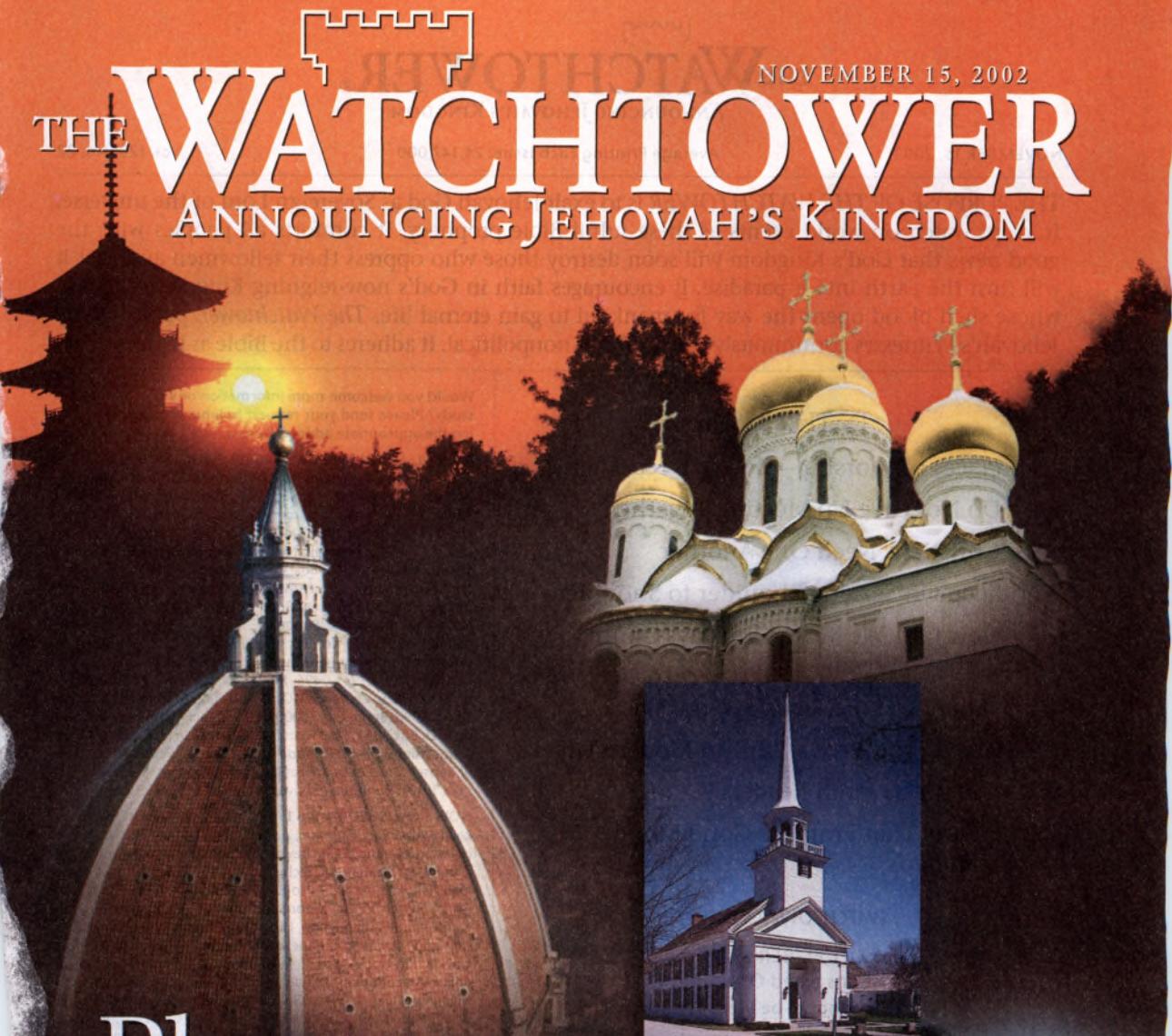


NOVEMBER 15, 2002

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Places of Worship **DO WE NEED THEM?**



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

NOVEMBER 15, 2002

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

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Places of Worship



DO WE NEED THEM?

Thousands of pilgrims wearing colorful dress from different parts of the country, groups of Indians reenacting supposed pre-Hispanic dances to the beat of drums, and the faithful painfully making their way on their knees through the multitudes to the shrine filled the atrium and the streets around the basilica.

THAT is how the newspaper *El Economista* described a teeming crowd in December 2001. At that time some three million people visited the basilica in Mexico City to demonstrate their faith in the Virgin of Guadalupe. Other religious edifices, such as St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, also attract multitudes of visitors.

Religious buildings occupy a special place in the hearts of many who desire to worship God. "For me, the church was a place where I could be close to God," says Maria from Brazil. "It was a holy place. I believed that going to church cleansed the soul and that it was a sin not to go to Mass and to confession every Sunday." Consuelo from Mexico relates: "The church produced in me a deep emotion; I greatly valued it. While there, I felt I was in heaven."

Although some attach great importance to churches, others have doubts about their necessity as places of worship. Speaking about poor church attendance, Peter Sibert, a Catholic priest in England, says: "[People] choose the bits of religion that they like. A lot of older people are Catholics and they live their faith—but there is not the sense of commitment among younger people." London's *Daily Telegraph* of November 20, 1998, observed: "Since 1979 some 1,500 churches have been closed in England compared with the 495 churches which

have opened and the 150 which were rebuilt."

In 1997 the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of Munich, Germany, reported: "Churches turned into cinemas and apartments: Believers are staying away, places of worship are being converted.... What has already become tradition in the Netherlands or in England is being done in Germany." It added: "One can locate some 30 or 40 spec-

tacular sales of churches in Germany within the last few years."

Are religious buildings really necessary to worship God? Do basilicas and ornate churches have a precedent in the Scriptures? What types of buildings have been associated with the worship of the true and living God? What can we learn from them about the need for places of worship and about what should take place there?



DO NOT GIVE UP Meeting Together

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing," say the Scriptures, "but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25, New International Version) Clearly, true worshipers are to come together at a place of worship to "consider one another to incite to love and fine works."—Hebrews 10:24.

WHEN the apostle Paul penned the foregoing words in the first century of our Common Era, an impressive temple in Jerusalem served as a place of worship for the Jews. There were also synagogues. Jesus had "taught in a synagogue and in the temple, where all the Jews [came] together."—John 18:20.

What type of meeting places did Paul have in mind when he admonished Christians to come together to encourage one another? Do the religious edifices of Christendom find any precedent in the temple arrangement in Jerusalem? When were massive religious structures introduced to professed Christians?

'A House to God's Name'

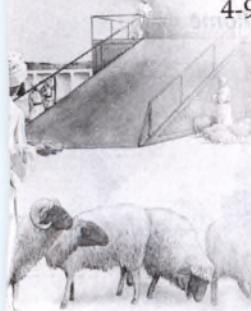
The first instructions about a place to worship God are found in the Bible book of Exodus. Jehovah God instructed his chosen people—the Israelites—to build "the tabernacle," or "the tent of meeting." The ark of the covenant and various sa-

The tabernacle and later the temples served as fine centers of Jehovah's worship



cred utensils were to be kept there. "Jehovah's glory filled the tabernacle" upon its completion in 1512 B.C.E. That portable tent served as a central feature of God's arrangement for approach to him for over four centuries. (Exodus, chapters 25-27; 40:33-38) The Bible also refers to this tent as "the temple of Jehovah" and "the house of Jehovah." —1 Samuel 1:9, 24.

Later, when David was king in Jerusalem, he expressed a strong desire to build a permanent house to Jehovah's glory. Since David had been a man of war, however, Jehovah told him: "You will not build a house to my name." Instead, He chose David's son Solomon to build the temple. (1 Chronicles 22: 6-10) Solomon inaugurated the temple in 1026 B.C.E., after a construction period lasting seven and a half years. Jehovah approved of this building, saying: "I have sanctified this house that you have built by putting my name there to time indefinite; and my eyes and my heart will certainly prove to be there always." (1 Kings 9:3) As long as the Israelites remained faithful, Jehovah would direct his favor toward that house. However, if they turned aside from what was right, Jehovah would remove his favor from that place, and 'the house itself would become heaps of ruins.' —1 Kings 9: 4-9; 2 Chronicles 7:16, 19, 20.



dwelling towers they burned with fire and also all its desirable articles, so as to cause ruin. Furthermore, he carried off those remaining from the sword captive to Babylon, and they came to be servants to him and his sons." According to the Bible, this happened in 607 B.C.E.—2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 52:12-14.

As foretold by the prophet Isaiah, God raised up King Cyrus of Persia to liberate the Jews from the power of Babylon. (Isaiah 45:1) Following a 70-year exile, they returned to Jerusalem in 537 B.C.E. for the purpose of rebuilding the temple. (Ezra 1:1-6; 2:1, 2; Jeremiah 29:10) After delays in construction, the temple was finally completed in 515 B.C.E., and the pure worship of God was restored. Though it was not as glorious as Solomon's temple, the structure lasted for nearly 600 years. However, this temple also fell into disrepair because the Israelites neglected the worship of Jehovah. When Jesus Christ appeared on the earthly scene, the temple was in the process of being progressively rebuilt by King Herod. What was in the offing for this temple?

'Not a Stone Will Be Left Upon a Stone'

Referring to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus told his disciples: "By no means will a stone be left here upon a stone and not be thrown down." (Matthew 24:1, 2) True to those words, the place that had been recognized for centuries as the center of God's worship was destroyed in 70 C.E. by Roman troops who came to put down the revolt of the Jews.* That temple was never rebuilt.

