

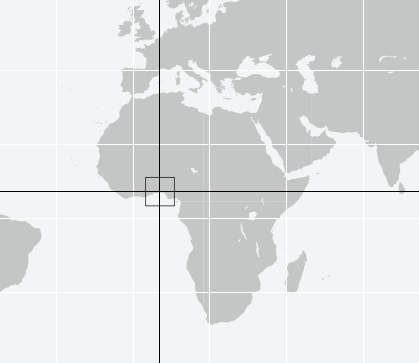
OCTOBER 2017

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 24, 2017



COVER IMAGE:

NIGERIA

One of the many metropolitan witnessing stands in Lagos, the most populous city in Africa. At this one location, an average of six Bible studies are requested every month

PUBLISHERS

370,336

BIBLE STUDIES

870,185

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE
(2016)

774,874

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THE **WATCHTOWER**[®]
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Blessings Come From Doing What Jehovah Asks

AS TOLD BY OLIVE MATTHEWS



In Hemsworth shortly after our wedding in 1949

“We’ll do that!” This is how my husband and I, along with my brother and his wife, responded to an invitation to take up an assignment. Why did we accept it, and how did Jehovah bless us? First, let me tell you about my background.

I WAS born in 1923 in Hemsworth, a town in Yorkshire, England. I had one older brother, Bob. When I was about nine years old, our father, who disliked religious hypocrisy, obtained some books exposing false religion. He was very impressed by what he read. A few years later, Bob Atkinson called at our house and played a phonograph record of one of Brother Rutherford’s talks. We realized that this came from the same group that published those books! My parents suggested that Brother Atkinson have his evening meal with us every night and answer our many Bible questions. We were invited to attend meetings at a brother’s home a few miles away. We quickly responded, and a small congregation

was formed in Hemsworth. Soon we were accommodating zone servants (now known as circuit overseers) and inviting nearby pioneers for meals. Association with them really left an impression on me.

We had begun setting up a business, but Father said to my brother, “If you want to go pioneering, we’ll get rid of this.” Bob agreed, and he left home to pioneer at age 21. Two years later, when I was 16, I was appointed as a pioneer. Apart from weekends, I worked mostly alone, using a testimony card and a phonograph. But Jehovah blessed me with a Bible student who made wonderful progress. Many in that student’s family eventually accepted the truth. The following year, I was appointed as a special pioneer, along with Mary Henshall. We were sent to unassigned territory in the county of Cheshire.

It was now the middle of World War II, and women were directed to assist in the war effort. As full-time ministers, we special pioneers expected to receive the same exemption as other religious ministers. But the courts did not agree, so I was sentenced to 31 days in prison. The following year when I turned 19, I registered as a conscientious objector. I was brought before two



With fellow pioneers
on a motorcycle
and sidecar



Our car
and camper trailer

tribunal courts, but my case was dismissed. All through this experience, I knew that holy spirit was helping me and that Jehovah was holding my hand, making me firm and strong.—Isa. 41: 10, 13.

A NEW PARTNER

Arthur Matthews and I met in 1946. Having just served a three-month prison sentence as a conscientious objector, he joined his brother Dennis, a special pioneer, in Hemsworth. They had been taught about Jehovah from infancy by their father and got baptized as teenagers. Very soon Dennis was assigned to Ireland, leaving Arthur without a partner. Impressed with the way this young, hardworking pioneer conducted himself, my parents invited Arthur to stay with them. When I visited, Arthur and I would volunteer to wash the dishes after meals. Eventually we began writing to each other. During 1948, Arthur received another three-month prison sentence. We married in January 1949 with the goal of staying in full-time service as long as possible. With Jehovah's blessing and careful management, we used vacation time to earn some money picking fruit, so we were able to continue pioneering.

Just over a year later, we were asked to go to Northern Ireland, first to Armagh and then to Newry, both mostly Catholic towns. Tension in

the area was high, and we had to be very cautious and discerning when talking with people. Meetings were held in a brother and sister's home that was ten miles (16 km) away from where we lived. About eight attended. When invited to stay the night, we would sleep on the floor and enjoy a hearty breakfast the next day. It is a great joy to know that there are now many Witnesses in that area.

“WE’LL DO THAT!”

My brother and his wife, Lottie, were already serving as special pioneers in Northern Ireland, and in 1952 the four of us attended a district convention in Belfast. A brother kindly accommodated all of us, together with Pryce Hughes, then the branch servant in Britain. One night we discussed the release of the booklet *God's Way Is Love*, produced especially with Ireland in mind. Brother Hughes spoke of the difficulty in reaching Catholic people in the Irish Republic. Brothers were being put out of their accommodations and facing mob violence instigated by the priests. “We need couples with cars,” Pryce said, “to engage in a special campaign to distribute the booklet throughout the country.”* Our immediate response was, “We’ll do that!” Hence, the comment made at the beginning of this story.

* See the 1988 *Yearbook of Jehovah's Witnesses*, pp. 101-102.



Arthur greeting Nathan Knorr on his arrival for the 1965 convention



Arthur releases *My Book of Bible Stories* in Gaelic in 1983

One place where pioneers could always stay in Dublin was at the home of Ma Rutland, a long-time faithful sister. After a stop there and after selling some belongings, the four of us piled onto Bob's motorcycle and sidecar and went in search of an automobile. We found a suitable second-hand car and asked the seller to deliver it to us, since none of us could drive. Arthur spent that evening sitting on the bed, going through imaginary gearshift movements. The next morning while he was attempting to drive the car out of the garage, missionary Mildred Willett (who later married John Barr) came by. She could drive! Now on the road and with a little more practice, we were ready to go!

Next, we needed accommodations. We had been cautioned to avoid living in a trailer because opposers might set it on fire, so we searched for a home, but in vain. That night the four of us slept in the car. The next day, all we could find was a little homemade trailer with two small bunk beds. That became our home. Amazingly, we had no problem parking the trailer on the property of friendly farmers. We covered territory that was 10 to 15 miles (16 to 24 km) away. Then after moving on, we would return and call on those in the area where we had been parked.

We visited all the homes in the southeast of the Republic without much trouble at all, distribut-

ing over 20,000 booklets and passing on to the Britain branch office the names of interested people. What a blessing it is to have hundreds of Witnesses there now!

BACK TO ENGLAND, THEN ON TO SCOTLAND

In time, we were reassigned to south London. Within a few weeks, Arthur received a call from the Britain branch office asking him to begin circuit work the next day! After a week's training, we traveled to our circuit in Scotland. Arthur had no extra time to prepare his talks, but his readiness to meet challenges in Jehovah's service was of great encouragement to me. We really enjoyed our assignment in the circuit work. We had been in unassigned territory for some years, and now it was a wonderful blessing to be among so many brothers and sisters.

When Arthur received an invitation to attend the 1962 ten-month course at Gilead School, we had a big decision to make. We came to the conclusion that even though I was to be left behind, it was right for Arthur to accept this privilege. As I was to be without a partner, I was sent back to Hemsworth as a special pioneer. When Arthur returned a year later, we were assigned to the district work and covered Scotland, northern England, and Northern Ireland.

A NEW ASSIGNMENT IN IRELAND

In 1964, Arthur received a new assignment as branch servant in the Irish Republic. We had greatly enjoyed the traveling work, so at first I felt very apprehensive about the change. Looking back, now I am grateful to have been given the privilege of serving at Bethel. I believe that if you accept an assignment even when you don't really feel like doing it, you will always be blessed by Jehovah. My days were filled with office duties, packing literature, cooking, and cleaning. For some time, we were also in district work and were able to meet brothers throughout the country. This, along with seeing our Bible students make progress, created a strong bond with our spiritual family in Ireland. What a blessing!

A TURNING POINT IN IRELAND'S THEOCRATIC HISTORY

The first international convention in Ireland was held in Dublin in 1965.* Despite intense opposition on all fronts, the convention was a great success. A total of 3,948 attended, and 65 got baptized. Everyone who had provided accommodations for the 3,500 international delegates received a letter of appreciation. Householders, in turn, praised the delegates' conduct. It was indeed a turning point for Ireland.

