

Do you allow a disagreement between you and your mate to develop into an ongoing source of annoyance or vexation? Do misunderstandings and upsetting situations linger for several days? In order to live up to your vow, when difficulties arise do not allow a day to go by without making peace with your mate. This means forgiving and forgetting as well as acknowledging your own faults and errors.—Psalm 51:5; Luke 17:3, 4.

“To love”: The husband-to-be vows “to love and to cherish” his bride. This love includes the romantic love that likely brought them together. But romantic love is not enough. The love that a Christian vows for his or her mate is deeper and broader.

Ephesians 5:25 says: “Husbands, continue loving your wives, just as the Christ also loved the congregation.” Jesus’ love for the congregation could hardly be in the same category as the romantic love between the sexes. The terms “loving” and “loved” used

in this scripture come from the word *a·ga'-pe*, which refers to love guided by principle. The Bible is here commanding husbands to manifest constant, unswerving, enduring love for their wives.

It is not simply an "I love you because you love me" type of emotion. A husband seeks the welfare of his wife even ahead of his own, and the wife loves her husband in the same manner. (Philippians 2:4) Cultivating a deep love for your partner will help you to live up to your marriage vow.

"To cherish": According to one dictionary, "to cherish" means 'to hold dear, to feel or show affection for.' You must express your love in both words and deeds! A wife especially needs to receive constant demonstrations of her husband's love. Her husband may take good care of her physical needs, but this is not enough. There are wives who have enough food and a comfortable home but who are desperately unhappy because of being neglected or ignored by their marriage partner.

On the other hand, a wife who knows that she is loved and cherished has every reason to be happy. Of course, the same can be said of the husband. True love is greatly enhanced by genuine expressions of endearment. In the Song of Solomon, the shepherd lover exclaims: "How beautiful your expressions of endearment are, O my sister, my bride! How much better your expressions of endearment are than wine and the fragrance of your oils than all sorts of perfume!"—Song of Solomon 4:10.

"And deeply respect": Throughout the centuries, there have been men who have abused and degraded women. Even today, according to *World Health* magazine, "violence against women occurs in every country and in every social and economic class. In many cultures, wife-beating is consid-

ered a man's right." Most men may not be guilty of such conduct. Still, it does seem that many men fail to show genuine interest in the issues that concern women. As a result, many women have developed a negative attitude about men. Some wives have been heard to say, "I love my husband, but I just can't respect him!"

Jehovah God, however, gives credit to the woman who strives to respect her husband—even if he falls short of her expectations from time to time. She recognizes that he has a God-given assignment, or position. (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23) Deep respect for her husband is thus part of her worship and obedience to Jehovah. God does not overlook the obedience of godly women.—Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:1-6; compare Hebrews 6:10.

Respect in marriage must be mutual, and it should be earned rather than merely expected or demanded. For example, cutting or offensive speech has no place in the marital arrangement. It would not be loving or respectful to make derogatory comments about your husband or wife. Nothing good can come from revealing your mate's flaws to others or talking about them in public. Even in jest one could show gross lack of respect in this area. The words of Ephesians 4:29, 32 apply to both husband and wife. There the Bible says: "Let a rotten saying not proceed out of your mouth, but whatever saying is good for building up as the need may be . . . Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate."

"In accordance with the divine law as set forth in the Holy Scriptures": God wants us to enjoy freedom of choice and action. He does not burden us with an exhaustive list of rules regulating married life. Yet, for our own sakes he has set forth some guidelines.



In a way, married couples are like snowflakes. All of them may look identical from a distance, but in reality each couple is uniquely different

accept its teachings as a guide in your daily life, you will be able to live up to your marriage vow.—Psalm 119:105.

"For as long as we both shall live together on earth": This points to long-term togetherness. God commands that "a man will leave his father and his mother and he must stick to his wife." (Genesis 2:24) Jehovah wants you to be together. Serve God together. Study his Word together. Take time to walk together, sit together, eat together. Enjoy life together!

Some couples make an effort to set aside time every day just to talk to each other. Even after many years of marriage, this togetherness is vital to marital happiness.

"According to God's marital arrangement": Marriage is a gift from Jehovah God, who established the marital arrangement. (Proverbs 19:14) Failure to follow his arrangement will threaten not only your marital happiness but also your relationship with the Creator. On the other hand, when husband and wife cultivate a good relationship with Jehovah, manifested by obedience to his arrangements, they will have peaceful relationships with others, including each other.—Proverbs 16:7.