* The temple was completely demolished by the Romans. The Wailing Wall, to which many Jews come from great distances to pray, is not part of that temple. It is only a part of the wall of the temple courtyard.

In the seventh century, the Muslim shrine known as the Dome of the Rock was erected, and it stands until this day upon the location of the former Jewish place of worship.

What was to be the arrangement of worship for Jesus' followers? Would early Christians coming from a Jewish background continue to worship God at the temple that was soon to be destroyed? Where would non-Jewish Christians worship God? Were religious structures of Christendom to serve as a replacement for the temple? Jesus' conversation with a Samaritan woman gives us insight into the matter.

For centuries, Samaritans worshiped God at a large temple on Mount Gerizim in Samaria. "Our forefathers worshiped in this mountain," said the Samaritan woman to Jesus, "but you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where persons ought to worship." In reply Jesus said: "Believe me, woman, The hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you people worship the Father." A material temple would no longer be necessary in the worship of Jehovah, for Jesus explained: "God is a Spirit, and those worshiping him must worship with spirit and truth." (John 4:20, 21, 24) The apostle Paul later told the Athenians: "The God that made the world and all the things in it, being, as this One is, Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in handmade temples."

—Acts 17:24.

Clearly, the religious buildings of Christendom have no connection with the temple arrangement of the pre-Christian Era. And first-century Christians had no reason to erect such places. After the death of the apostles, however, the foretold deviation from the true teachings—the apostasy—occurred. (Acts 20:29, 30) Years before Roman Emperor Constantine was supposedly converted to Christianity in 313 C.E., professed Christians began to turn aside from what Jesus had taught.

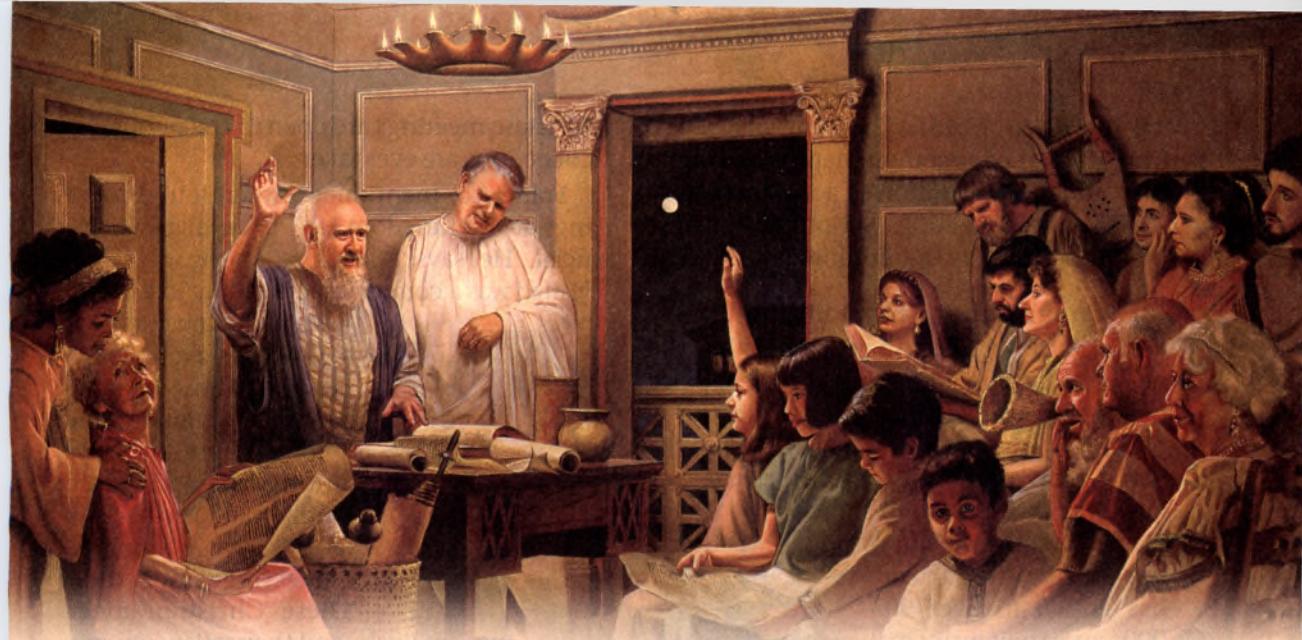
Constantine contributed to the fusing of "Christianity" with the pagan Roman religion. *The Encyclopædia Britannica* says: "Constantine himself commissioned the construction of three enormous Christian basilicas in Rome: St. Peter's, S. Paolo Fuori le Mura, and S. Giovanni in Laterano. He . . . created the cross-shaped plan that became standard for churches in western Europe throughout the Middle Ages." The reconstructed St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is still considered the center of the Roman Catholic Church.

"The Church took over some religious customs and forms common in pre-Christian [pagan] Rome," says historian Will Durant. This included "the architecture of the basilica." From the 10th to the 15th century, there was a boom in the construction of churches and cathedrals, with great emphasis placed on architecture. That was when many of the edifices of Christendom that are now considered artistic monuments came into existence.

Do people always find spiritual refreshment and encouragement from worshiping in a church? "For me, the church came to represent all that is tedious and tiresome in religion," says Francisco from Brazil. "Mass was a meaningless, repetitive ceremony that did

St. Peter's Basilica in Rome





The early Christians met together in private homes

nothing to satisfy my real needs. It was a relief when it was over." Nevertheless, true believers are commanded to meet together. What arrangement for meetings should they follow?

"The Congregation That Is in Their House"

The pattern for the Christian way of meeting together emerges from an examination of how first-century believers met. The Scriptures indicate that they usually met together in private homes. For example, the apostle Paul wrote: "Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, . . . and greet the congregation that is in their house." (Romans 16:3, 5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2) The Greek word for "congregation" (*ek-kle-si'a*) is rendered "church" in some English translations, such as the *King James Version*. But the term refers to a group of people gathered together for a common purpose, not to a building. (Acts 8:1; 13:1) Worship practiced by true Christians does not require ornate religious buildings.

How were the meetings conducted in early Christian congregations? The disciple James

uses a form of the Greek word *sy-na-go·ge'* to refer to a Christian meeting. (James 2:2, footnote) This Greek word means "a bringing together" and is used interchangeably with *ek-kle-si'a*. Over time, though, the term "synagogue" took on the meaning of the place or building where the assembly was held. The first Jewish Christians were familiar with what took place at a synagogue.*

While the Jews met at the temple in Jerusalem for their annual festivals, the synagogues served as local places for learning about Jehovah and gaining an education in the Law. The exercises held at synagogues appear to have consisted of prayer and reading the Scriptures, as well as exposition and exhortation. When Paul and others with him went into a synagogue in Antioch, "the presiding officers of the synagogue sent out to them, saying: 'Men, brothers, if there is any word of encouragement for the people that you have,

* It seems likely that synagogues were instituted during the 70-year Babylonian exile when there was no temple in existence or shortly after the return from exile while the temple was being reconstructed. By the first century, each town in Palestine had its own synagogue, the larger cities more than one.

tell it.' " (Acts 13:15) When the first Jewish Christians met together in private homes, they undoubtedly followed a similar pattern, making their meetings Scripturally instructive and spiritually upbuilding.

Congregations for Building Up

Like the early Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses today come together at simple places of worship to receive instruction in the Bible and to enjoy wholesome fellowship. For many years they met only in private homes and still do so in some places. But now the number of congregations has grown to over 90,000, and their principal meeting places are called Kingdom Halls. These buildings are neither ostentatious nor church-like in appearance. They are practical and modest structures that allow for congregations of 100 to 200 people to congregate for weekly meetings in order to listen to and learn from God's Word.

Most congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses meet three times a week. One meeting is a public lecture on a subject of current interest. It is followed by a study based on a Bible theme or prophecy, using the *Watchtower* magazine as source material. Another meeting is a school designed to provide training in presenting the Bible's message. It is followed by a meeting especially devoted to giving practical suggestions for the Christian ministry. Once a week, Witnesses also assemble for Bible study in small groups in private homes.

All these meetings are open to the public. No collections are ever taken.

Francisco, mentioned earlier, found meetings at the Kingdom Hall to be highly beneficial. He says: "The first meeting place I visited was a comfortable building in a downtown area,

and I left the hall with a favorable impression. Those in attendance were friendly, and I could sense the love among them. I could hardly wait to go back. In fact, I have not missed a meeting since then. These Christian meetings are lively, and they satisfy my spiritual need. Even when I am feeling discouraged for some reason, I go to the Kingdom Hall, confident that I will return home encouraged."

Bible education, upbuilding association, and the opportunity to praise God also await you at Christian meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses. You have our warm invitation to attend at the Kingdom Hall nearest to your home. You will be glad you did.

Jehovah's Witnesses hold Christian meetings in private homes and at Kingdom Halls



CHRISTIANS NEED ONE ANOTHER

"We are members belonging to one another."—EPHESIANS 4:25.

THE human body is a marvel of creation! Says *The World Book Encyclopedia*: "People sometimes call the human body a machine—the most wonderful one ever built. Of course, the human body is not a machine. But it can be compared to one in many ways. Like a machine, the body is made up of many parts. Each part of the body, like each part of a machine, does special jobs. But all the parts work together and so make the body or the machine run smoothly."

² Yes, the human body has many parts, or members, and each one supplies something needed. Not a single vein, muscle, or other body member is purposeless. Similarly, each member of the Christian congregation can contribute something to its spiritual health and beauty. (1 Corinthians 12:14-26)

1. What does one encyclopedia say about the human body?
2. In what way is the human body and the Christian congregation similar?