In 1966 both north and south Ireland were united under the Dublin branch office—a sharp contrast to the political and religious divisions on the island. We were thrilled to see so many Catholics coming into the truth and serving alongside brothers who were once Protestants.

A COMPLETE CHANGE OF ASSIGNMENT

In 2011 our lives changed completely when the Britain and Ireland branches were merged and we were assigned to London Bethel. The news came at a time when I was beginning to be concerned about Arthur's health. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. On May 20, 2015, my companion of 66 years passed away in death.

In the last few years, I have felt heartbreak, depression, and grief. In the past, Arthur had always been there for me. How I miss him! But when you go through these kinds of situations, you draw closer to Jehovah. It has also been heartwarming to learn how much Arthur was loved. I have received letters from friends in Ireland, Britain, and even the United States. These letters, along with encouragement from Arthur's brother Dennis, his wife, Mavis, and my nieces Ruth and Judy, have helped me more than words can express.

A scripture that has greatly encouraged me is Isaiah 30:18. It says: "Jehovah is waiting patiently to show you favor, and he will rise up to show you mercy. For Jehovah is a God of justice. Happy are all those keeping in expectation of him." I have found it truly comforting to know that Jehovah is waiting patiently to remedy matters and to give us exciting assignments in his new world.

Looking back on our lives, I can see how Jehovah has guided and blessed the work in Ireland! I feel very privileged to have had a small share in that spiritual growth. It is undoubtedly true that doing what Jehovah asks of us always brings blessings.



* See the 1988 Yearbook, pp. 109-112.



“Love . . . in Deed and Truth”

*“We should love, not in word or with the tongue,
but in deed and truth.”—1 JOHN 3:18.*

LOVE based on right principles (*a-ga’pe*) is a gift from Jehovah. He is its Source. (1 John 4:7) This kind of love is the highest form of love. While it can include affection and warmth, it is primarily identified by unselfish actions for the good of others. According to one reference work, *a-ga’pe* “can be known only from the actions it prompts.” When we show or are shown unselfish love, our lives are enriched, being filled with joy and meaning.

² Jehovah showed love for humans even before he created Adam and Eve. He made the earth to be man’s everlasting home, a place where man does not just survive but enjoys life to the full. Jehovah did this solely for our benefit, not for personal gain. He further showed unselfish love by blessing his children on earth with the prospect of living forever in the Paradise that he had prepared for them.

³ After Adam and Eve rebelled, Jehovah made his greatest

1. What is the highest form of love, and why is that so? (See opening image.)

2, 3. How has Jehovah shown unselfish love for humans?

SONGS: 106, 100

CAN YOU RECALL?

What is the highest form of love?

What is “love free from hypocrisy”?

How can we be sure that our love is genuine?

expression of unselfish love. He arranged to ransom the future descendants of those two rebels, certain that some of them would respond favorably to His love. (Gen. 3:15; 1 John 4:10) In fact, from the moment that Jehovah promised a future Savior, He viewed this sacrifice as already made. Then, some 4,000 years later, Jehovah at great personal cost sacrificed his only-begotten Son for the world of mankind. (John 3:16) How grateful we are for Jehovah's unselfish love!

⁴ We are able to show unselfish love because God created us in his image. Inherited sin has made it challenging for us to manifest love, but it has not removed our ability to do so. Abel showed love for God by unselfishly offering the best of what he had. (Gen. 4:3, 4) Noah displayed unselfish love for his fellow man by preaching God's message for decades despite not seeing any response from the people. (2 Pet. 2:5) Abraham put his love for God ahead of his own feelings when he was commanded to offer up his son Isaac. (Jas. 2:21) Like those faithful men, we want to show love, despite the challenges we face.

GENUINE LOVE VERSUS COUNTERFEIT LOVE

⁵ The Bible explains that genuine love is shown, "not in word or with the tongue, but in deed and truth." (1 John 3:18) Does this mean that we cannot express love through our speech? Not at all! (1 Thess. 4:18) Rather, it means that our love must not be limited to words, especially when the circumstances call

4. What indicates that imperfect humans are able to show unselfish love?

5. In what ways can we show genuine love?

for action. For example, when a fellow Christian lacks the basic necessities of life, he needs more than our good wishes. (Jas. 2:15, 16) Similarly, love for Jehovah and our neighbor moves us not only to ask God 'to send out workers into the harvest' but also to have a full share in the preaching work.—Matt. 9:38.

⁶ The apostle John wrote that we must love "in deed *and truth*." Thus, our love must be "without hypocrisy," or "free from hypocrisy." (Rom. 12:9; 2 Cor. 6:6) This means that we cannot show genuine love while pretending to be something that we are not, as if we were wearing a mask. We might wonder, 'Is there such a thing as love *with* hypocrisy?' Not really. This would not be love at all but a worthless imitation.

⁷ Consider some examples of counterfeit love. In the garden of Eden, Satan pretended to be looking out for Eve's best interests, but his actions were actually selfish and hypocritical. (Gen. 3:4, 5) In David's day, Ahithophel proved that his friendship with the king was a fraud. Ahithophel turned traitor when he felt that he would gain an advantage. (2 Sam. 15:31) Likewise today, apostates and others who create divisions in the congregation use "smooth talk and flattering speech" to make themselves appear to be loving, but their true motive is selfish.—Rom. 16:17, 18.

⁸ Hypocritical love is especially shameful because it is a counterfeit of the godly quality of self-sacrificing love. Such hypocrisy might fool men, but not

6, 7. (a) What is "love free from hypocrisy"? (b) What are some examples of counterfeit love?

8. What question should we ask ourselves?

Jehovah. In fact, Jesus said that those who are like hypocrites would be punished “with the greatest severity.” (Matt. 24:51) Of course, Jehovah’s servants would never want to display hypocritical love. However, we do well to ask ourselves, ‘Is my love always genuine, not tainted by selfishness or deception?’ Let us consider nine ways we can strive to show love that is “free from hypocrisy.”

HOW TO SHOW “LOVE . . . IN DEED AND TRUTH”

⁹ *Be happy to serve in the background.* We should be willing to perform acts of love for our brothers “in secret,” or out of the limelight, when this is possible. **(Read Matthew 6:1-4.)** Ananias and Sapphira failed to do that. Not content to donate anonymously, they blatantly exaggerated their offering and suffered disaster for their hypocrisy. (Acts 5:1-10) In contrast, genuine love moves us to find joy in serving our brothers without fanfare or recognition. For instance, the brothers who support the Governing Body in helping to prepare spiritual food do so anonymously, not drawing attention to themselves or revealing the material they have worked on.

¹⁰ *Take the lead in showing honor to others.* **(Read Romans 12:10.)** Jesus set the pattern in honoring others by performing the lowliest of tasks. (John 13:3-5, 12-15) We may have to work hard to develop the humility needed to show honor to others in this way. Even the apostles could not fully understand Jesus’ actions until they received holy spirit.

(John 13:7) We can show honor to others by not thinking too much of ourselves because of our education, material possessions, or privileges in Jehovah’s service. (Rom. 12:3) And rather than envying those who receive praise, we rejoice with them even if we feel that we deserve equal honor or a share of the credit for what was done.

¹¹ *Commend your brothers sincerely.* We should seize opportunities to commend one another because such expressions are “good for building up.” (Eph. 4:29) However, we must be sincere. Otherwise, we could actually be flattering the person or avoiding our responsibility to provide needed counsel. (Prov. 29:5) To commend someone but then tear him down behind his back is a form of hypocrisy. The apostle Paul avoided that trap and set a fine example in showing genuine love in the way he commended others. For example, he sincerely commended the Christians in Corinth regarding some aspects of their conduct. (1 Cor. 11:2) But when their actions did not deserve commendation, he explained the reason to them kindly and clearly.—1 Cor. 11:20-22.