Never forget that Jehovah is the principal Witness to your marriage vow. Continue to live up to this solemn promise, and your marriage will be a source of praise and glory to Jehovah God!

Today, there is an abundant variety of printed material on marriage, and many people have their own philosophies. But be careful! On the subject of marriage, much of the information circulating is in conflict with the Bible.

Recognize also that circumstances vary from one couple to the next. In a way, married couples are like snowflakes; they may look identical from a distance, but in reality each one is unique, different from all others. The combination of your personality with that of your mate is not duplicated by any other married couple in the world. So do not be hasty to accept the personal viewpoints of others. There is no man-made formula that applies to every marriage!

In contrast, all of the Bible's commands are true and applicable. The apostle Paul wrote: "All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproofing, for setting things straight." (2 Timothy 3:16; Psalm 119:151) If you read the Bible and

UNITED IN GOD'S SERVICE THROUGH GOOD TIMES AND BAD

As told by Michel and Babette Muller

IHAVE bad news for you," the doctor said. "You can forget about your missionary life in Africa." Looking at my wife, Babette, he said, "You have breast cancer."

We were stunned beyond words. A lot of things flashed through our minds. We had thought that this visit to the doctor would be only a final checkup. Our return tickets to Benin, West Africa, had been purchased. We had hoped to be back there within the week. During our 23 years of marriage, we had experienced good times and bad. Confused and fearful, we now braced ourselves for a fight against cancer.

Let us start from the beginning. Michel was born in September 1947, Babette in August 1945. We grew up in France and got married in 1967. We lived in Paris. One morning in early 1968, Babette was late for work. A lady came to the door and offered her a religious brochure; she accepted it. The lady then said: "May I return with my husband to talk to you and your husband?"

Babette was thinking about her job. She wanted the woman to leave, so she said, "OK, OK."

Michel relates: "I had no interest in religion, but the brochure caught my eye, and I read it. A few days later, the lady, Joce-line Lemoine, returned with her husband, Claude. He was very skilled in his use of the Bible. He had answers to all my questions. I was impressed.



Michel and Babette Muller wearing traditional dress in Benin

"Babette was a good Catholic but had no Bible, which was not unusual for Catholics. She was very excited to see and read the Word of God. From our study we learned that many of the religious ideas that we had been taught were false. We started to talk to our relatives and friends about the things we were learning. In January 1969 we became baptized Witnesses of Jehovah. Nine of our relatives and friends were baptized soon after that."

Serving Where Preachers Were Needed

Soon after our baptism, we thought: 'We do not have any children. Why not take up the full-time ministry?' So in 1970 we left our jobs, enrolled as regular pioneers, and moved to the small town of Magny-Lormes, near Nevers, in the center of France.

It was a difficult assignment. It was hard to find people who wanted to study the Bible. We could not find secular employment, so we had little money. Sometimes we had only potatoes to eat. During the winter the temperatures plunged well below zero Fahrenheit. We called the time we spent there the time of the seven thin cows.
—Genesis 41:3.

But Jehovah sustained us. One day when we had almost run out of food, the mailman delivered a big box of cheese from Babette's sister. Another day we came home after preaching and found some friends who had driven 300 miles to see us. Having heard how hard things were, these brothers had packed their two cars with food for us.

After a year and a half, the Society appointed us as special pioneers. Over the next four years, we served in Nevers, then in Troyes, and finally in Montigny-lès-Metz. In 1976, Michel was appointed to serve as a circuit overseer in the southwest of France.

Two years later, during a school for circuit overseers, we got a letter from the Watch Tower Society inviting us to go abroad as missionaries; the letter said that we could choose between Chad and Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta). We chose Chad. Soon we received another letter, assigning us to work under the Tahiti branch. We had asked for Africa, a huge continent, but soon found ourselves on a small island!

Serving in the South Pacific

Tahiti is a beautiful tropical island in the South Pacific. When we arrived, about a hundred brothers were there to meet us at the airport. They welcomed us with flower leis, and though we were tired after our long journey from France, we were very happy.

Four months after we arrived in Tahiti, we boarded a small sailing boat filled with a cargo of dry coconuts. Five days later we reached our new assignment—the island of Nuku Hiva in the Marquesas Islands. About 1,500 people lived on the island, but there were no brothers. Only us.

Conditions were primitive at the time. We lived in a small house made of concrete and bamboo. There was no electricity. We had a water tap that worked sometimes, but the water was muddy. Most of the time, we used rainwater that collected in a cistern. There were no paved roads, just dirt tracks.

