

# Awake!

FEBRUARY 2007

## IS RELIGION LOSING ITS INFLUENCE?

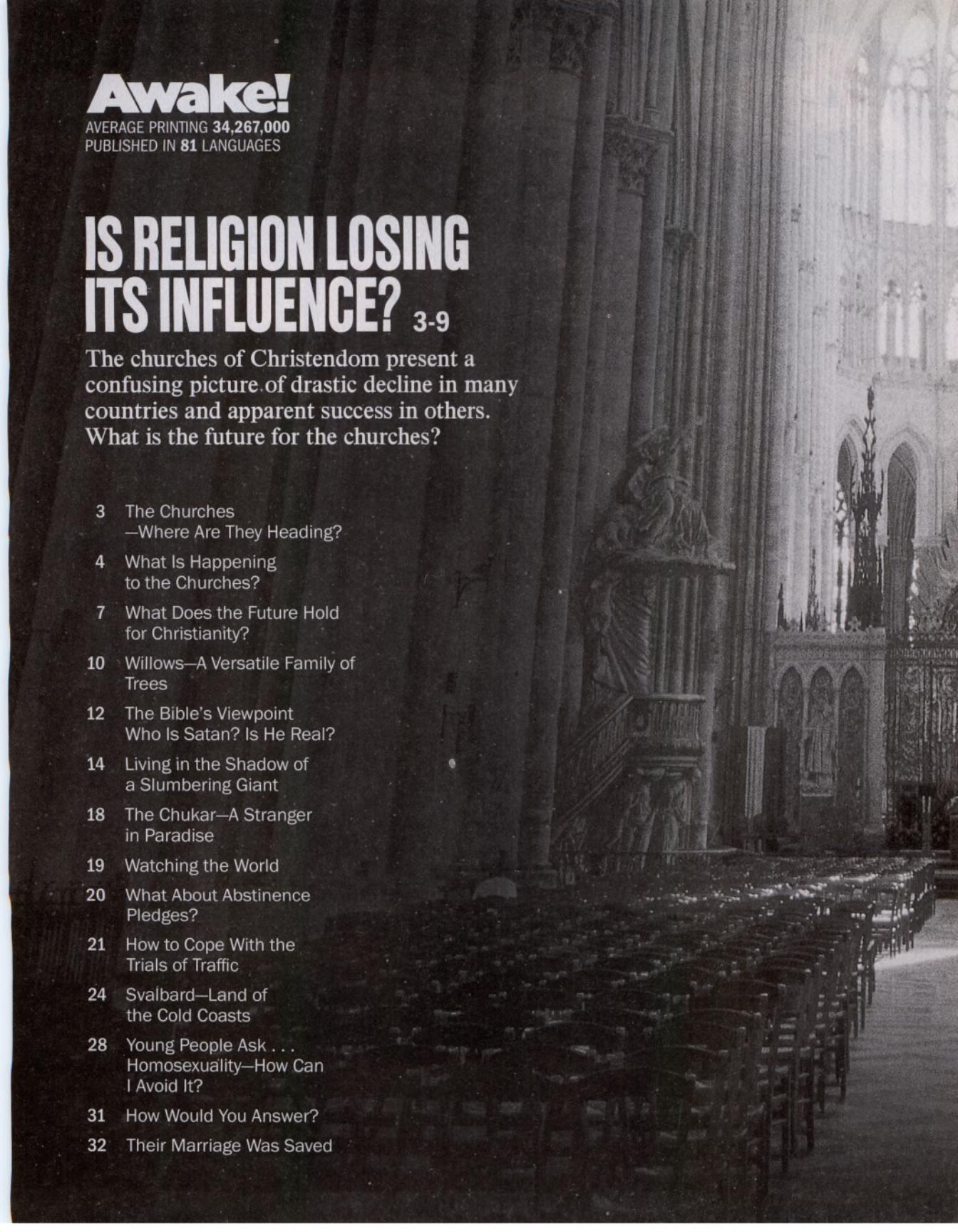


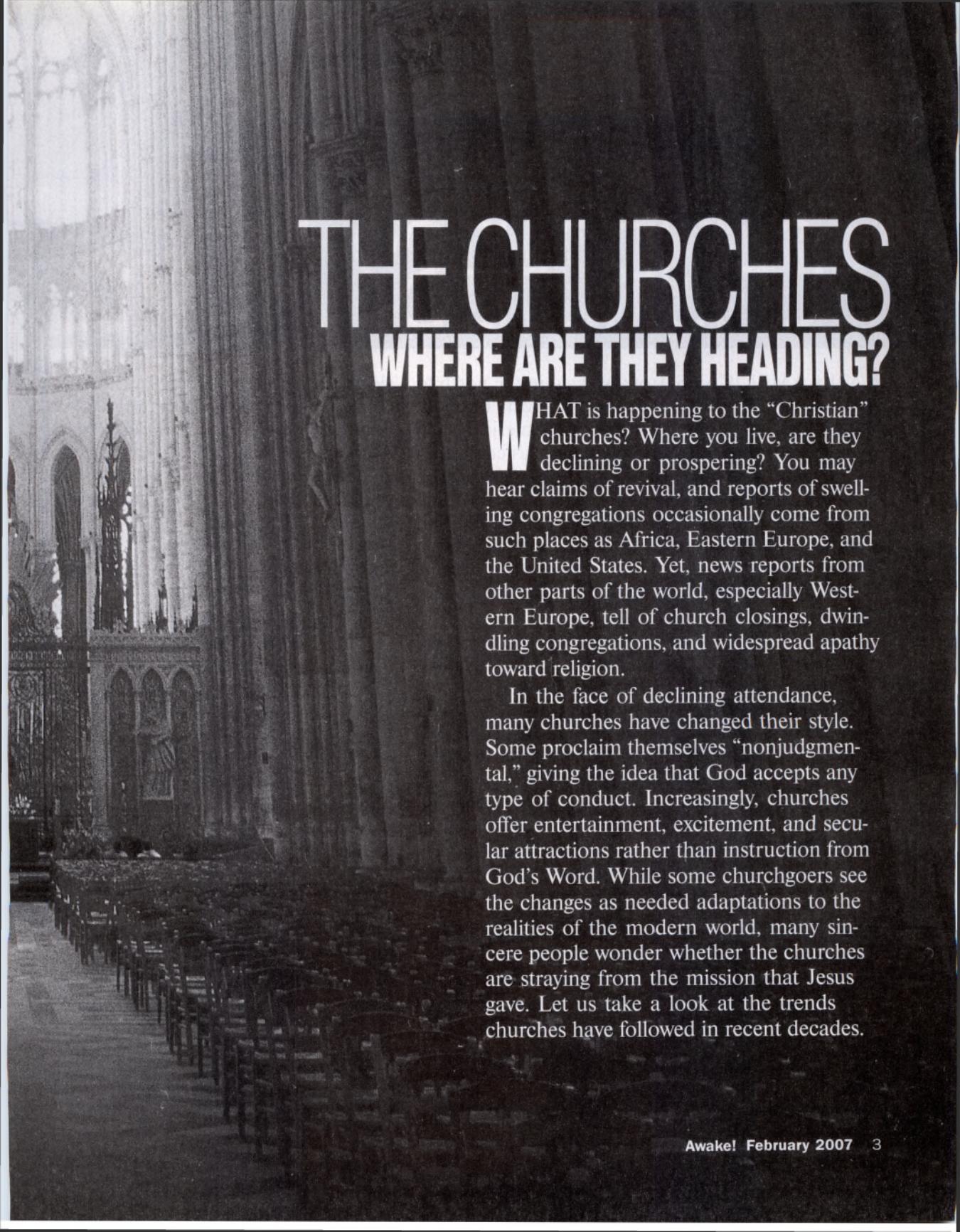
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IS HE REAL? PAGE 12

## **IS RELIGION LOSING ITS INFLUENCE? 3-9**

The churches of Christendom present a confusing picture of drastic decline in many countries and apparent success in others. What is the future for the churches?

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# THE CHURCHES WHERE ARE THEY HEADING?

**W**HAT is happening to the "Christian" churches? Where you live, are they declining or prospering? You may hear claims of revival, and reports of swelling congregations occasionally come from such places as Africa, Eastern Europe, and the United States. Yet, news reports from other parts of the world, especially Western Europe, tell of church closings, dwindling congregations, and widespread apathy toward religion.

In the face of declining attendance, many churches have changed their style. Some proclaim themselves "nonjudgmental," giving the idea that God accepts any type of conduct. Increasingly, churches offer entertainment, excitement, and secular attractions rather than instruction from God's Word. While some churchgoers see the changes as needed adaptations to the realities of the modern world, many sincere people wonder whether the churches are straying from the mission that Jesus gave. Let us take a look at the trends churches have followed in recent decades.

# WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE CHURCHES?



**L**ATIN AMERICANS, from Mexico in the north to Chile in the south, share many aspects of a culture held in common. Older Latin Americans can remember the time when there was basically only one religion, Roman Catholicism. In the 16th century, the Spanish conquistadores made it so by force of arms. In Brazil the colonial power was Roman Catholic Portugal. For 400 years the Catholic Church supported the governments in power in return for economic support and recognition as the official religion.