¹² *Be hospitable.* Jehovah commands us to be generous toward our brothers and sisters. **(Read 1 John 3:17.)** Yet, we must do so with a pure motive, avoiding any trace of selfishness. We can ask ourselves: ‘Do I offer hospitality primarily to close friends, prominent ones, or those who might be able to return a favor somehow? Or do I instead look for ways to be generous toward brothers and sisters whom I do not know well

9. What will genuine love move us to do?

10. How can we take the lead in showing honor to others?

11. Why must our commendation be sincere?

12. How can we show genuine love when we offer hospitality?

or who have nothing with which to repay me?’ (Luke 14:12-14) Or suppose a fellow Christian falls into need because of poor planning or fails to thank us for our hospitality. In such situations, we should apply the counsel: “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” (1 Pet. 4:9) If you follow this advice, you will gain the reward of happiness that comes from giving with the right motive.—Acts 20:35.

¹³ *Support those who are weak.* The genuineness of our love can be tested by the Bible’s command to “support the weak, be patient toward all.” (1 Thess. 5:14) Although many who are weak later become strong in the faith, others need our patient, ongoing support. This can include sharing upbuilding Scriptural thoughts, inviting them to join us in the ministry, or just taking time to listen to them. In addition, instead of simply thinking that a brother or a sister is either “strong” or “weak,” we should recognize that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Even the apostle Paul acknowledged his own weaknesses. (2 Cor. 12:9, 10) Thus, we can all benefit from the support of fellow Christians.

¹⁴ *Make peace.* We do everything in our power to maintain peace with our brothers, even when we feel that we have been misunderstood or treated unfairly. **(Read Romans 12:17, 18.)** An apology can help to repair hurt feelings, but it must be sincere. For instance, rather than saying, “I’m sorry that you feel that way,” you could admit your role in the

13. (a) When can it be especially challenging to help those who are weak? (b) What practical things can we do to support the weak?

14. How far should we be willing to go to maintain peace with our brothers?



Giving to our brothers in need is one way to show our love and hospitality
(See paragraph 12)

problem by saying, “I’m sorry that I hurt you by what I said.” Peace is especially vital in a marriage. A husband and a wife should not pretend to love each other in public but then use the silent treatment, cruel words, or physical violence to hurt each other in private.

¹⁵ *Forgive freely.* We forgive by pardoning someone who has offended us and by letting go of our resentment toward him. By “putting up with one another in love, earnestly endeavoring to maintain the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace,” we can freely forgive those who may not be aware that they offended us. (Eph. 4:2, 3) For our forgiveness to be genuine, we must control our thinking so that we do “not keep account of the injury.” (1 Cor. 13:4, 5) If we were to harbor resentment or hold a grudge, we would risk permanently damaging our relationship not only with our brother or sister but also with Jeho-

15. How can we show that our forgiveness is genuine?



vah. (Matt. 6:14, 15) We can also demonstrate our sincere forgiveness by praying for those who sin against us.—Luke 6: 27, 28.

¹⁶ *Sacrifice personal advantages.* If we receive privileges in Jehovah's service, we should view these as opportunities to show the genuineness of our love by "seeking, not [our] own advantage, but that of the other person." (1 Cor. 10:24) For example, at our assemblies and conventions, attendants are on duty in the seating area before others are scheduled to enter. Instead of viewing their assignment as an opportunity to get the best seats for themselves and their families, many of these brothers choose to sit in less favorable seats within their assigned section. By sacrificing their personal advantage in this way, they demonstrate love that is free of any trace of selfishness. How might you imitate their good example?

16. How should we view privileges in Jehovah's service?

¹⁷ *Confess and abandon secret sins.* Some Christians who have committed a serious sin try to cover it over in order to avoid embarrassing themselves or disappointing others. (Prov. 28:13) Yet, such a course is unloving, for it harms not only the sinner but also others. It can hinder the flow of God's spirit and threaten the peace of the entire congregation. (Eph. 4:30) Genuine love moves Christians who have committed serious sins to speak to the elders so that the elders can provide the needed help.—Jas. 5:14, 15.

¹⁸ Love is the greatest of all qualities. (1 Cor. 13:13) It identifies us as Jesus' followers and as imitators of Jehovah, the Source of love. (Eph. 5:1, 2) "If I . . . do not have love," wrote Paul, "I am nothing." (1 Cor. 13:2) May we continue to show our love not just "in word" but also "in deed and truth."

17. What will genuine love move a person to do if he has committed a serious sin?

18. How important is genuine love?



The Truth Brings, “Not Peace, But a Sword”

*“Do not think I came to bring peace to the earth;
I came to bring, not peace, but a sword.”—MATT. 10:34.*

SONGS: 123, 128

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What is the “sword” that
Jesus said he would bring?

How can you maintain
your loyalty to Jehovah if
your relatives oppose true
worship?

What can help you to cope
if a family member leaves
Jehovah?

WE ALL want peaceful lives, free from anxiety. How thankful we are that Jehovah grants us “the peace of God,” an inner calm that can protect us from disturbing thoughts and feelings! (Phil. 4:6, 7) Because of our dedication to Jehovah, we also enjoy “peace with God,” a good relationship with him. —Rom. 5:1.

² However, God’s time to bring about complete peace has not yet come. These critical last days are filled with conflict, and countless people have contentious attitudes. (2 Tim. 3:1-4) As Christians, we must wage a spiritual war against Satan and the false teachings that he promotes. (2 Cor. 10:4, 5) But the greatest threat to our peace may come from unbelieving relatives. Some might ridicule our beliefs, accuse us of dividing the family, or threaten to disown us unless we give up our faith. How should we view family opposition? How can we successfully deal with the challenges it brings?

1, 2. (a) What peace can we enjoy now? (b) What prevents us from finding complete peace at this time? (See opening image.)

HOW TO VIEW FAMILY OPPOSITION

³ Jesus knew that his teachings would divide people and that those who follow him would need courage to do so in the face of opposition. This opposition could affect peaceful relations among family members. Jesus said: “Do not think I came to bring peace to the earth; I came to bring, not peace, but a sword. For I came to cause division, with a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Indeed, a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”—Matt. 10:34-36.

⁴ In saying “*Do not think* I came to bring peace,” Jesus meant that some of his listeners needed to think about the consequences of following him. His message could divide people. Of course, Jesus’ motive was to proclaim God’s message of truth, not to damage relationships. (John 18:37) Still, holding faithfully to Christ’s teachings would be challenging if one’s close friends or family members rejected the truth.

⁵ Jesus included the pain of family opposition as part of the suffering that his followers must be willing to endure. (Matt. 10:38) In order to prove worthy of the Christ, his disciples have had to endure ridicule or even alienation from their families. Yet, they have gained far more than they have lost.—**Read Mark 10:29, 30.**

⁶ Even when our relatives oppose our efforts to worship Jehovah, we continue

to love them, but we must remember that our love for God and Christ comes first. (Matt. 10:37) We must also realize that Satan will try to use our affection for our family to break our integrity. Let us consider some situations involving family opposition and see how we can successfully face the challenges that these bring.

AN UNBELIEVING MATE

⁷ The Bible warns that those who marry “will have tribulation in their flesh.” (1 Cor. 7:28) If you have an unbelieving mate, you may experience more than the usual stress and anxiety in your marriage. Nevertheless, it is important for you to view your situation as Jehovah does. Your mate’s present unwillingness to follow Christ is not in itself a valid reason for separation or divorce. (1 Cor. 7:12-16) Although an unbelieving husband may not take the lead in spiritual matters, he should be respected because of his position as the head of the family. Likewise, an unbelieving wife should be shown self-sacrificing love and tender affection by her Christian husband.—Eph. 5:22, 23, 28, 29.

⁸ What if your spouse tries to limit your worship? For example, one sister was told by her husband to share in the field ministry only on certain days of the week. If you face a similar situation, ask yourself: ‘Is my spouse demanding that I stop worshipping my God? If not, can I yield to the request?’ Being reasonable can help you to avoid needless marital conflict.—Phil. 4:5.

7. How should those with an unbelieving mate view their situation?

8. What questions can you ask yourself if your spouse tries to limit your worship?

3, 4. (a) What effect do Jesus’ teachings have? (b) When would it be especially challenging to follow Jesus?