To reach distant parts of the island, we had to rent horses. The saddles were made of wood—very uncomfortable, especially for Babette, who had never ridden a horse before. We carried a machete to cut through bamboo that had fallen across the track. It was a big change from life in France.

We held Sunday meetings, although only the two of us attended. Initially we didn't have the other meetings since there were only us two. Instead we read the meeting material together.

After a few months, we decided that it was not good to continue that way. Michel relates: "I said to Babette, 'We must dress properly. You sit down there, and I will sit here. I will start with a prayer, and then we'll have the Theocratic Ministry School and the Service Meeting. I'll ask the questions, and you'll answer, even if you are the



**Missionary work among
Polynesians in tropical Tahiti**

only other person in the room.' It was good we did that because it's easy to become spiritually lax when there is no congregation."

It took time to get people to come to our Christian meetings. We two were by ourselves for the first eight months. Later, we were joined by one, two, or sometimes three others. One year, just the two of us started the annual celebration of the Lord's Evening Meal. After ten minutes, some people came, so I stopped and started the talk again.

Today, there are 42 publishers and 3 congregations in the Marquesas Islands. Although the greatest part of the work was done by our successors, some people we contacted back then are now baptized.

Our Brothers Are Precious

We learned patience on Nuku Hiva. We had to wait for everything apart from the most basic necessities. If you wanted a

book, for example, you had to write for it, then wait for two or three months before it arrived.

Another lesson we learned was that our brothers are precious. When we visited Tahiti and attended a meeting and heard the brothers singing, we were moved to tears. It may be true that some brothers are difficult to get along with, but when you are alone, you realize how good it is to be with the brotherhood. In 1980 the Society decided that we should return to Tahiti and serve in the circuit work. There we were greatly encouraged by the warm hospitality of the brothers and their love for the preaching work. We spent three years in the circuit work on Tahiti.

From Island to Island

Next we were assigned to a missionary home in Raiatea, another Pacific island, and we stayed there for about two years. After

Raïatéa, we were assigned to the circuit work in the Tuamotu island group. We visited 25 of the 80 islands by boat. For Babette it was difficult. Every time she traveled on a boat, she got sick.

Babette says: "It was terrible! I was sick all the time we spent on the boat. If we were at sea five days, I was sick five days. No drugs worked for me. Yet, despite my sickness, I thought the ocean was beautiful. It was a marvelous sight. Dolphins would race the boat. They would often jump out of the water if you clapped your hands!"

After five years in the circuit work, we were reassigned to Tahiti for two years and again had a good time in the preaching work. Our congregation doubled from 35 to 70 publishers in a year and a half. Twelve of those with whom we studied the Bible were baptized just before we left. Some of them are now elders in the congregation.

Altogether we spent 12 years in the South Pacific. Then we received a letter from the Society saying that they did not need missionaries on the islands anymore since the congregations were now strong. There were about 450 publishers when we arrived in Tahiti and over 1,000 when we left.

Africa At Last!

We returned to France, and after a month and a half, the Society gave us a new assignment—Benin, West Africa. We had wanted to go to Africa 13 years before, so we were very happy.

We arrived in Benin on November 3, 1990, and were among the first missionaries to arrive after the 14-year ban on the Kingdom preaching activity was lifted. It was very exciting. We had no problem settling down because life is similar to that in the Pacific islands. The people are very

friendly and hospitable. You can stop and talk with anyone on the street.

Only a few weeks after we arrived in Benin, Babette noticed a lump in her breast. So we went to a little clinic near the newly established branch office. The doctor checked her and said that she needed surgery very soon. The next day we went to another clinic where we saw a European doctor, a gynecologist from France. She too said that we had to go to France quickly so that Babette could have surgery. Two days later we were on a plane to France.

We were sad to leave Benin. With the renewed religious freedom in the country, the brothers were thrilled to have new missionaries, and we were delighted to be there. So we were upset that we had to leave after being in the country only a few weeks.

When we arrived in France, the surgeon examined Babette and confirmed that she needed surgery. The doctors acted quickly, performed a small operation, and released Babette from the hospital the next day. We thought that this was the end of the matter.

Eight days later, we met with the surgeon. It was then that he broke the news that Babette had breast cancer.

Reflecting on how she felt at the time, Babette says: "At first, I was less upset than Michel. But the day after the bad news, I had no feeling. I was not able to cry. I was not able to smile. I thought I was going to die. To me, cancer equaled death. My attitude was, We have to do what we have to do."