Although one member of the congregation should not feel superior to others, neither should anyone consider himself unimportant.—Romans 12:3.

³ Like the interdependent members of the human body, Christians need one another. The apostle Paul told spirit-anointed fellow believers: "Now that you have put away falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, because we are members belonging to one another." (Ephesians 4:25) Since they 'belong to one another,' there is truthful communication and full cooperation among members of spiritual Israel—"the body of the Christ." Yes, each one of them belongs to all the others. (Ephesians 4:11-13) Happily united with them are truthful, cooperative Christians having an earthly hope.

⁴ Every year, thousands hoping to live in an earthly paradise are baptized. Other

3. How does Ephesians 4:25 indicate that Christians need one another?
4. In what ways may new ones be helped?



members of the congregation gladly help them to "press on to maturity." (Hebrews 6:1-3) This aid may involve answering Scriptural questions or providing practical assistance in the ministry. We can help new ones by setting a fine example through regular participation in Christian meetings. In times of distress, we can also offer encouragement or perhaps consolation. (1 Thessalonians 5:14, 15) We should look for ways to assist others to "go on walking in the truth." (3 John 4) Whether we are young or old, have just begun walking in the truth or have walked in it for years, we can promote the spiritual welfare of fellow believers—and they do need us.

They Offered Needed Help

⁵ Christian married couples are among those who find satisfaction in helping fellow believers. For instance, Aquila and his wife, Priscilla (Prisca), helped Paul. They received him into their home, worked with him as tentmakers, and helped him to build up the new congregation in Corinth. (Acts 18:1-4) In some undisclosed way, they even put their lives in jeopardy in Paul's behalf. They were

5. How did Aquila and Priscilla prove helpful to Paul?

Aquila and Priscilla cared about others



living in Rome when Paul told Christians there: "Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who have risked their own necks for my soul, to whom not only I but also all the congregations of the nations render thanks." (Romans 16:3, 4) Like Aquila and Priscilla, some modern-day Christians build up congregations and help fellow worshipers in various ways, sometimes even risking their own lives to avoid exposing other servants of God to brutality or death at the hands of persecutors.

⁶ Aquila and Priscilla also helped the eloquent Christian Apollos, who was teaching residents of Ephesus about Jesus Christ. At that time, Apollos knew only of the baptism performed by John in symbol of repentance for sins against the Law covenant. Discerning that Apollos needed some help, Aquila and Priscilla "expounded the way of God more correctly to him." Very likely they explained that Christian baptism included undergoing water immersion and receiving the outpouring of holy spirit. Apollos learned well. Later in Achaia "he greatly helped those who had believed on account of God's undeserved kindness; for with intensity he thoroughly proved the Jews to be wrong publicly, while he demonstrated by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (Acts 18:24-28) Comments made by fellow worshipers can often help to enhance our understanding of God's Word. In this respect too, we need one another.

Providing Material Assistance

⁷ Members of the Christian congregation in Philippi dearly loved Paul and sent him material provisions during his stay in Thessalonica. (Philippians 4:15, 16) When the brothers in Jerusalem needed material help, the Philippians demonstrated readiness to contribute even beyond their means. So

6. What help did Apollos receive?
7. How did the Philippians react when fellow Christians needed material help?

much did Paul appreciate the fine spirit of his brothers and sisters in Philippi that he cited them as an example to other believers.—2 Corinthians 8:1-6.

⁸ When Paul was in prison bonds, the Philippians not only sent him material gifts but also dispatched their personal envoy Epaphroditus. “On account of the Lord’s work [Epaphroditus] came quite near to death, exposing his soul to danger,” said Paul, “that he might fully make up for your not being here to render private service to me.” (Philippians 2:25-30; 4:18) We are not told whether Epaphroditus was an elder or a ministerial servant. Nevertheless, he was a self-sacrificing and helpful Christian, and Paul really needed him. Is there someone like Epaphroditus in your congregation?

They Were ‘Strengthening Aids’

⁹ Loving brothers and sisters, such as Aquila, Priscilla, and Epaphroditus, are greatly appreciated in any congregation. Some of our fellow worshipers may be much like the first-century Christian Aristarchus. He and others were “a strengthening aid,” perhaps a source of solace or assistance in basic, practical matters. (Colossians 4:10, 11) By assisting Paul, Aristarchus proved to be a real friend in times of need. He was the kind of person mentioned at Proverbs 17:17: “A true companion is loving all the time, and is a brother that is born for when there is distress.” Should not all of us endeavor to be ‘strengthening aids’ to fellow Christians? Especially should we extend a helping hand to those suffering adversity.

¹⁰ Christian elders in particular must be strengthening aids to their spiritual brothers and sisters. Christ told the apostle Peter: “Strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:32) Pe-

ter was able to do that because he manifested strong, rocklike qualities, especially after Jesus’ resurrection. Elders, by all means strive to do the same thing willingly and tenderly, for your fellow believers need you.—Acts 20:28-30; 1 Peter 5:2, 3.

¹¹ Paul’s traveling companion Timothy was an elder who was deeply concerned about other Christians. Though he had certain health problems, Timothy displayed whole-hearted faith and ‘slaved with Paul in furtherance of the good news.’ The apostle could therefore tell the Philippians: “I have no one else of a disposition like his who will genuinely care for the things pertaining to you.” (Philippians 2:20, 22; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:5) We can be a blessing to fellow worshipers of Jehovah by manifesting a spirit like that of Timothy. True, we must contend with our own human frailties and various trials, but we too can and should display strong faith and loving concern for our spiritual brothers and sisters. We should always remember that they need us.

Women Who Cared About Others

¹² Among the godly women who cared about others was Dorcas. When she died, the disciples summoned Peter and led him into an upper chamber. There “all the widows presented themselves to him weeping and exhibiting many inner garments and outer garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.” Dorcas was brought back to life and doubtless continued to ‘abound in good deeds and gifts of mercy.’ In the present-day Christian congregation, there are women like Dorcas who may make garments or do other loving things for those in need. Of course, their good works primarily have to do with promoting Kingdom interests and

8. What spirit did Epaphroditus display?
9. What example do we have in Aristarchus?
10. Peter provided what example for Christian elders?

11. How can we benefit from considering Timothy’s spirit?
12. What can we learn from the example of Dorcas?

sharing in the disciple-making work.—Acts 9:36-42; Matthew 6:33; 28:19, 20.

¹³ A God-fearing woman named Lydia cared about others. A native of Thyatira, she was living in Philippi when Paul preached there in about 50 C.E. Lydia was probably a Jewish proselyte, but there may have been few Jews and no synagogue in Philippi. She and other devout women had assembled for worship by a river when the apostle proclaimed the good news to them. The account says: "Jehovah opened [Lydia's] heart wide to pay attention to the things being spoken by Paul. Now when she and her household got baptized, she said with entreaty: 'If you men have judged me to be faithful to Jehovah, enter into my house and stay.' And she just made us come." (Acts 16:12-15) Because Lydia wanted to do good things for others, she prevailed upon Paul and his associates to stay with her. How we appreciate it when similar hospitality is shown by kind and loving Christians today!—Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9.

We Need You Young Ones Too

¹⁴ The Christian congregation got its start with the kind, warmhearted Son of God, Jesus Christ. People were comfortable around

13. How did Lydia show concern for fellow Christians?
14. How did Jesus Christ treat young people?

Jehovah's people help one another and others when adversity strikes



him because he was loving and compassionate. When some began to bring their young children to Jesus on one occasion, his disciples tried to send them away. But Jesus said: "Let the young children come to me; do not try to stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to suchlike ones. Truly I say to you, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a young child will by no means enter into it." (Mark 10:13-15) To receive Kingdom blessings, we must be as humble and teachable as young children. Jesus showed his love for little ones by taking them into his arms and blessing them. (Mark 10:16) What about you young ones today? Be assured that you are loved and needed in the congregation.

¹⁵ While Jesus was still a young person, he showed love for God and the Scriptures.

15. What facts about Jesus' life are recorded at Luke 2:40-52, and what example did he set for young ones?



When he was 12 years old, he and his parents, Joseph and Mary, traveled from their hometown of Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. On the return trip, Jesus' parents discovered that Jesus was not in the group traveling together. They eventually found him sitting in one of the temple's halls, listening to the Jewish teachers and asking them questions. Surprised that Joseph and Mary did not know where to find him, Jesus asked: "Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?" He returned home with his parents, remained subject to them, and continued to progress in wisdom and physical growth. (Luke 2:40-52) What a fine example Jesus set for our young ones! Surely they should obey their parents and be interested in learning about spiritual things.

—Deuteronomy 5:16; Ephesians 6:1-3.

¹⁶ As a young person, you may be witnessing about Jehovah at school and from house to house with your parents. (Isaiah 43:10-12; Acts 20:20, 21) When Jesus was witnessing and healing people at the temple shortly before his death, some boys cried out: "Save, we pray, the Son of David!" Angered by this, the chief priests and the scribes protested: "Do you hear what these are saying?" "Yes," replied Jesus. "Did you never read this, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have furnished praise'?" (Matthew 21:15-17) Like those children, you young people in the congregation have the grand privilege of praising God and his Son. We want and need you at our side as Kingdom proclaimers.

When Adversity Strikes

¹⁷ Whatever our circumstances, love prompts us to help fellow Christians in need.

16. (a) What did some boys cry out when Jesus was witnessing at the temple? (b) What privilege do young Christians have today?