5. What have Jesus’ followers experienced?

6. What must we remember if our relatives oppose our efforts to worship Jehovah?

⁹ Training children can be especially challenging if you have an unbelieving mate. For instance, you need to teach your children to obey the Bible's command: "Honor your father and your mother." (Eph. 6:1-3) But what if your mate does not follow the Bible's high standard of conduct? Set the example by honoring your mate. Focus on his or her good qualities, and express appreciation for your mate. Avoid saying negative things about your mate in front of your children. Instead, explain to them that each person must choose whether to serve Jehovah. The children's good conduct might help to draw the unbelieving parent to true worship.

9. How can Christians teach their children to honor an unbelieving parent?

¹⁰ At times, unbelieving mates will demand that children share in pagan celebrations or be taught false religious beliefs. Some husbands may forbid the Christian wife to teach the children from the Bible. Even so, a Christian wife does what she can to teach the children Bible truth. (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 3:14, 15) For example, the husband of a Witness wife might not allow her to conduct a formal Bible study with her minor children or to take them with her to Christian meetings. While respecting his decisions, she can still express her faith in the presence of her children as opportunities arise, thus giving them moral training

10. How can Christian parents teach their children Bible truth in a religiously divided household?



Teach your
children Bible truth
whenever possible
(See paragraph 10)

and knowledge about Jehovah. (Acts 4: 19, 20) Of course, her children must eventually make their own decision regarding worship.—Deut. 30:19, 20.*

RELATIVES WHO OPPOSE TRUE WORSHIP

¹¹ At first, we may not have told our family about our association with Jehovah's Witnesses. As our faith grew, though, we saw the need to be open about our beliefs. (Mark 8:38) If your courageous stand has resulted in a problem between you and your non-Witness relatives, consider some steps to take to reduce conflict and still maintain integrity.

¹² *Have empathy for unbelieving relatives.* While we may be overjoyed about the Bible truths we have learned, our relatives may mistakenly believe that we have been tricked or have become part of a cult. They may think that we no longer love them because we do not celebrate holidays with them. They may even fear for our eternal welfare. We should show empathy by trying to see things from their viewpoint and by listening carefully to discern their real concerns. (Prov. 20:5) The apostle Paul endeavored to understand "people of all sorts" in order to share the good news with them, and a similar approach can help us as well.—1 Cor. 9:19-23.

¹³ *Speak with mildness.* "Let your words

* For more information on training children in a religiously divided household, see "Questions From Readers" in *The Watchtower*, August 15, 2002.

11. What may cause a problem with non-Witness relatives?

12. Why may unbelieving relatives oppose us, but how can we show them empathy?

13. How should we speak with unbelieving relatives?

always be gracious," says the Bible. (Col. 4:6) We can ask Jehovah for his holy spirit so that we can display its fruitage when speaking with our relatives. We should not try to argue about all their false religious ideas. If they hurt us by their speech or actions, we can imitate the example of the apostles. Paul wrote: "When insulted, we bless; when persecuted, we patiently endure; when slandered, we answer mildly."—1 Cor. 4: 12, 13.

¹⁴ *Maintain fine conduct.* Although mild speech is helpful in dealing with opposing relatives, our good conduct can speak even louder. (**Read 1 Peter 3:1, 2, 16.**) By your example, let your relatives see that Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy happy marriages, look after their children, and live a clean, moral, and fulfilling life. Even if our relatives never accept the truth, we can have the joy that comes from pleasing Jehovah by our faithful course.

¹⁵ *Plan ahead.* Think of situations that might lead to conflict, and determine how to handle them. (Prov. 12:16, 23) A sister from Australia relates: "My father-in-law strongly opposed the truth. Before calling to check on him, my husband and I would pray that Jehovah help us not to respond in kind to angry reactions. We would prepare topics to discuss so that we could keep the conversation friendly. To avoid long conversations that would usually lead to a heated discussion about religion, we set a time limit for the visit."

14. What are the benefits of maintaining fine conduct?

15. How can we plan ahead for situations that might lead to conflict?

¹⁶ Of course, you cannot expect to avoid all disagreements with your unbelieving relatives. Such conflict can make you feel guilty, especially because you love your relatives dearly and have always tried to please them. If you feel this way, strive to put your loyalty to Jehovah ahead of your love for your family. Such a stand may actually help your relatives to see that applying Bible truth is a life-and-death matter. In any case, remember that you cannot force others to accept the truth. Instead, let them see in you the benefits of following Jehovah's ways. Our loving God offers to them, just as he does to us, the opportunity to choose the course they will follow.—Isa. 48:17, 18.

IF A FAMILY MEMBER LEAVES JEHOVAH

¹⁷ When a family member is disfellowshipped or he disassociates himself from the congregation, it can feel like the stab of a sword. How can you cope with the pain that this brings?

¹⁸ *Keep up your spiritual routine.* Build yourself up by regularly reading the Bible, preparing for and attending Christian meetings, sharing in the field ministry, and praying for the strength to endure. (Jude 20, 21) But what if you feel that your heart is not in your activity, that you are just going through the motions? Do not give up! A good spiritual routine can help you to gain control of your thoughts and feelings. Consider the experience of the writer of Psalm 73. He had developed a wrong viewpoint and had become greatly troubled, but he was

able to correct his thinking when he entered God's place of worship. (Ps. 73:16, 17) Your faithfully worshipping Jehovah can help you to do the same.

¹⁹ *Respect the discipline of Jehovah.* His arrangement can bring the best long-term outcome for all, including the wrongdoer, even though the immediate effect is painful. (**Read Hebrews 12:11.**) For example, Jehovah instructs us to “stop keeping company” with unrepentant wrongdoers. (1 Cor. 5:11-13) Despite our pain of heart, we must avoid normal contact with a disfellowshipped family member by telephone, text messages, letters, e-mails, or social media.

²⁰ *Maintain hope.* Love “hopes all things,” including that those who have left Jehovah will come back to him. (1 Cor. 13:7) If you see evidence that a close family member is having a change of heart, you could pray that he or she gain strength from the Scriptures and respond to Jehovah's appeal: “Return to me.”—Isa. 44:22.

²¹ Jesus said that if we were to put any human before him, we would not be worthy of him. Yet, he was confident that his disciples would have the courage to maintain their loyalty to him despite family opposition. If following Jesus has brought “a sword” into your family, rely on Jehovah to help you deal with the challenges successfully. (Isa. 41:10, 13) Find joy in knowing that Jehovah and Jesus are pleased with you and that they will reward your faithful course.

16. How can you overcome feelings of guilt about displeasing your relatives?

17, 18. What can help you to cope if a family member leaves Jehovah?

19. How can you show respect for Jehovah's arrangement for discipline?

20. What hope can we maintain?

21. What should you do if you experience family division because you are following Jesus?

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA

Takes a Stand

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA hardly knew how he had found the courage to approach the Roman governor. Pontius Pilate was known to be extremely stubborn. Yet, if Jesus was to receive a dignified burial, someone would have to ask Pilate to release the body. As it turned out, the face-to-face meeting was not as difficult as Joseph may have imagined. After ascertaining from an officer that Jesus was dead, Pilate granted the request. So now Joseph, his heart still heavy, hurried back to the execution site.—Mark 15:42-45.

- ♦ Who was this Joseph of Arimathea?
- ♦ What connection did he have with Jesus?
- ♦ And what makes his story worthy of your interest?



Do you have the courage to acknowledge Jesus as your King?

A MEMBER OF THE SANHEDRIN

The inspired Gospel of Mark calls Joseph “a reputable member of the Council.” In context, the Council can only be the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court and supreme administrative body. (Mark 15:1, 43) Joseph was therefore one of the leaders of his people, which explains how he could gain an audience with the Roman governor. It is no surprise that Joseph was also rich.—Matt. 27:57.

As a group, the Sanhedrin was hostile to Jesus. Its members connived to have him put to death. Joseph, however, is called “a good and righteous man.” (Luke 23:50) Unlike most of his Sanhedrin colleagues, he lived an honest, moral life and did his best to obey God’s commands. He was also “waiting for the Kingdom of God,” which may explain why he became one of Jesus’ disciples. (Mark 15:43; Matt. 27:57) Likely, he was attracted to Jesus’ message out of a sincere desire for truth and justice.