The Fight With Cancer

We heard the bad news on Friday, and Babette was scheduled for a second operation on Tuesday. We had been staying with Babette's sister, but she too was sick, so we could not continue to stay in her small apartment.

We wondered where we could go. Then we remembered Yves and Brigitte Merda, a couple with whom we had previously stayed. This couple had been very hospitable to us. So we called Yves on the phone and told him that Babette needed surgery and that we did not know where to stay. We also told him that Michel needed a job.

Yves provided Michel work around his house. The brothers supported and encouraged us with many acts of kindness. They also helped us financially. The Society paid Babette's medical bills.

The surgery was major. The doctors had to remove the lymph nodes and the breast. They began chemotherapy immediately. After a week, Babette could leave the hospital, but she had to return every three weeks for continued therapy.

During the time Babette was receiving treatment, the brothers in the congregation were very helpful. One sister who had also had breast cancer was a great encouragement. She told Babette what to expect and gave her much comfort.

Nevertheless, we were anxious about our future. Discerning this, Michel and Jeanette Cellerier took us out to a restaurant for a meal.

We told them that we had to quit missionary service and that we could never go back to Africa. However, Brother Cellerier said: "What? Who says you have to quit? The Governing Body? The brothers in France? Who said it?"

"Nobody said it," I replied, "I am saying it."

"No, no!" said Brother Cellerier. "You will return!"

Chemotherapy was followed by radiation, which was finished by the end of August 1991. The doctors said that they saw

no problem with our returning to Africa, provided that Babette went back to France for regular checkups.

Back to Benin

So we wrote to headquarters in Brooklyn, asking permission to return to missionary service. We were anxious to hear their reply. The days dragged by. Finally, Michel could not wait any longer, so he telephoned Brooklyn and asked if they had received our letter. They said that they had considered it—we could return to Benin! How grateful we were to Jehovah!

The Merda family organized a great get-together to celebrate the news. In November 1991 we returned to Benin, and the brothers welcomed us with a feast!

Babette seems to be fine now. We have returned to France from time to time for complete medical checkups, and the doctors find no trace of cancer. We delight to be back in our missionary assignment. We feel needed in Benin, and Jehovah has blessed our work. Since we returned we have helped 14 people to baptism. Five of them are now regular pioneers, and one has been appointed to be a ministerial servant. We have also seen our small congregation grow and then divide into two congregations.

Over the years, we have served Jehovah as husband and wife and have enjoyed many blessings and have come to know many wonderful people. But we have also been trained and strengthened by Jehovah to endure hardships successfully. Like Job, we did not always understand why things happened as they did, but we did know that Jehovah was always there to help us. It is as God's Word says: "Look! The hand of Jehovah has not become too short that it cannot save, nor has his ear become too heavy that it cannot hear."—Isaiah 59:1.

KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

Former Enemies United in Serving Jehovah

"THE first time I heard anything about Jehovah's Witnesses was while I was serving as an armed guard in Bosnia," explains Branko.*

Branko was on guard duty at a hospital where the wounded were being treated. One of the doctors was studying the Bible with the Witnesses, and during a night shift, he explained to Branko much of what he had learned about the Bible.

What Branko heard that night moved him so much that he immediately laid down his weapons. He got in touch with the Witnesses, wanting to learn more. Some time later, after moving to another European country, Branko sought out a Kingdom Hall and attended a meeting of the Yugoslavian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. That is where Branko met Slobodan.

Slobodan also came from Bosnia and had served as a volunteer in the same war as Branko—but in the opposite camp. Slobodan had fought for the Serbs against the Croats. By the time the two met, Slobodan had become a baptized Witness of Jehovah. He offered to study the Bible with Branko, his former enemy. As the study progressed, Branko learned more about Jehovah, and his love for God grew. This moved Branko to dedicate his life to the Creator. In October 1993 he symbolized his dedication by water baptism.

How did Slobodan become one of Jehovah's Witnesses? He had left the war zone in Bosnia some time earlier. He had read some



publications by the Witnesses, but it was not until two Witnesses called at his home in early 1992 that his interest in the Word of God grew. Who called on Slobodan, offering to study the Bible with him? It was Mujo, who also came from Bosnia but who was brought up as a Muslim. As the Bible study progressed, Mujo and Slobodan, once enemies, spent some time together every day to strengthen each other's faith.

The war in the former Yugoslavia has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. But Branko, Slobodan, and Mujo now serve as full-time preachers of the good news in the same congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. They have overcome ethnic and racial strife, and now they seek peace while submitting to the Creator, Jehovah.