17, 18. (a) Why did Paul organize the collection for Christians in Judea? (b) What effect did the voluntary donations for Judean believers have on Jewish and Gentile Christians?

(John 13:34, 35; James 2:14-17) It was love for his brothers and sisters in Judea that moved Paul to organize the collection for them among congregations in Achaia, Galatia, Macedonia, and the district of Asia. The persecution, civil unrest, and famine experienced by the disciples in Jerusalem may have resulted in what Paul called "sufferings," "tribulations," and "the plundering of [their] belongings." (Hebrews 10:32-34; Acts 11:27-12:1) He therefore supervised a fund for poor Christians in Judea.—1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, 13-15; 9:1, 2, 7.

¹⁸ Voluntary donations for the holy ones in Judea proved that a bond of brotherhood existed between Jewish and Gentile worshipers of Jehovah. Delivery of the contributions also enabled Gentile Christians to show their Judean fellow worshipers gratitude for spiritual riches received from them. Hence, there was a sharing that was both material and spiritual in nature. (Romans 15:26, 27) Contributions for needy fellow believers today are also voluntary and are motivated by love. (Mark 12:28-31) We need one another in this regard too so that there is an equalizing 'and the one with little does not have too little.'—2 Corinthians 8:15.

¹⁹ Aware that Christians need one another, we are quick to come to the aid of our
²⁰ 19, 20. Give an example to show how Jehovah's people provide help when disasters occur.

How Would You Answer?

- What similarity is there between the human body and the Christian congregation?
- How did the early Christians react when fellow believers needed help?
- What are some Scriptural examples showing that Christians need and help one another?

brothers and sisters in the faith. For instance, consider what happened when devastating earthquakes and landslides struck El Salvador early in 2001. Said one report: "Relief efforts were undertaken by brothers in all parts of El Salvador. Groups of brothers from Guatemala, the United States, and Canada came to give us a hand. . . . Over 500 houses and 3 attractive Kingdom Halls were erected in short order. A great witness has been given by the hard work and cooperation of these self-sacrificing brothers."

²⁰ A report from South Africa said: "The terrible floods that ravaged large parts of Mozambique also affected many of our Christian

brothers. The branch in Mozambique arranged to care for most of their needs. But they requested that we send good used clothing to needy brothers. We gathered enough clothes to send a 40-foot container full of clothes to our brothers in Mozambique." Yes, in these ways too, we need one another.

²¹ As noted earlier, all parts of the human body are important. The same thing certainly is true of the Christian congregation. All its members need one another. They also need to keep on serving unitedly. The next article will consider some factors that make this possible.

21. What will be considered in the next article?

KEEP ON SERVING SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

"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.

ABOUT 6,000 languages are now spoken throughout the earth. Besides these, there are various dialects, or local forms of languages. Whether people speak tongues as diverse as Arabic and Zulu, however, God has done something truly remarkable. He has made it possible for humans everywhere to learn and speak the one and only pure language. This is happening in fulfillment of a promise given through the prophet Zephaniah: "I [Jehovah God] shall give to peoples the change to a pure language [literally, "a clean lip," footnote], in order for them all to call

upon the name of Jehovah, in order to serve him shoulder to shoulder."—Zephaniah 3:9.

² The "pure language" is the truth of God found in his Word, the Bible. Especially is it the truth about God's Kingdom, which will sanctify Jehovah's name, vindicate his sovereignty, and bring blessings to mankind. (Matthew 6:9, 10) As the only spiritually clean tongue on earth, the pure language is spoken by people of all nations and races. It enables them to serve Jehovah "shoulder to shoulder," or according to the footnote, "with one shoulder." They thus serve him

1. What is happening in fulfillment of Zephaniah 3:9?

2. What is the "pure language," and what has it made possible?

unitedly, or "with one consent."—*The New English Bible*.

No Place for Partiality

³ As Christians, we are grateful for the multilingual cooperation that exists among us. Although we preach the good news of the Kingdom in many human languages, we are serving God in unity. (Psalm 133:1) This is possible because, wherever we live on earth, we speak the one pure language to Jehovah's praise.

⁴ There must be no partiality among God's people. The apostle Peter made that clear when he preached at the home of the Gentile army officer Cornelius in 36 C.E. and was moved to say: "For a certainty I perceive that God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness

3. What enables us to serve Jehovah unitedly?
4. Why must there be no partiality among God's people?

is acceptable to him." (Acts 10:34, 35) Since that is true, the Christian congregation is no place for partiality, cliques, or favoritism.

⁵ Regarding her visit to the Kingdom Hall, one college student said: "Usually, churches draw in members of a certain race or ethnic group. . . . Jehovah's Witnesses were all sitting together and not in certain cliques." However, some members of the congregation in ancient Corinth were creating factions. By thus causing dissension, they were opposing the operation of God's holy spirit, for it promotes unity and peace. (Galatians 5: 22) If we were to foster cliques in the congregation, we would be working against the leadings of the spirit. Therefore, let us bear in mind the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians: "I exhort you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you should all speak in agreement, and that there

5. Why is it wrong to contribute to cliques in the congregation?



should not be divisions among you, but that you may be fitly united in the same mind and in the same line of thought." (1 Corinthians 1:10) Paul also stressed unity in his letter to the Ephesians.—Ephesians 4:1-6, 16.

⁶ Impartiality has always been required of Christians. (Romans 2:11) Because some in the first-century congregation were showing favoritism toward wealthy individuals, the disciple James wrote: "My brothers, you are not holding the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, our glory, with acts of favoritism, are you? For, if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in splendid clothing enters into a gathering of you, but a poor man in filthy clothing also enters, yet you look with favor upon the one wearing the splendid clothing and say: 'You take this seat here in a fine place,' and you say to the poor one: 'You keep standing,' or: 'Take that seat there under my footstool,' you have class distinctions among yourselves and you have become judges rendering wicked decisions, is that not so?"—James 2:1-4.

⁷ If rich unbelievers with gold rings and splendid garments came to a Christian meeting as well as poor unbelievers in filthy clothing, the wealthy got special treatment. They were given seats "in a fine place," while the poor were told to stand or to sit on the floor at someone's feet. But God impartially provided Jesus' ransom sacrifice for rich and poor alike. (Job 34:19; 2 Corinthians 5:14) So if we are going to please Jehovah and serve him shoulder to shoulder, we must not show favoritism

6, 7. What counsel did James give regarding favoritism, and how do his words apply?

or 'admire personalities for our own benefit.' —Jude 4, 16.

Keep Free From Murmuring

⁸ In order to maintain our unity and continue to have divine favor, we must heed Paul's counsel: "Keep doing all things free from murmurings." (Philippians 2:14, 15) The faithless Israelites freed from Egyptian bondage murmured against Moses and Aaron and thus even Jehovah God. Because of this, all the men 20 years old and upward, except faithful Joshua and Caleb and the Levites, did not enter the Promised Land but died during Israel's 40-year trek in the wilderness. (Numbers 14:2, 3, 26-30; 1 Corinthians 10:10) What a price they paid for murmuring!

⁹ This shows what can happen to an entire murmuring nation. What about individual murmurers? Well, Moses' sister, Miriam, along with her brother Aaron, murmured: "Is it just by Moses alone that Jehovah has spoken? Is it not by us also that he has spoken?" The account adds: "Jehovah was listening." (Numbers 12:1, 2) The result? Miriam, who evidently took the lead in this complaint, was humiliated by God. How? By being afflicted with leprosy and being compelled to remain outside the camp for seven days until she was cleansed.—Numbers 12:9-15.

¹⁰ Murmuring is not just a complaint about

8. What happened because the Israelites murmured?
9. What did Miriam experience because of her murmuring?
- 10, 11. Unchecked murmuring can result in what? Illustrate.



Do you know why God humiliated Miriam?

some wrongdoing. Persistent murmurers attach too much importance to their feelings or position, drawing attention to themselves rather than to God. If not checked, this causes dissension among spiritual brothers and hinders their efforts to serve Jehovah shoulder to shoulder. This is so because murmurers invariably voice their complaints, doubtless hoping that others will sympathize with them.

¹¹ For instance, someone may criticize the way a certain elder handles his parts in the congregation or cares for his duties. If we listen to the complainer, we may begin to think as he does. Until the seed of discontent was planted in our mind, the elder's activities may not have troubled us, but they do now. Eventually, nothing the elder does will be right in our eyes, and we too may begin to complain about him. This kind of conduct is not fitting in a congregation of Jehovah's people.

¹² Murmuring about men whose duty it is to shepherd the flock of God may lead to reviling. Such murmuring or slanderously calling down evil upon them can detrimentally affect our relationship with Jehovah. (Exodus 22:28) Unrepentant revilers will not inherit God's Kingdom. (1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:10) The disciple Jude wrote about murmurers who were "disregarding lordship and speaking abusively of glorious ones," or responsible men in the congregation. (Jude 8) Those murmurers did not have divine approval, and we wisely shun their wicked course.

¹³ Granted, not all complaints are displeasing to God. He did not ignore "the cry of complaint" about Sodom and Gomorrah but destroyed those wicked cities. (Genesis 18:20, 21; 19:24, 25) In Jerusalem, shortly after Pentecost of 33 C.E., "a murmuring arose on the

12. Murmuring can have what effect on our relationship with God?

13. Why are not all complaints objectionable?

part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrew-speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution." Consequently, "the twelve" corrected the situation by appointing "seven certified men" over the "necessary business" of food distribution. (Acts 6:1-6) Present-day elders must not 'stop up their ears' to legitimate complaints. (Proverbs 21:13) And rather than criticizing fellow worshipers, the elders ought to be encouraging and upbuilding.—1 Corinthians 8:1.