A SECRET DISCIPLE

John 19:38 says that Joseph “was a disciple of Jesus but a secret one because of his fear of the Jews.” What was Joseph

afraid of? He knew of the Jews’ disdain for Jesus and their determination to expel from the synagogue any who confessed faith in him. (John 7:45-49; 9:22) Being expelled from the synagogue meant being scorned, shunned, and treated as an outcast by fellow Jews. So Joseph hesitated to confess his faith in Jesus openly. Doing so would mean losing his position and his prestige.

Joseph was not the only one in this predicament. According to John 12:42, “many even of the rulers actually put faith in [Jesus], but they would not acknowledge him because of the Pharisees, so that they would not be expelled from the synagogue.” Another individual in the same situation was Nicodemus, also a member of the Sanhedrin.—John 3:1-10; 7:50-52.

Joseph, though, *was* a disciple, but he could not bring himself to say so openly. That was a serious problem, particularly in the light of Jesus’ pronouncement: “Everyone . . . who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father who is in the heavens. But whoever disowns me before men, I will also disown him before my Father who is in the heavens.” (Matt. 10:32, 33) Joseph did not exactly disown Jesus, but neither did he have the courage to acknowledge him. Do you?

To Joseph’s credit, the Bible reports that he did not support the Sanhedrin’s plot against Jesus. (Luke 23:51) Perhaps,

as some suggest, Joseph was not present at Jesus' trial. Whatever the case, Joseph must have felt wretched about that dreadful perversion of justice—but he could do nothing to stop it!

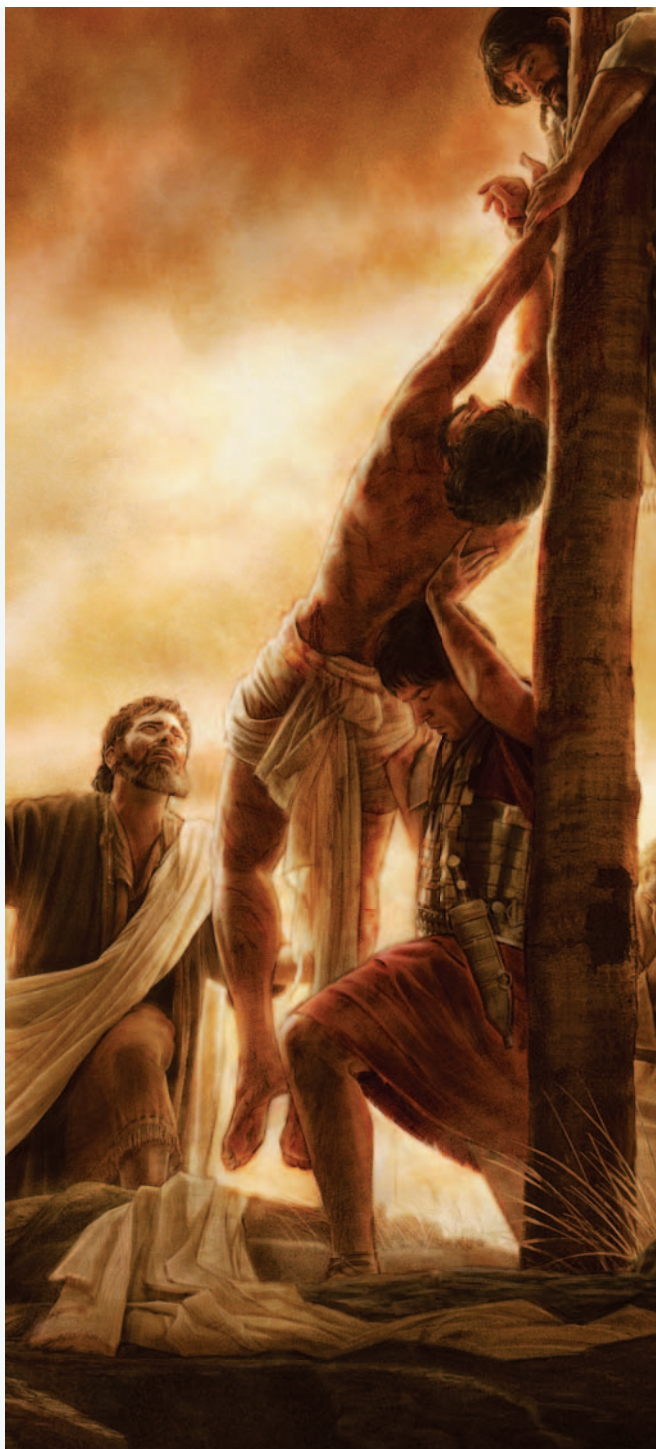
INDECISION OVERCOME

By the time of Jesus' death, Joseph had evidently overcome his fears, and he decided to throw in his lot with Jesus' followers. That decision is indicated by the words of Mark 15:43: "*He took courage and went in before Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.*"

It seems that Joseph was present when Jesus died. Indeed, he knew of Jesus' death before Pilate did. Thus, when Joseph asked for the body, the governor "wondered whether [Jesus] could already be dead." (Mark 15:44) If Joseph had witnessed Jesus' agony on the torture stake, did that awful scene move him to examine his conscience and finally decide that he ought to take a stand for truth? It is possible. At the very least, Joseph was now stirred to action. He would be a secret disciple no more.

JOSEPH BURIES JESUS

Jewish law required that those sentenced to death be buried before sundown. (Deut. 21:22, 23) As far as the Romans were concerned, though, the bodies of executed criminals either were left on the stake to rot or were thrown into a common grave. But that is not what Joseph



had in mind for Jesus. Close to the execution site, Joseph had a new rock-cut tomb. This vault had never been used, which indicates that Joseph had recently moved from Arimathea* to Jerusalem and that he expected to use this property as his family burial site. (Luke 23:53; John 19:41) Burying Jesus in Joseph's own future tomb was a generous gesture on Joseph's part and fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be buried "with the rich."—Isa. 53: 5, 8, 9.

Is there anything to which you give more importance than your relationship with Jehovah?

All four Gospels record that after Jesus' body was removed from the stake, Joseph wrapped it in fine linen and laid it in his own tomb. (Matt. 27:59-61; Mark 15:46, 47; Luke 23:53, 55; John 19:38-40) The only person specifically stated to have helped Joseph was Nicodemus, who brought burial spices. Given the status of these two, it is unlikely that they would have moved the body themselves. It is

* Arimathea is likely identified with Ramah, modern-day Rentis (Rantis). This was the prophet Samuel's hometown, located some 22 miles (35 km) northwest of Jerusalem.—1 Sam. 1:19, 20.

more likely that they would have used servants to do the actual carrying and burying. Be that as it may, the task that the two men undertook was not trivial. Any who came in contact with a corpse incurred ceremonial uncleanness for seven days, making everything that they touched unclean. (Num. 19:11; Hag. 2:13) Such a condition would require them to be secluded during the Passover week and to miss all its observances and celebrations. (Num. 9:6) By arranging Jesus' burial, Joseph also risked derision from his colleagues. Yet, at this point, he was willing to accept the consequences of giving Jesus a dignified burial and of openly identifying himself as one of Christ's disciples.

THE END OF JOSEPH'S STORY

Beyond the Gospel accounts of Jesus' burial, the Bible mentions Joseph of Arimathea no more, leading to the obvious question: What became of him? The fact is, we do not know. In the light of the foregoing, however, there is a strong likelihood that he openly declared himself to be a Christian. After all, at the moment of test and crisis, his faith and boldness were increasing rather than diminishing. That was a good sign.

This story raises a question that all of us would do well to ponder: Is there anything at all—be it position, career, possessions, family affections, or even our very freedom—to which we give more importance than our relationship with Jehovah?



Visions of Zechariah —How They Affect You

“Return to me, . . . and I will return to you.”—ZECH. 1:3.