But what brought about such changes? It was their love for Jehovah, their respect for the Bible, and their eagerness to apply Bible truth in their lives. As the Holy Scriptures say, "the word of God is alive and exerts power . . . and is able to discern thoughts and intentions of the heart."—Hebrews 4:12.

* Pseudonyms have been used.

A Successful Campaign With **KINGDOM NEWS**

WHY Is Life So Full of Problems?—Is a Trouble-Free Paradise Possible?" This was the title of *Kingdom News* No. 34, a four-page tract that was distributed worldwide in 139 languages during April and May of last year. "One of the highlights of the year" is how Witnesses in Jamaica described this service campaign. "A great source of joy for the brothers," Witnesses in Belgium called it. In the Czech Republic, this was the first time Jehovah's Witnesses had the opportunity to share in a *Kingdom News* distribution. The branch reports: "The campaign brought a spirit of zeal and enthusiasm." Similar sentiments were heard from many other lands.

Kingdom News No. 34 had a special message for those sighing and groaning because of the abominations committed in the name of religion. (Ezekiel 9:4) It had comfort for those whose lives are troubled because of "critical times hard to deal with" over which they have no control. (2 Timothy 3:1) Pointing to the Bible, the tract showed that life's problems will be solved very soon. A trouble-free paradise is a certainty. (Luke 23:43) Many who read the *Kingdom News* were persuaded by its message. A man in Togo said to a Witness: "What you have stated is indisputable."

Undeniably, the distribution of this *Kingdom News* attracted unusual attention. In Denmark a householder responded to a Witness offering the tract: "I have just returned from the United States. Just be-

fore I left, someone offered your tract to me. Now I have just arrived here, and immediately the same tract is being delivered in Danish!"

Enthusiastic Support for the Campaign

Jehovah's Witnesses around the world enthusiastically joined in the work of distributing the tract. Austria, El Salvador, Haiti, Hungary, Italy, New Caledonia, were just some of the many countries reporting all-time peaks of publishers during the months when the *Kingdom News* was being distributed.

In Zambia a circuit overseer has trained his three-year-old daughter, Deborah, to offer literature from house to house. During the campaign with *Kingdom News* No. 34, Deborah placed more than 45 copies of the tract. Her mother started Bible studies with some who had accepted the *Kingdom News* from Deborah.

In South Africa a teenager offered the tract to a schoolmate named Cashia. Cashia read the tract and said: "This is just too wonderful—living forever on a paradise earth! Why have I not been told about it before?" A Bible study was started. Within a week Cashia received another tract. The second one came from her Roman Catholic pen pal, who lives in Cyprus. The pen pal explained to Cashia why the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are false and told her that she intended to study the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. Of course,

that greatly strengthened Cashia's determination to continue her study.

A ten-year-old boy in Switzerland shared with his mother in distributing the tract. He handed a copy to a young woman and encouraged her to read it carefully. The young woman asked the boy if he really believed what the picture on its cover illustrated—unending life on earth. The boy's reply? "Oh, yes, I am very sure." The woman then revealed that she was searching for the true faith because there were too many contradictions in her own religion. On a return visit, a Bible study was started.

Immediate Reactions

Sometimes the *Kingdom News* caused immediate reaction in those who read it. After reading the tract, an 11-year-old girl in Belgium confessed to one of Jehovah's Witnesses that she had been shoplifting. The girl's mother wanted to keep quiet about the matter, but the young girl's conscience was moved by what she had read, and she insisted on going to see the manager of the shopping center. The mother finally agreed to let her daughter go back to the shopping center with the Witness. The manager was surprised at her confession. When he learned that it was the *Kingdom*

News that moved her to act in this way, he took a copy for himself to see what it contained that was so powerful. The girl is now having a progressive Bible study.

A Witness in Cameroon left a copy of *Kingdom News* with a man and relates: "When we returned, we found that he had already underlined it and had a number of questions. After receiving satisfactory answers, he declared: 'It is absolutely true that religion has contributed to mankind's unhappiness. Your tract has helped me to understand much, but I would like to know more.'" He now has a regular Bible study.

A Witness visiting from house to house in Uruguay placed a tract with a man. The Witness continued his work of preaching from house to house and worked around the block until he got to the back door of the man's home. He was surprised to find the man waiting for him, tract in hand. He had already read it and wanted more information. A study was started on the spot.