¹⁴ All of us need to keep free from murmuring, for the spirit of complaint is spiritually unwholesome. Such an attitude would disrupt our unity. Instead, let us always allow the holy spirit to produce love in us. (Galatians 5:22) Complying with 'the kingly law of love' will help us to keep on serving Jehovah shoulder to shoulder.—James 2:8; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8; 1 Peter 4:8.

Guard Against Slander

¹⁵ Since murmuring can lead to harmful gossip, we must be careful about what we say. Gossip is idle talk about people and their affairs. Slander, though, is a false report intended to damage another person's reputation. Such talk is malicious and ungodly. God therefore told the Israelites: "You must not go around among your people for the sake of slandering."—Leviticus 19:16.

¹⁶ Since idle talk may lead to slander, Paul spoke out against certain gossips. After mentioning widows who qualified for congregation assistance, he referred to widows who learned "to be unoccupied, gadding about to the houses; yes, not only unoccupied, but also gossips and meddlers in

14. To keep free from murmuring, what quality is especially needed?

15. How would you differentiate between gossip and slander?

16. What did Paul say about certain gossips, and how should we be affected by his counsel?

other people's affairs, talking of things they ought not." (1 Timothy 5:11-15) If a Christian woman finds that she has a weakness for the kind of talk that could lead to slander, she will do well to heed Paul's counsel to be "serious, not slanderous." (1 Timothy 3:11) Of course, Christian men must also guard against harmful gossip.—Proverbs 10:19.

Stop Judging!

¹⁷ Even if we do not slander anyone, we may have to make an earnest effort to avoid becoming judgmental. Jesus condemned such a spirit when he said: "Stop judging that you may not be judged; for with what judgment you are judging, you will be judged; and with the measure that you are measuring out, they will measure out to you. Why, then, do you look at the straw in your brother's eye, but do not consider the rafter in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Allow me to extract the straw from your eye';

17, 18. (a) What did Jesus say about judging our brother? (b) How can we apply Jesus' words about judging?

Loyal Christians joyfully serve Jehovah shoulder to shoulder

when, look! a rafter is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First extract the rafter from your own eye, and then you will see clearly how to extract the straw from your brother's eye." —Matthew 7:1-5.

¹⁸ We should not presume to offer to extract a mere "straw" from our brother's eye to help him when our own ability to render proper judgment is impaired by a figurative "rafter." In fact, if we really appreciate how merciful God is, we will not be inclined to judge our spiritual brothers and sisters. How could we possibly understand them as well as our heavenly Father does? No wonder Jesus warned us to 'stop judging that we may not be judged'! An honest appraisal of our own imperfections ought to hold us back from making judgments that God would consider unrighteous.

Frail but Honorable

¹⁹ If we are determined to serve God shoulder to shoulder with fellow believers, we will not just avoid being judgmental. We will take the lead in showing them honor. (Romans

19. How should we view fellow believers?



12:10) In fact, we will seek their advantage, not our own, and will joyfully perform humble tasks in their behalf. (John 13:12-17; 1 Corinthians 10:24) How can we maintain such a fine spirit? By bearing in mind that every believer is precious to Jehovah and that we need one another, just as each member of the human body is dependent on the others.—1 Corinthians 12:14-27.

²⁰ Admittedly, Christians are frail earthen vessels entrusted with the glorious treasure of the ministry. (2 Corinthians 4:7) If we are to carry out this blessed activity to Jehovah's praise, we must maintain an honorable standing before him and his Son. Only by staying morally and spiritually pure can we remain an honorable vessel for God's use. In this regard, Paul wrote: "In a large house there are vessels not only of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, and some for an honorable purpose but others for a purpose lacking honor. If, therefore, anyone keeps clear of the latter ones, he will be a vessel for an honorable purpose, sanctified, useful to his owner, prepared for every good work."—2 Timothy 2:20, 21.

²¹ Individuals who do not conduct themselves in harmony with divine requirements are 'vessels lacking honor.' By pursuing a godly course, however, we will be 'vessels for an honorable purpose, sanctified, or set apart, for Jehovah's service and prepared for every good work.' So we may well ask ourselves: 'Am I an "honorable vessel"? Do I have a good effect on fellow believers? Am I a member of the congregation who works shoulder to shoulder with fellow worshipers?' *Continue Serving Shoulder to Shoulder*

²² The Christian congregation is a family-like arrangement. There is a loving, helpful,

20, 21. What meaning do the words of 2 Timothy 2:20, 21 have for us?

22. To what may the Christian congregation be compared?

and pleasant atmosphere in a family when all its members worship Jehovah. A family may be composed of a number of individuals with varying personalities, but everyone has an honorable place. The situation is similar in the congregation. Though all of us are different—and imperfect—God has drawn us to himself through Christ. (John 6:44; 14:6) Jehovah and Jesus love us, and like a united family, we definitely need to show love for one another.—1 John 4:7-11.

²³ The familylike Christian congregation is also a place where we rightly expect to find loyalty. The apostle Paul wrote: "I desire that in every place the men carry on prayer, lifting up loyal hands, apart from wrath and debates." (1 Timothy 2:8) Paul thus associated loyalty with public prayer "in every place" where Christians meet together. Only loyal men should represent the congregation in public prayer. Of course, God expects all of us to be loyal to him and to one another. (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14) Let us therefore be determined to work together harmoniously, like the members of the human body. May we also serve unitedly as part of the family of Jehovah's worshipers. Above all, let us remember that we need one another and will enjoy divine approval and blessings if we keep on serving Jehovah shoulder to shoulder.

23. What should we remember and be determined to do?

How Would You Answer?

- What enables Jehovah's people to serve him shoulder to shoulder?
- Why do Christians avoid partiality?
- What would you say is wrong with murmuring?
- Why should we honor fellow believers?

How Can We Make Our Days Count Before Jehovah?

"Lost, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered, for they are gone forever!"—Lydia H. Sigourney, American author (1791-1865).

THE days of our life seem few and fleeting. The psalmist David pondered the brevity of life and was moved to pray: "Cause me, O Jehovah, to know my end, and the measure of my days—what it is, that I may know how transient I am. Look! You have made my days just a few; and my life's duration is as nothing in front of you." David's concern was to live in such a way as to please God, both by his speech and by his actions. Voicing his dependence on God, he said: "My expectation is toward you." (Psalm 39:4, 5, 7) Jehovah listened. He did indeed measure David's activities and reward him accordingly.

It is easy to be busy every minute of the day and to be swept along in a life that is fast-paced and full of activities. This could arouse in us an anxious concern, especially with so much to do and to experience and so little time to do it. Is our concern the same as that of David—to live our life so as to have God's approval? To be sure, Jehovah does observe and carefully examine each of us. Job, a man who feared God, acknowledged some 3,600 years ago that Jehovah saw his ways and counted all his steps. Job rhetorically asked: "When he calls for an accounting, what can I answer him?" (Job 31:4-6, 14) It is possible to make our days count before God by estab-

lishing spiritual priorities, obeying his commands, and using our time wisely. Let us give closer consideration to these matters.

Make Spiritual Matters Our Primary Concern

The inspired Scriptures rightly urge us to establish spiritual priorities when they say: "Make sure of the more important things." What are these important things? The answer involves "accurate knowledge and full discernment." (Philippians 1:9, 10) Acquiring knowledge of Jehovah's purpose calls for wise use of our time. However, making spiritual matters our primary concern will assure us of a life that is rewarding and fulfilling.

The apostle Paul reminds us to "keep on making sure of what is acceptable to the Lord." Our *making sure* must involve self-examination of our motives and desires of the heart. The apostle continues: "Go on perceiving what the will of Jehovah is." (Ephesians 5:10, 17) So, what does Jehovah find acceptable? A Bible proverb answers: "Wisdom is the prime thing. Acquire wisdom; and with all that you acquire, acquire understanding. Highly esteem it, and it will exalt you." (Proverbs 4:7, 8) Jehovah rejoices over a person who acquires and exercises godly wisdom.

(Proverbs 23:15) The beauty of such wisdom is that it cannot be taken away or destroyed. In fact, it becomes a safeguard and a protection 'from the bad way and from those speaking perverse things.'—Proverbs 2:10-15.

How wise it is, then, to resist any tendency toward adopting a casual approach to spiritual matters! We need to cultivate an appreciative attitude for Jehovah's sayings and a healthy fear of him. (Proverbs 23:17, 18) While such a mental disposition can be acquired at any time in life, it is best to establish this right pattern and to imprint Bible principles on our personality during youth. "Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood," says wise King Solomon.—Ecclesiastes 12:1.

The most intimate way to cultivate an appreciation for Jehovah is through personal prayer to him each day. David recognized the importance of confiding in Jehovah, for he pleaded: "Do hear my prayer, O Jehovah, and to my cry for help do give ear. At my tears do not keep silent." (Psalm 39:12) Does the depth of our intimacy with God at times touch our emotions to the point of tears? Indeed, the more we communicate with Jehovah about intimate matters of the heart and meditate on his Word, the closer he draws to us.—James 4:8.