A FLYING scroll, a woman sealed inside a container, and two women soaring in the wind with wings like those of storks—such dramatic images are found in the book of Zechariah. (Zech. 5:1, 7-9) Why did Jehovah give these striking visions to his prophet? What was the situation of the Israelites at that time? How does Zechariah’s record of those visions affect us today?

² The year 537 B.C.E. was one of rejoicing for Jehovah’s dedicated people. After 70 long years of captivity, they were freed from Babylon. With an initial burst of enthusiasm, they got to work on restoring true worship in Jerusalem. In 536 B.C.E., the foundation of the temple was laid. At that time the people were “shouting so loudly that the sound was heard from a great distance.” (Ezra 3:10-13) However, opposition

1-3. (a) What was the situation of Jehovah’s people when Zechariah began prophesying? (b) Why did Jehovah ask his people to ‘return to him’?

SONGS: 89, 86

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How does Jehovah view any kind of stealing?

How can we live up to our dedication to God “day after day”?

How can we do our part in keeping wickedness out of Jehovah’s house?

soon mounted against their construction project. Discouraged by the many challenges and difficulties, the people left off building the temple and began looking after their own homes and cultivating their fields. Sixteen years later, the building of Jehovah's temple was at a standstill. God's people needed to be reminded that they should return to Jehovah and stop putting their personal pursuits first. Jehovah wanted them to return to him, to resume their fearless, wholehearted worship of him.

³ To help his people recall why they were freed from Babylon in the first place, God sent his prophet Zechariah in 520 B.C.E. The very name Zechariah, which means "Jehovah Has Remembered," may have brought to mind a vital truth. Though they had forgotten Jehovah's saving acts, God still remembered his people. (**Read Zechariah 1: 3, 4.**) He lovingly assured them that he would help them to reestablish pure worship, but he also firmly warned them that he would not tolerate halfhearted worship. Let us see how, by means of Zechariah's sixth and seventh visions, Jehovah stirred them to action. Also, what lessons can we today learn from this?

DIVINE PUNISHMENT FOR STEALING

⁴ Chapter 5 of Zechariah begins with an unusual vision. (**Read Zechariah 5: 1, 2.**) Zechariah sees flying through the air a scroll nearly 30 feet (9 m) long and 15 feet (4.5 m) wide! It is unrolled, ready to be read. It contains a judgment message, which fills both sides of the scroll. (Zech. 5:3) Usually, only one side of a

scroll was used, so this scroll clearly contains a weighty and serious message.

⁵ **Read Zechariah 5:3, 4.** While all of mankind are accountable to Jehovah, his name people are even more so. Those who love God realize that any form of stealing would "dishonor the name of [their] God." (Prov. 30:8, 9) No matter what the motive or how excusable the theft might seem under the circumstances, a thief puts greedy desire above God, placing too much value on material possessions. He minimizes God's law, disregarding Jehovah and His name as being of no force or importance.

⁶ Did you notice at Zechariah 5:3, 4 that "the curse . . . [would] enter into the house of the thief . . . and it [would] remain inside that house and consume it"? Jehovah's adverse judgment cannot be kept out by bars and locks. It can penetrate any hiding place to uncover wrongdoing among Jehovah's people. Even if a person is able to conceal thievery from authorities, employers, elders, or parents, he cannot hide it from God, who guarantees that every theft will be exposed. (Heb. 4:13) How refreshing it is to associate with people who are ever conscious of being honest "in all things"!—Heb. 13:18.

⁷ All forms of stealing are offensive to Jehovah. We view it as an honor to live up to Jehovah's high moral standard, maintaining conduct that in no way brings reproach on his name. Thus, we may succeed in escaping Jehovah's judgment against those who deliberately violate his law.

4. What did Zechariah see in his sixth vision, and what is significant about the scroll's having writing on both sides? (See opening image 1.)

5, 6. How does Jehovah view any kind of stealing?

7. How can we escape the curse of the flying scroll?



Stealing of any kind has no place among Christians

(See paragraphs 5-7)

LIVING UP TO OUR WORD “DAY AFTER DAY”

⁸ The message written on the flying scroll next delivers a warning to those ‘who make a false oath in God’s name.’ (Zech. 5:4) An oath is a sworn statement to certify that something is true or a solemn promise that a person will or will not do a certain thing.

⁹ It is a very serious matter to swear an oath in the name of Jehovah. That is exactly what the last king to occupy the throne of Jerusalem did. Zedekiah swore by Jehovah that he would remain a loyal vassal to the king of Babylon. However, Zedekiah did not keep his sworn oath. As a result, Jehovah passed judgment on him in these words: “As surely as I am alive, . . . [Zedekiah] will die in Babylon, in the place where

the king who made him king lives, the one whose oath he despised and whose covenant he broke.”—Ezek. 17:16.

¹⁰ King Zedekiah owed it to Jehovah to live up to the oath that he had sworn in God’s name. (2 Chron. 36:13) Instead, Zedekiah turned to Egypt in a fruitless attempt to break free from Babylon’s yoke.—Ezek. 17:11-15, 17, 18.

¹¹ Jehovah also listens to the promises that we make. He takes our vows seriously, and we must fulfill them in order to have his approval. (Ps. 76:11) Of all the promises we make, the most important is the one we make when we dedicate ourselves to Jehovah. Dedication is a solemn vow to serve Jehovah unconditionally.

¹² How can we prove true to our

8-10. (a) What is an oath? (b) What oath did King Zedekiah fail to keep?

11, 12. (a) What is the most important vow we will ever make? (b) In what ways should our dedication vow affect our daily lives?

dedication vow? Our stand during tests both large and small should show that we take seriously our pledge to praise Jehovah “day after day.” (Ps. 61:8) For example, when someone on the job or at school flirts with us, do we see this as an opportunity to “take pleasure in [Jehovah’s] ways” by rejecting such advances? (Prov. 23:26) If we live in a divided household, do we ask Jehovah for his help to maintain the Christian personality even when no one else around us is making such an effort? Do we daily approach our loving heavenly Father in prayer, thanking him for bringing us under his rulership and for loving us? Are we making time to read the Bible daily? Did we not, in effect, promise that we would do such things? It is a matter of obedience. Our full share in worship reveals that we love Jehovah and are truly dedicated to him. Our worship is a way of life, not a mere formality. Fulfilling our promise is for our own good; our faithfulness leads to a secure future. —Deut. 10:12, 13.

¹³ Zechariah’s sixth vision has helped us to see that lovers of Jehovah should not engage in any kind of stealing or make false oaths. We also see that despite their failures, Jehovah did not give up on the Israelites. He understood the pressures they faced as they were surrounded by enemies. He sets the example for us by living up to his promises, and he will help us live up to ours. One way he offers help is by giving us the hope that he will soon put an end to all wickedness throughout the whole earth. Zechariah’s next vision guarantees this bright hope.

13. What can we learn from Zechariah’s sixth vision?

WICKEDNESS IS ‘PUT IN HER PROPER PLACE’

¹⁴ After seeing the flying scroll, Zechariah is told by an angel to “look up.” What will his seventh vision reveal? He now sees a container, called an “ephah,” going out. **(Read Zechariah 5: 5-8.)** This medium-sized container has a “round lid of lead.” When the lid is removed, Zechariah sees “a woman sitting inside.” The angel explains that the woman in the container is “Wickedness.” Imagine Zechariah’s horror as he sees her attempt to crawl out of her confinement! The angel takes swift action, throwing her back into the container and sealing it shut with the heavy lid. What does this mean?

¹⁵ This part of the vision highlights that Jehovah will not tolerate wickedness of any kind among his people. He will see to it that it is contained and speedily removed. (1 Cor. 5:13) The angel assures us of this by thrusting the lead lid back over the container.

¹⁶ Next on the scene appear two women who have strong wings like those of a stork. **(Read Zechariah 5:9-11.)** How different these women are from the woman in the container! These women use their powerful wings to swoop in and lift up the container containing “Wickedness.” Where are they taking her? Wickedness is deposited in “the land of Shinar,” or Babylon. Why, though, would they take the container to Babylon?