The Public Helps in Distribution

In Japan a young Witness approached a man in his 50's and introduced the tract to him. The man asked: "What do you do with that pamphlet when you meet people who cannot see?" The Witness admitted that he did not know. The man told him to wait a moment and went back into his house. He returned with a copy of the *Kingdom News* and said: "I already received that pamphlet. I thought it contained very interesting and important information, so I transcribed it into Braille. Please use this for people who are blind." The man had spent many hours transcribing the *Kingdom News* into Braille so that the blind would not miss out on what it contained.

In Slovakia a man liked the tract so much that he had 20 copies made, and he distrib-

In Our Next Issue

You Can Enjoy Lasting Friendships

Meeting the Challenge of Loyalty

How Christian Shepherds Serve You

Keep Distributing Magazines!

April and May 1995 saw a highly successful campaign to distribute *Kingdom News* No. 34. During those two months, there was also an outstanding distribution of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines. A brother in the Czech Republic, for example, reports that in April he placed 250 copies of *Kingdom News* and 750 magazines. In Guadeloupe, Saturday, April 15, was chosen as a special magazine day. Almost every publisher in the country shared in the ministry that day! Slovakia had a new peak in magazine distribu-

tion in April. Similar reports came from many other countries.

So why not make April and May 1996 outstanding months for magazine distribution? Congregations can organize special magazine days. Individuals can share in auxiliary pioneering. In these and other ways, magazine distribution can be encouraged, and the vital message proclaimed in *Kingdom News* No. 34 will continue to be spread. Then, as happened last year, Jehovah will surely bless the zealous spirit we show.—2 Timothy 4:22.

uted these black and white copies himself. A publisher in Switzerland left a *Kingdom News* with a family and continued to work the upper floors of the building where the family lived. Upon coming down again, he was met by a young boy from the family, who asked for 19 more copies of the tract. At the boy's school, the students had been assigned to write about problems and the search for solutions. He wanted a copy of *Kingdom News* for each of his classmates.

No One Was Missed

Those who shared in the campaign tried hard to ensure that no one was missed. In New Caledonia two Witnesses were traveling to the territory of a remote tribe in order to distribute the *Kingdom News*. On the way, they noticed a path that seemed to be unused, but they nevertheless decided to see if anyone lived at the end of it. Leaving the car, they trekked along the path, wading through streams until they finally found a house. A couple who had never heard of Jehovah's Witnesses lived there, and they accepted a copy of the *Kingdom News*. Later the publishers made a return

visit and to their surprise found that the couple had mended the road and several small bridges so that the Witnesses could drive their car all the way to the house. A regular Bible study was started.

In Poland a Witness had to walk past a construction site in order to offer a copy of the *Kingdom News* to a householder. The workers watched as he walked back past the building site. Finally, one of the workers called to him, asking him not to forget them. When he approached them, they paused and carefully listened to the presentation of the tract. They accepted copies of the *Kingdom News* as well as magazines and later, on a return visit, books.

Hundreds of millions of *Kingdom News* No. 34 were distributed in many languages. Its message has already had a powerful effect. Many have learned that a trouble-free paradise is possible. We pray that right-hearted ones will continue to respond and finally get to be among "the meek ones" who will "possess the earth, and . . . find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace."—Psalm 37:11.



Let Your Light Shine!

AT LAST the time had come for the aged man to set eyes on the promised Messiah! By divine revelation Simeon knew that "he would not see death before he had seen the Christ of Jehovah." (Luke 2:26) But what a thrill it was when Simeon entered the temple and Mary and Joseph put the baby Jesus into his arms! He gave praise to God, saying: "Now, Sovereign Lord, you are letting your slave go free in peace . . . because my eyes have seen your means of saving . . . a light for removing the veil from the nations and a glory of your people Israel."—Luke 2:27-32; compare Isaiah 42:1-6.

Jesus, from his baptism at age 30 until his death, proved to be a "light" to the world. In what ways? He radiated spiritual light by preaching about God's Kingdom and His purposes. He also exposed false religious teachings and clearly identified works that belong to darkness. (Matthew 15:3-9; Galatians 5:19-21) Therefore, Jesus could rightly say: "I am the light of the world."—John 8:12.

Jesus died in the year 33 C.E. Did the light then go out? By no means! While still on earth, Jesus told his disciples: "Let your light shine before men." (Matthew 5:16) Accordingly, after Jesus' death his followers kept the light shining.

In imitation of Jesus, Christians today reflect Jehovah's light by engaging in the preaching work. They "go on walking as children of light," proving themselves to be shining examples in Christian living.—Ephesians 5:8.

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