Learn Obedience

Moses was another man of faith who recognized his dependence on God. Like David, Moses could see that life is filled with trouble. He therefore petitioned God to show him 'how to count his days in such a way as to bring in a heart of wisdom.' (Psalm 90:10-12) A heart of wisdom would come only from learning and living



Christians take a serious view of spiritual matters

in accord with Jehovah's laws and principles. Moses knew this and subsequently endeavored to impress that vital truth upon the nation of Israel by repeating God's laws and regulations to them prior to their taking possession of the Promised Land. Any human king whom Jehovah would later choose to rule over Israel was to write for himself a copy of the Law and read in it all the days of his life. Why? In order that he might learn to fear God. This would be a test of a king's obedience. It would protect him from exalting his heart above his brothers and would also lengthen his days upon his kingdom. (Deuteronomy 17:18-20) This promise was reiterated when Jehovah said to David's son Solomon: "If you will walk in my ways by keeping my regulations and my commandments, just as David your father walked, I will also lengthen your days."—1 Kings 3:10-14.

Obedience is a serious matter with God. If we were to trivialize certain aspects of Jehovah's requirements and commands as if unimportant, he would surely take notice of such an attitude. (Proverbs 15:3) Knowing this should move us to maintain a high regard for all of Jehovah's divine directives, even though doing so may not always be easy. Satan does all he can to "cut across our path" as we strive to heed God's laws and commands.—1 Thessalonians 2:18.

It is particularly important to comply with the Scriptural counsel to meet together for worship and fellowship. (Deuteronomy 31:12, 13; Hebrews 10:24, 25) So we do well to ask ourselves: 'Do I have the determination and persistence necessary to do what is really



Are you using
your time
wisely?



worthwhile? To neglect association and instruction at Christian meetings for the sake of trying to ensure financial security would weaken our relationship with Jehovah. The apostle Paul wrote: "Let your manner of life be free of the love of money, while you are content with the present things. For [Jehovah] has said: 'I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you.'" (Hebrews 13:5) Willing obedience to Jehovah's commands shows implicit trust that he will care for us.

Jesus learned obedience and benefited. So can we. (Hebrews 5:8) The more we cultivate obedience, the more readily it will come, even in little things. True, because of our integrity, we may have to cope with unpleasant and even harsh treatment from others. Especially may this be so in the workplace, at school, or in a religiously divided household. Yet, we find comfort in the declaration made to the Israelites that if they 'loved Jehovah by listening to his voice and by sticking to him, he would be their life and the length of their days.' (Deuteronomy 30:20) This same promise is held out to us.

Use Time Wisely

Wise use of our time will also help us to make our days count before Jehovah. Unlike money that can be saved, time must be spent, or it will be lost. Every hour that passes is gone forever. Since there is always more to do than we can handle, are we spending our time in line with our objectives in life? A major objective of all Christians should be regular participation in the Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making work.

—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

Wise use of our time comes only after we are keenly aware of its value.

Aptly, Ephesians 5:16 urges us to 'buy out the opportune time for ourselves,' and this implies "purchasing" it, forgoing less important things. It means reducing time-wasting pursuits. Too much television viewing or surfing of the Internet, reading of unprofitable secular material, or the excessive pursuit of recreation and entertainment can leave us exhausted. Additionally, an inordinate accumulation of material possessions can consume the time needed to acquire a heart of wisdom.

Advocates of careful time management say: "It is impossible to make good use of your time without a set of well-defined goals." They suggest five criteria for setting goals: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed.

One worthwhile goal is to improve in our Bible reading. The first step is to make our goal specific—to read the *entire* Bible. The next step is to make our goal measurable. By doing this, we can chart our progress. Goals should make us stretch and grow. They must also be achievable and realistic. Personal abilities, skills, and available time must be taken into consideration. For some, more time may be required to accomplish the goal. Finally, our goal needs to be timed. Setting a date for accomplishing something may well increase motivation to get it done.

All members of the global Bethel family, who serve at the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses or at one of its branches worldwide, have a specific goal to read the entire Bible during their first year at Bethel. They realize that profitable Bible reading contributes to their spiritual growth and to a closer relationship with Jehovah, who is teaching them to benefit themselves. (Isaiah 48:17) Can we make regular Bible reading our goal as well?

Benefits of Making Our Days Count

Giving paramount attention to spiritual matters will result in manifold blessings. For one thing, it contributes to a greater sense of accomplishment and purpose in life. Regular communication with Jehovah in heartfelt prayer draws us closer to him. The very action of praying shows our trust in him. Daily reading of the Bible and Bible-based publications provided by "the faithful and discreet slave" demonstrates our willingness to listen to God as he speaks to us. (Matthew 24:45-47) This helps us acquire a heart of wisdom so as to make right decisions and choices in life. —Psalm 1:1-3.

We delight to obey Jehovah's commandments, for doing so is not a burden. (1 John 5:3) As we make each day count before Jehovah, we strengthen our relationship with him. We also become a true spiritual support to our fellow Christians. Such actions make Jehovah God glad. (Proverbs 27:11) And there is no greater reward than to enjoy Jehovah's approval now and forever!

We strengthen our relationship with Jehovah as we make each day count with him



"COME TO ME, . . . AND I WILL REFRESH YOU"

"Shepherd the Flock of God"

"You are always there to lend a hearing ear and share words from the Bible that lift our spirits."—Pamela.

"Thank you for all you do in behalf of all of us. It really makes a difference."—Robert.

PAMELA and Robert were moved to write these words of appreciation to the Christian elders in their respective congregations. Others among God's servants worldwide also are thankful for the continuing support and care they receive from those who "shepherd the flock of God." (1 Peter 5:2) Indeed, Jehovah's people are grateful for the many things that the elders do in their behalf and for the manner in which they do them.

"Having Plenty to Do"

Christian elders are entrusted with numerous responsibilities. (Luke 12:48) They prepare talks for congregation meetings and share in publicly preaching the good news of God's Kingdom. Their duties include making shepherding calls on fellow believers. The elders devote time to those in need of special attention—the elderly and others—all without neglecting the spiritual and material welfare of their own families. (Job



29:12-15; 1 Timothy 3:4, 5; 5:8) Some elders help to build Kingdom Halls. Others serve on Hospital Liaison Committees or are members of Patient Visitation Groups. And many of them perform volunteer work at assemblies and conventions. Yes, elders have "plenty to do in the work of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58) No wonder such hardworking elders are deeply appreciated by those entrusted to their care!

—1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.

Elders who regularly visit fellow Christians at home or elsewhere in order to strengthen them spiritually are a source of encouragement.

"If it were not for the loving support and encouragement of the elders," said Thomas, who grew up without a father in the home, "I don't think I would be serving Jehovah as a full-time minister today." Many youths raised in single-parent families acknowledge that the attention they received from the elders helped them to develop a personal relationship with God.

Shepherding visits are also much valued by older ones in the congregation. After a mission-



ary couple in their mid-80's were visited by two elders, they wrote: "We want to express our appreciation for your very welcome visit. After you left, we again read the scriptures that you considered with us. We will never forget your words of encouragement." A 70-year-old widow wrote to the elders: "I have been praying to Jehovah for help, and he sent you two brothers to my home. Your visit was a blessing from Jehovah!" Have you recently benefited from a visit made by elders in your congregation? Surely all of us appreciate their efforts in shepherding the flock in their care!

Shepherds Who Imitate God and Christ

Jehovah is a loving Shepherd. (Psalm 23:1-4; Jeremiah 31:10; 1 Peter 2:25) Jesus Christ is also an outstanding spiritual Shepherd. In fact, he is called "the fine shepherd," "the great shepherd," and "the chief shepherd." (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4) How did Jesus deal with those who wished to become his disciples? He gave them the warm invitation: "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you."—Matthew 11:28.

Elders today likewise strive to be a source of refreshment and protection to the flock. Such men "prove to be like a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rain-storm, like streams of water in a waterless country, like the shadow of a heavy crag in an exhausted land." (Isaiah 32:2) Such kind protectors bring refreshment, earn the respect of the flock, and gain God's approval.—Philippians 2:29; 1 Timothy 5:17.

Valuable Support From Their Wives

God's people are grateful for Christian elders and for the loving support these men receive from their wives. Being supportive often calls for sacrifices on the part of such women. At times, they are at home while their husbands are caring for congregation matters or are making shepherding calls. Sometimes, carefully made personal plans are set aside because some urgent problem arises in the congregation. "Even so," said Michelle, "when I see how busy my husband is preparing for the meetings or making shepherding calls, I keep in mind that he is

doing Jehovah's work, and I try to be as supportive as I can."

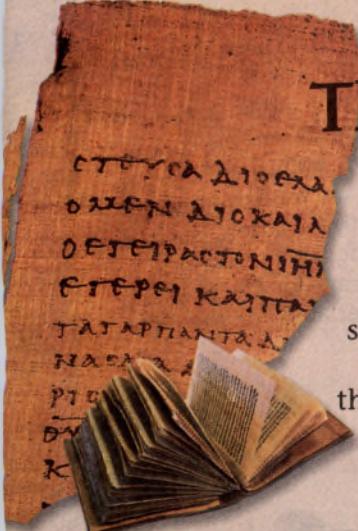
Cheryl, also married to an elder, stated: "I know that the brothers and sisters in the congregation need elders to talk to, and I want them to feel that they can come to my husband anytime they need him." Supportive women, such as Michelle and Cheryl, willingly make sacrifices so that their husbands can care for God's sheep. Wives of elders are appreciated for their supportive spirit.



Yet, a busy elder must not overlook the spiritual and other needs of his wife and children. A married elder must be "free from accusation, a husband of one wife, having believing children that [are] not under a charge of debauchery nor unruly." (Titus 1:6) He must care for his family in the godly manner Scripturally required of Christian overseers.—1 Timothy 3:1-7.