14, 15. (a) In his seventh vision, what does Zechariah see? (See opening image 2.) (b) What does the woman inside the ephah container represent, and why is she confined and sealed away?

16. (a) What did Zechariah next see happen to the ephah container? (See opening image 3.) (b) Where do the women with wings take the ephah container?

Jehovah made every effort to keep pure worship clean
(See paragraphs 16-18)



¹⁷ To the Israelites of Zechariah's day, Shinar would be a fitting place for Wickedness to be confined. Zechariah and his fellow Jews could confirm that Babylon was a place of wickedness in their day. Having grown up amid the filthy and idolatrous ways of this city, they had to fight every day to resist the spirit of that pagan world. What a relief this vision must have brought them—a guarantee that Jehovah would keep pure worship clean!

¹⁸ However, the vision also reminded the Jews of their responsibility to maintain the purity of their worship. Wickedness cannot and will not be allowed to creep into and dwell among Jehovah's people. After we have been brought into the protective and loving care of God's clean organization, we have the responsibility to help maintain it. Are we moved to keep our "house" clean? Wickedness in any form does not belong in our spiritual paradise.

17, 18. (a) Why is Shinar the "proper place" for "Wickedness" to reside? (b) What should be our resolve regarding wickedness?

CLEAN PEOPLE HONOR JEHOVAH

¹⁹ Zechariah's sixth and seventh visions are a sober warning to those who persist in dishonest ways, a reminder that Jehovah does not tolerate wrongdoing. On the part of his sincere worshippers, there must be a genuine hatred of wickedness. These accounts are also a loving reassurance from our heavenly Father. If we diligently work to be the sort of people who have God's approval and protection, we will not have to face a death-dealing curse. Rather, Jehovah will gladly bless us. All our struggles to remain clean in a world full of wickedness will be worthwhile. We can be sure that we can succeed with Jehovah's help! But how can we be sure that true worship will prevail in this world filled with ungodliness? What guarantee do we have that Jehovah will protect his organization as the great tribulation approaches? These questions will be discussed in the next article.

19. What do the dramatic visions of Zechariah mean for us today?



Chariots and a Crown Safeguard You

*“It will occur—if you do not fail to listen
to the voice of Jehovah your God.”—ZECH. 6:15.*

SONGS: 61, 22

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

Of what does Zechariah’s
final vision assure God’s
people?

How do the two copper
mountains and the chariots
provide encouragement
for us?

How do you feel about the
greatest building work going
on today?

AS Zechariah’s seventh vision closes, the prophet has much to think about. Jehovah had guaranteed that he would hold dishonest people accountable for their wicked deeds. This promise surely strengthened Zechariah. Yet, nothing had really changed. Dishonesty and other wicked practices were still present, and the rebuilding of Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem was far from complete. How could the Jews have abandoned their divinely appointed task so quickly? Had they returned to their homeland simply to further their own interests?

² Zechariah knew that the Jews who moved to Jerusalem were men and women of faith. They were the ones “whose spirit the true God had stirred” to leave behind the security of their homes and businesses. (Ezra 1:2, 3, 5) They left a land that was familiar to them in order to move to a place most of them had never seen. If the rebuilding of Jehovah’s temple was not important, they would not have made the difficult

1, 2. At the close of Zechariah’s seventh vision, what was the situation of the Jews in Jerusalem?

journey of some 1,000 miles (1,600 km) through a harsh land.

³ What would that journey have been like? As the Jews traveled along, they no doubt spent many hours thinking about their new home. They had heard how beautiful the city of Jerusalem once was. The oldest ones among them had seen the former glory of the temple. (Ezra 3:12) If you had traveled with them, how would you have felt when you first caught sight of Jerusalem, your new home? Would you have been saddened when you saw the ruined buildings overgrown with weeds? Would you have compared the massive double walls of Babylon with Jerusalem's broken-down walls, with large gaps where gates and watchtowers once stood? Yet, the people took heart. They had already seen Jehovah's saving hand in their behalf throughout their long trip homeward. The first thing they did upon arriving was set up an altar on the site of the former temple, and they began to offer daily sacrifices to Jehovah. (Ezra 3:1, 2) In their initial excitement, it seemed that nothing could discourage them.

⁴ In addition to the temple work, the Israelites had to rebuild their cities. They had houses to restore, fields to plant, and mouths to feed. (Ezra 2:70) The work before them seemed overwhelming. Then the opposition came—hard and fast. Although they initially took a firm stand, 15 years of hostility took their toll. (Ezra 4:1-4) A crushing blow was dealt in 522 B.C.E. when the Persian king banned further building in Jerusalem. The future of that city seemed uncertain.—Ezra 4:21-24.

3, 4. What obstacles did the returning Jews face?

⁵ Jehovah knew what his people needed. God gave Zechariah a final vision to assure the Jews of His love and appreciation for all that they had done so far and to guarantee protection for them if they would return to His work. In connection with rebuilding the temple, Jehovah promised: "It will occur—if you do not fail to listen to the voice of Jehovah your God."—Zech. 6:15.

A CAVALRY OF ANGELIC FORCES

⁶ The last of Zechariah's eight visions may perhaps be the most faith-strengthening. (**Read Zechariah 6:1-3.**) Picture the scene: Charging forward "from between two mountains . . . of copper" come four chariots, likely fitted for battle. The horses pulling the chariots are of different colors. This would help to distinguish one rider from the next. "What are these?" asked Zechariah. (Zech. 6:4) We too want to know, as this vision directly affects us.

⁷ In the Bible, mountains can represent kingdoms, or governments. The mountains in Zechariah's account are similar to two mountains described in Daniel's prophecy. One mountain represents Jehovah's universal and eternal rulership. The other mountain represents the Messianic Kingdom in the hands of Jesus. (Dan. 2:35, 45) Since Jesus' enthronement in the autumn of 1914, both mountains have been present

5. How did Jehovah respond to the inactivity of his people?

6. (a) How does Zechariah's eighth vision begin? (See opening image.) (b) Why are the horses of different colors?

7, 8. (a) What do the two mountains represent? (b) Why are the mountains made of copper?

Jehovah still uses his angels to protect and strengthen his people

and have played a special role in the fulfillment of God's will on earth.

⁸ Why are the mountains made of copper? Like gold, copper is a metal that is highly valued. Jehovah directed that this shiny metal be used in the construction of the tabernacle and later in the temple in Jerusalem. (Ex. 27:1-3; 1 Ki. 7:13-16) Appropriately, then, the copper of the two symbolic mountains reminds us of the excellent quality of Jehovah's universal sovereignty and of the Messianic Kingdom, which will provide stability and blessings to all mankind.

⁹ Now back to the chariots. What do they and their riders represent? The riders of the chariots are angels, likely groups or divisions of angels. (**Read Zechariah 6:5-8.**) They are going out from "before the Lord of the whole earth" with a special mission to fulfill. What assignment are they given? The chariots and their riders are sent out to care for specific territories. Their responsibility is to protect Jehovah's people, particularly from "the land of the north," Babylon. Jehovah would make sure that Babylon would not enslave his people again. What comfort this must have brought to the temple builders in Zechariah's day! They did not have to worry about interference from their enemies.

9. Who are the riders of the chariots, and what is their assignment?

¹⁰ As in Zechariah's day, Jehovah of armies still uses his angels to protect and strengthen his people. (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 1:7, 14) Ever since spiritual Israel was released from symbolic captivity to Babylon the Great in 1919, the expansion of true worship has been unstoppable despite relentless opposition. (Rev. 18:4) Because we have angelic protection, we need not fear that Jehovah's organization might go through another time of spiritual oppression. (Ps. 34:7) Instead, we can be sure that God's servants worldwide will continue to flourish spiritually. As we reflect on Zechariah's vision, we do not doubt that we are safe in the shadow of the two mountains.

¹¹ Very soon the political powers of Satan's world will form a coalition that is bent on the destruction of God's people. (Ezek. 38:2, 10-12; Dan. 11:40, 44, 45; Rev. 19:19) Ezekiel's prophecy describes these forces as covering the land like the clouds and coming up against us in a fury, riding on horses. (Ezek. 38:15, 16)* Do we have anything to fear? Not at all! We have a cavalry on our side. At that critical moment during the great tribulation, the angelic soldiers of Jehovah of armies will come together to protect God's people and destroy those who oppose his sovereignty. (2 Thess. 1:7, 8) What a day that will be! But who takes the lead among Jehovah's heavenly army?

* For more information, see "Questions From Readers" in *The Watchtower*, May 15, 2015, pp. 29-30.

10. What assurance can God's people today draw from Zechariah's prophecy about the chariots and their riders?

11. Why do we not need to fear the coming attack on God's people?

JEHOVAH CROWNS HIS KING AND PRIEST

¹² Zechariah has had eight visions that he alone observed. Now he participates in a prophetic act as an encouragement to those who are restoring God's temple. **(Read Zechariah 6:9-12.)** Zechariah is told to collect silver and gold from Hel-dai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—three new arrivals returning from Babylon—and to make “a grand crown” out of the contributions. (Zech. 6:11, fn.) Is Zechariah told to place the crown on the head of Governor Zerubbabel of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of David? No. Observers must have been intrigued when he placed the crown on High Priest Joshua.

¹³ Did the crowning of High Priest Joshua make him a king? No, Joshua was not from the royal line of David and thus did not qualify to be king. His crowning was prophetic, pointing to a future and eternal king and priest. The high priest who is made king is named Sprout. The Scriptures clearly indicate that Sprout is Jesus Christ.—Isa. 11:1; Matt. 2:23, fn.

¹⁴ Acting as both King and High Priest, Jesus is the leader of Jehovah's heavenly army. As such, he works diligently so that God's people as a whole may dwell in security despite living in the midst of this hostile world. (Jer. 23:5, 6) In the near future, Christ will take the lead in conquering the nations in support of God's sovereignty and in defending Jehovah's people. (Rev. 17:12-14; 19:11, 14, 15) Before executing judgment, how-

12, 13. (a) What action is Zechariah now told to take? (b) Explain how the man named Sprout is prophetic of Jesus Christ.

14. What work does Jesus take on as King and High Priest?

ever, Sprout has a great work to accomplish.

HE WILL BUILD THE TEMPLE

¹⁵ In addition to being commissioned King and High Priest, Jesus was assigned to “build the temple of Jehovah.” **(Read Zechariah 6:13.)** In modern times, Jesus' building work involved liberating true worshippers from Babylon the Great and restoring the Christian congregation in 1919. He also appointed a “faithful and discreet slave” to take the lead in directing the work in the earthly courtyards of the great spiritual temple. (Matt. 24:45) Jesus has also been busy refining God's people and helping them to render worship that is clean.—Mal. 3:1-3.

¹⁶ During the Thousand Year Reign, Jesus and his 144,000 associate kings and priests will bring faithful humans to perfection. When this is accomplished, only true worshippers of God will be left on the cleansed earth. Finally, true worship will be fully restored!

TAKE PART IN THE BUILDING WORK

¹⁷ How, though, did Zechariah's message affect the Jews in his day? Jehovah had guaranteed stability and protection for their work. His assurance that the temple would be built must have brought hope to their tired hearts. But how would just a few accomplish so much work? Zechariah's next words remove any remaining fear or doubt. In addition

15, 16. (a) What restoration and refining work has been accomplished in modern times, and by whom? (b) What will result by the end of Christ's Thousand Year Reign?

17. What reassurance does Jehovah next give the Jews, and how does his message affect them?

to the support of faithful ones like Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, God tells of many others who would “come and take part in building the temple of Jehovah.” **(Read Zechariah 6:15.)** Confident of divine backing, the Jews quickly swing into action, resuming their building work despite the ban. Soon Jehovah removes the mountainlike obstacle of the official ban, and the temple is completed in 515 B.C.E. (Ezra 6:22; Zech. 4:6, 7) The words of Jehovah, however, describe things far greater for our day.

¹⁸ Today, millions join in true worship, and they are moved from the heart to contribute their “valuable things,” which include their time, energy, and resources in support of Jehovah’s great spiritual temple. (Prov. 3:9) How can we be certain that Jehovah values our loyal support? Remember that Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah brought the materials for the crown that Zechariah made. The crown then served “as a memorial,” or

“reminder,” of their contribution toward true worship. (Zech. 6:14; ftn.) Likewise, the work and the love we show for Jehovah will never be forgotten. (Heb. 6:10) They will remain forever, cherished in Jehovah’s memory.

¹⁹ All that has been accomplished for true worship in these last days is tangible evidence of Jehovah’s blessing and Christ’s leadership. We are part of a stable, secure, and everlasting organization. Jehovah’s purpose regarding pure worship “will occur.” Cherish your place among Jehovah’s people, and “do not fail to listen to the voice of Jehovah your God.” Then you can remain under the protection of our King and High Priest and of the heavenly riders of the chariots. Have as full a share as possible in supporting true worship. As you do so, you can be certain that Jehovah of armies will keep you safe and secure during the remainder of this system of things—and for eternity!

18. How is Zechariah 6:15 being fulfilled in our day?

19. What effect should Zechariah’s visions have on us today?

Jehovah will never forget the love that we show for him!
(See paragraphs 18, 19)





ONE ACT of Christian Kindness

IN A small town in Gujarat, India, John's father was baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in the late 1950's. John as well as his five brothers and sisters and their mother were all staunch Roman Catholics and as such were opposed to the father's faith.

One day, John's father asked John to deliver an envelope to a friend in the congregation. That morning, however, John cut his finger badly while opening a large tin barrel. Nevertheless, wanting to obey his father, he tied a rag around his bleeding finger and set out on foot to deliver the envelope.

When John arrived at the address, the recipient's wife, who was one of Jehovah's Witnesses, accepted the envelope. She noticed John's injured finger and offered to help. She got out her first-aid kit, cleaned the wound with an antiseptic, and bandaged the finger. Then she made John a cup of hot tea, all the while talking to him in a friendly manner about the Bible.

By this time, John's prejudice toward the Witnesses was beginning to melt, so he asked her about two topics on which his father's beliefs differed from his—whether Jesus is God and whether Christians should pray to Mary. Having learned John's native Gujarati, the Witness answered him from the Bible and gave him the booklet *"This Good News of the Kingdom."*

Later, as he read the booklet, John felt that he was hearing Bible truth for the first time. He went to his priest and asked him the same two questions. The priest soon lost his temper and threw a Bible at him, shouting: "You've become Satan! Show me where the Bible says that Jesus is not God. Show me where it says that you should not worship Mary. Show me!" John was so shocked by the priest's behavior that he told the priest, "I will never set foot in a Catholic church again." And he never did!

John started to study with the Witnesses, took his stand for true worship, and began serving Jehovah. In time, several other members of the family did the same. Today, John still has a scar on the forefinger of his right hand where he cut himself some 60 years ago. He fondly remembers the one act of Christian kindness that drew him to a life of pure worship.—2 Cor. 6:4, 6.



DID YOU KNOW?

What Jewish practice caused Jesus to condemn the swearing of oaths?

OATHS had their proper place according to the Mosaic Law. However, their use became so common in the everyday life of Jesus' contemporaries that there was the tendency to reinforce practically any utterance by swearing to it. This frivolous practice was intended to add credence to one's statements; yet, Jesus twice denounced it. Instead, he taught: "Just let your word 'Yes' mean yes, your 'No,' no."—Matt. 5:33-37; 23:16-22.

According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, that "the inclination of the Jewish people to confirm all possible statements by an oath" was very strong may be discerned from passages of the Talmud, which painstakingly specifies which oaths were to be considered binding and which were not.

Jesus was not alone in condemning these abuses. For example, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus said of a Jewish sect: "Swearing they avoid, regarding it as worse than perjury, for they say that one who is not believed without an appeal to God stands condemned already." The Jewish apocryphal writing known as the Wisdom of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus, (23:11) likewise states: "A man given to swearing is lawless to the core." Jesus, then, condemned the practice of taking oaths lightly. If we speak the truth at all times, we should not have to take an oath to make our words more believable.