For a busy elder, a supportive wife is priceless! That is how thoughtful married elders feel. It is just as the Bible says: "Has one found a good wife? One has found a good thing." (Proverbs 18:22) In word and deed, such elders show their wives heartfelt appreciation. In addition to earnest prayer and pleasurable study together, these Christian married couples set aside time to enjoy such things as a walk on the beach, a hike in the woods, or a stroll in a park. Yes, elders find joy in giving their wives loving care.—1 Peter 3:7.

Elders who unselfishly shepherd the flock of God are a source of spiritual refreshment to Jehovah's people. They are truly "gifts in men," a blessing to the congregation!—Ephesians 4:8, 11-13.



The Struggle for a Bible in MODERN GREEK

You may be surprised to learn that in Greece, the land sometimes called the cradle of free thought, translation of the Bible into the language of the common people has been the focus of a long and bitter struggle. But who would resist the production of an easy-to-understand Greek Bible?

Why would anyone want to stop it?

ONE might think that Greek-speaking people are privileged, since a considerable part of the Holy Scriptures was originally written in their language. Modern Greek, though, is significantly different from the Greek of the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and from that of the Christian Greek Scriptures. In fact, for the past six centuries, most Greek-speaking people have found Biblical Greek to be as unfamiliar as a foreign language. New words have replaced older terms, and vocabulary, grammar, and syntax have changed.

A collection of Greek manuscripts dating from the 3rd to the 16th century testifies to an effort to translate the *Septuagint* into a later form of Greek. In the third century, Gregory, bishop of Neocaesarea (c. 213-c. 270 C.E.), rendered the book of Ecclesiastes from the *Septuagint* into simpler Greek. In the 11th century, a Jew named Tobias ben Eli-ezer living in Macedonia translated portions of the *Septuagint's* Pentateuch into everyday Greek. He even used Hebrew characters for the benefit of Macedonian Jews who spoke only Greek but read the Hebrew script. A complete Pentateuch of this kind was published in Constantinople in 1547.

Some Light Amid Darkness

After the Greek-speaking areas of the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottomans in the 15th century, the majority of the people there were left in want of education. The Orthodox Church, although greatly privileged under the Ottoman Empire, neglectfully allowed its flock to become a poor and uneducated peasantry. Greek writer Thomas Spelios commented: "The all-absorbing goal of the Orthodox Church and its educational system was to protect its communicants from the inroads of Islam and Roman Catholic propaganda. As a result, Greek education was somewhat stagnant." In such a gloomy atmosphere, Bible-loving individuals felt the need to provide the distressed people with relief and consolation from the Bible book of Psalms. From 1543 to 1835, there were 18 translations of the Psalms into spoken Greek.

The first Greek translation of the complete Christian Greek Scriptures was prepared in 1630 by Maximus Callipolites, a Greek monk of Callipolis. This took place under the direction and auspices of Cyril Lucaris, patriarch of Constantinople and a would-be reformer of the Orthodox Church. Within the church, Lucaris had opponents, how-

ever, who would not accept any reform attempts or agree to any translation of the Bible into the spoken language.* He was strangled as a traitor. Nevertheless, some 1,500 copies of the translation by Maximus were printed in 1638. In response to this translation, 34 years later an Orthodox synod in Jerusalem declared that the Scriptures "should be read, not by just anyone, but only by the ones peering into the deep things of the spirit after having done appropriate research." This meant that the Scriptures should be read only by the educated clergymen.

In 1703, Seraphim, a Greek monk from the island of Lesbos, tried to publish a revision of the Maximus translation in London. When promises for financial help from the English court failed, he printed the revision using his own money. In a fiery prologue, Seraphim stressed the need for "every godly Christian" to read the Bible, and he accused the high-ranking clergymen of the church of "desiring to cover up their misbehavior by keeping the people in ignorance." As might have been expected, his Orthodox opponents had him arrested in Russia and exiled to Siberia, where he died in 1735.

Commenting on the deep spiritual hunger of the Greek-speaking people during that time, a Greek clergyman made the following statement regarding a later revision of the Maximus translation: "The Greeks received this Holy Bible, along with the others, with love and with craving. And they read it. And they felt the pain within them soothed, and their faith in God . . . flared up." However, their spiritual leaders feared that if people



Cyril Lucaris directed the first Greek translation of the complete Christian Greek Scriptures in 1630

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were to understand the Bible, then the clergy would be exposed for their unscriptural beliefs and deeds. Therefore, in 1823 and again in 1836, the patriarchate of Constantinople issued an edict to burn all copies of such Bible translations.

A Courageous Translator

Against this backdrop of fierce opposition and earnest yearning for Bible knowledge, there emerged a prominent figure who would play a key role in the translation of the Bible into modern Greek. This courageous person was Neofitos Vamvas, a distinguished linguist and noted Bible scholar, generally regarded as one of the "Teachers of the Nation."

Vamvas clearly saw that the Orthodox Church was to blame for the spiritual illiteracy of the people. He strongly believed that in order to awaken the people spiritually, the Bible needed to be translated into the spoken Greek of the day. In 1831, with the help of other scholars, he began translating the Bible into literary Greek. His complete translation was published in 1850. Since the Greek Orthodox Church would not support him, he collaborated with the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) on the publication and circulation of his translation. The church labeled him "a Protestant," and soon he found himself an outcast.

Vamvas' rendering adhered closely to the King James Version and inherited the deficiencies of that version because of the limited Bible scholarship and linguistic knowledge of the time. Yet, for many years it was the closest thing to a Bible in modern Greek that people had access to. Interestingly, it includes the personal name of God four times, in the form "Ieová."—Genesis 22:14; Exodus 6:3; 17:15; Judges 6:24.

* For more information on Cyril Lucaris, see *The Watchtower*, February 15, 2000, pages 26-9.

*Some translations into the spoken Greek: Psalms printed in:
(1) 1828 by Ilarion, (2) 1832 by Vamvas, (3) 1643 by Julianus.
"Old Testament" printed in:
(4) 1840 by Vamvas*



What was the general reaction of the people to this and other easy-to-understand versions of the Bible? Simply overwhelming! In a boat off one of the Greek islands, a colporteur of the BFBS was "so beset with boats full of children who came for [Bibles], that he was obliged . . . to order the captain to get under way" lest he should part with his whole stock in one place! But the opposition did not stand idly by.

Orthodox priests warned the people against such translations. In the city of Athens, for instance, Bibles were confiscated. In 1833, the Orthodox bishop of Crete committed to the flames the "New Testaments" he discovered at a monastery. One copy was hidden by a priest, and the people in the nearby villages hid their copies until the prelate left the island.

Some years later on the island of Corfu, Vamvas' translation of the Bible was prohibited by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church. Its sale was forbidden, and the existing copies were destroyed. On the islands of Chios, Síros, and Mykonos, the hostility of the local clergy led to Bible burning. But further suppression of Bible translation was yet ahead.

A Queen Takes an Interest in the Bible

During the 1870's, Queen Olga of Greece realized that the Greek people in general still had little knowledge of the Bible. Believing

that knowledge of the Scriptures would provide solace and refreshment to the nation, she sought to have the Bible rendered into a simpler language than that of the Vamvas version.

Unofficially, the archbishop of Athens and the head of the Holy Synod, Prokopios, encouraged the queen in this undertaking. When she applied to the Holy Synod for official approval, however, she was turned down. Nevertheless, she persisted, submitting a new application, only to receive a second refusal, in 1899. Ignoring the disapproval, she decided to publish a limited edition at her own expense. This was accomplished in 1900.

Die-Hard Opponents

In 1901, *The Acropolis*, a prominent Athenian newspaper, published the Gospel of Matthew rendered in the Demotic Greek by Alexander Pallis, a translator working in Liverpool, England. The apparent motive of Pallis and his colleagues was to 'educate the



Queen Olga

Greeks' and to "help the nation recover" from decline.

Orthodox theology students and their professors called the rendering "a ridiculing of the nation's most valuable relics," a desecration of Holy Writ. Patriarch Joakim III of Constantinople issued a document disapproving the rendering. The controversy took on political dimensions, and it was used in a devious way by warring political camps.

An influential part of the Athenian press started attacking the Pallis translation, labeling its supporters "atheists," "traitors," and "agents of foreign powers" who were bent on destabilizing Greek society. From November 5 to 8, 1901, at the instigation of ultraconservative elements of the Greek Orthodox Church, students rioted in Athens. They attacked the offices of *The Acropolis*, marched against the palace, took over the University of Athens, and demanded that the government resign. At the climax of the riots, eight people were killed in clashes with the army. The next day, the king demanded the resignation of Archbishop Prokopios, and two days later the whole Cabinet stepped down.

One month later the students demonstrated again and publicly burned a copy of the Pallis translation. They issued a resolution against the circulation of this translation and asked for severe punishment for any such attempt in the future. This served as an excuse to prohibit the use of any modern Greek version of the Bible. A dark moment indeed!

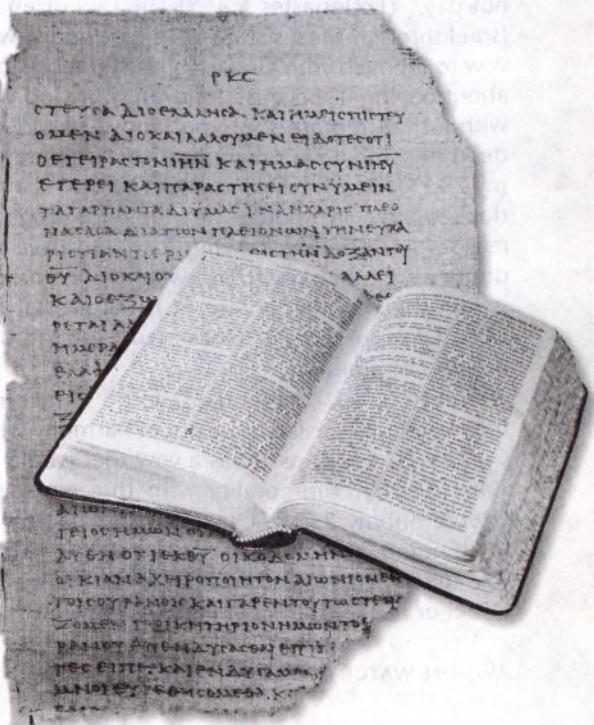
"The Saying of Jehovah Endures Forever"

The prohibition against using the Bible in modern Greek was repealed in 1924. Since then, the Greek Orthodox Church has suffered a complete defeat in its efforts to keep the Bible from the people. In the meantime, Jehovah's Witnesses have spearheaded Bible education in Greece, as they have in many

other countries. Since 1905, they have used the Vamvas translation to help thousands of Greek-speaking people acquire knowledge of Bible truth.

Over the years, many scholars and professors have made commendable efforts to produce a Bible in modern Greek. Today, there are about 30 renderings of the Bible, in whole or in part, that are readable to the average Greek. A true gem among them is the Greek version of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, released in 1997 for the benefit of the 16 million people worldwide who speak the Greek language. Produced by Jehovah's Witnesses, this translation renders the Word of God in an easy-to-read, understandable way, faithfully adhering to the original text.

The struggle for a Bible in modern Greek illustrates an important fact. It clearly indicates that despite hostile human efforts, "the saying of Jehovah endures forever."—1 Peter 1:25.



Questions From Readers

Are vows made to God always binding?

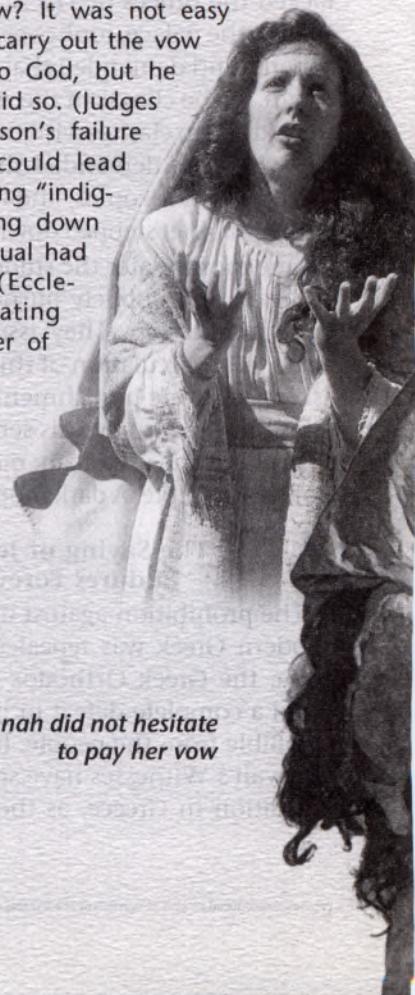
Scripturally, a vow is a solemn promise made to God to perform an act, make an offering, enter a service or condition, or abstain from certain things not unlawful in themselves. The Bible contains accounts of vows that were conditional in that they involved a pledge to follow a stated course if God first did something. For example, Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, "went on to make a vow and say: 'O Jehovah of armies, if . . . you will not forget your slave girl and actually give to your slave girl a male offspring, I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and no razor will come upon his head.'" (1 Samuel 1:11) The Bible also describes vows as being voluntary. How binding are Scriptural vows?

"Whenever you vow a vow to God," says King Solomon of ancient Israel, "do not hesitate to pay it." He adds: "What you vow, pay. Better is it that you vow not than that you vow and do not pay." (Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5) The Law given to Israel through Moses states: "In case you vow a vow to Jehovah your God, you must not be slow about paying it, because Jehovah your God will without fail require it of you, and it would indeed become a sin on your part." (Deuteronomy 23:21) Clearly, making a vow to God is a serious matter. It should be done for a good reason, and the one making it should have no doubt as to his ability to pay whatever he promises in the vow. Otherwise, it is better that he does not make the vow. Once made, though, are all vows binding?

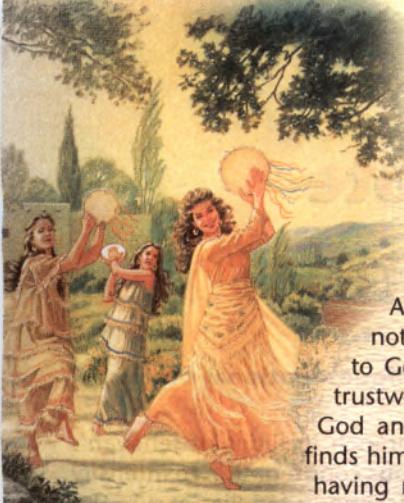
What if a vow called on one to do something that was later learned to be out of harmony with God's will? Suppose it was a vow that would in some way link immorality with true worship? (Deuteronomy 23:18) Obviously, such a vow is not binding. Moreover, under the Mosaic Law, a vow made by a woman could be annulled by her father or her husband.—Numbers 30:3-15.

Consider also the case of an individual who has made a vow to God to remain single but now finds himself in a dilemma. His vow has placed him in a position where he feels that carrying it out is bringing him near the point of violating divine standards regarding morality. Should he still strive to pay his vow? Would it not be better for him to protect himself from becoming guilty of immorality by not paying his vow and instead throwing himself upon God's mercy and begging for forgiveness? Only he himself can decide on the matter. No other human can make the decision for him.

What if one makes a vow that he later realizes was made rashly? Should he still seek to fulfill the vow? It was not easy for Jephthah to carry out the vow that he made to God, but he conscientiously did so. (Judges 11:30-40) A person's failure to pay a vow could lead to God's becoming "indignant" and tearing down what the individual had accomplished. (Ecclesiastes 5:6) Treating lightly the matter of



Hannah did not hesitate to pay her vow



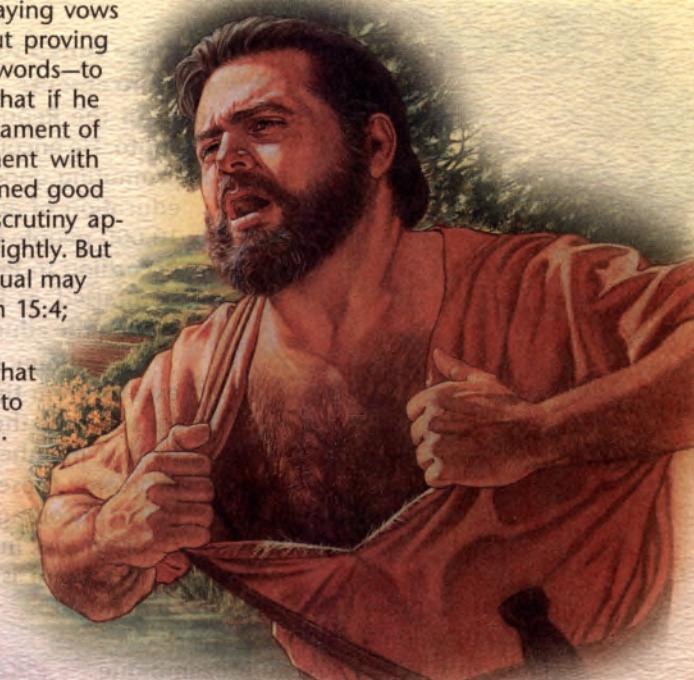
fulfilling a vow could result in a withdrawing of God's favor.

Jesus Christ said: "Just let your word Yes mean Yes, your No, No; for what is in excess of these is from the wicked one." (Matthew 5:37)

Although doing so was difficult, Jephthah paid his vow

A Christian must be concerned not merely about paying vows to God but also about proving trustworthy in all his words—to God and to humans. What if he finds himself in the predicament of having made an agreement with another person that seemed good at first but upon closer scrutiny appears foolish? He should not view such matters lightly. But because of earnest discussion, the other individual may decide to relieve him of the obligation.—Psalm 15:4; Proverbs 6:2, 3.

With regard to vows and all other things, what should be our main concern? Let us always seek to maintain a good relationship with Jehovah God.



IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

What Joshua Remembered

Enjoy Personal Study
of God's Word

Strengthen Your Hands

Efforts That Promote Good Moral Standards



Late in 2001, those tuned to Radio Mozambique's national broadcast heard this announcement:

"The president of the Republic visited the branch facilities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Maputo. He encouraged this religious congregation to intensify their efforts in promoting good moral standards among families and in the education of adults through their literacy programs. About 10,000 people have already benefited from these programs. According to President Chissano, incentives like these are to be praised, as they are a valuable contribution to society in solving the educational problems that this country still faces."



The announcement continued with the following recorded excerpt from the president's speech: "It is very encouraging for us to see the interest of many people in literacy. It shows us that members of the civil sector are going to help us to overcome these low literacy indexes. Therefore, I would just like to encourage Jehovah's Witnesses to intensify their literacy programs, in whatever language. What is really important is that there is literacy and that people can communicate

more easily and in the future have a greater participation in education."

Jehovah's Witnesses in Mozambique hold literacy classes in 850 places nationwide in order that people can read God's Word for themselves. In addition, they conduct some 50,000 free home Bible studies each week. All of this is part of a worldwide Bible educational program that now reaches into 235 lands. (Matthew 24:14) You too can benefit from this program. Please feel free to contact Jehovah's Witnesses in your locality.