In the 1960's, however, some Catholic priests realized that backing the ruling elite was leading to a loss of popular support. They began campaigning in favor of the poor, especially by promoting what was known as liberation theology. The movement started in Latin America as a protest against the poverty in which so many Catholics found themselves living.

In spite of the efforts of the clergy in popular politics, millions have turned from the Catholic faith to try other churches. Religions that hold services complete with hand clapping and fervent hymn

singing or the atmosphere of a rock concert have grown and multiplied. "The Evangelical movement in Latin America is divided up into innumerable separate Churches," says Duncan Green, in his book *Faces of Latin America*. "Often these are the personal vehicle of a single pastor. When a congregation grows, it will often splinter into new Churches."

## Europe Turns Its Back on the Churches

For more than 1,600 years, most of Europe has been ruled by governments that claimed to be Christian. Is religion in Europe prospering now as we advance into the 21st century? In 2002 sociologist Steve Bruce, in his book *God is Dead—Secularization in the West*, said of Britain: "In the nineteenth century almost all weddings were religious." However, by 1971,

## Awake!®

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**Graffiti on a church entrance,  
Naples, Italy**

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**In Mexico many have turned  
from the Catholic faith**



**Languages:** Afrikaans, Albanian, Amharic, Arabic, Bulgarian, Cebuano, Chicewa, Chinese, Chinese (Simplified), Croatian, Czech,<sup>#</sup> Danish,<sup>+</sup> Dutch,<sup>+</sup> English,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>○</sup> Estonian, Finnish,<sup>+</sup> French,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Georgian, German,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Greek, Hebrew, Hiligaynon, Hungarian, Iloko, Indonesian, Italian,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Japanese,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Korean,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Malagasy, Malayalam, Myanmar, Norwegian,<sup>+</sup> Polish,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Portuguese,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Romanian, Russian,<sup>+</sup> Serbian, Sesotho, Sinhala, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish,<sup>#</sup>+<sup>+</sup> Swahili, Swedish,<sup>+</sup> Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Tsonga, Tswana, Turkish, Ukrainian, Xhosa, Zulu

<sup>#</sup> Audiocassettes also available.

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only 60 percent of English weddings were religious. In 2000 it was only 31 percent.

Commenting on this trend, the religion correspondent for London's *Daily Telegraph* wrote: "All the main denominations, from the Church of England and the Roman Catholics to the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, are suffering from long-term decline." He said concerning one report: "Britain's Churches will be well on the way to extinction by 2040 with just two per cent of the population attending Sunday services." Similar statements have been made about religion in the Netherlands.

"In recent decades, our country appears to have become decidedly more secularized," noted a report by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office. "It is expected that by 2020, 72% of the population will not have any religious affiliation at all." A German news source says: "Increasing numbers of Germans are turning to witchcraft and the occult to provide the solace they once found in churches, jobs and family. . . . Churches across the land are forced to close for lack of congregations."

Those who still go to church in Europe do not usually go there to find out what God requires of them. One report from Italy says: "Italians tailor their religion to fit their lifestyles." One sociologist there says: "We take from the pope whatever suits us." The same might be said of Catholics in Spain, where religiosity has been replaced with consumerism and the search for an economic paradise—here and now.

These trends stand in stark contrast with the Christianity that Christ and his followers taught and practiced. Jesus did not offer "cafeteria" or "buffet" religion, where you pick and choose what you like and

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**Would you welcome more information? Write Jehovah's Witnesses at the appropriate address: America, United States of: Wallkill, NY 12589. Australia: Box 280, Ingleburn, NSW 1890. Britain: The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN. Canada: Box 4100, Halton Hills (Georgetown), Ontario L7G 4Y4. Ghana: P. O. Box GP 760, Accra. Jamaica: P. O. Box 103, Old Harbour, St. Catherine. New Zealand: PO Box 75142, Manurewa, Manukau 2243. Nigeria: P.M.B. 1090, Benin City 300001, Edo State. South Africa: Private Bag X2067, Krugersdorp, 1740. Zambia: Box 33459, Lusaka 10101. Zimbabwe: Private Bag WG-5001, Westgate.**

# "THE SUPER-MARKETING OF RELIGION"

The director of the National Vocation Service of the French Catholic Church was quoted as saying: "We're seeing the super-marketing of religion. People consume, and when they don't find an institution they agree with, then they go somewhere else." In a study of European religion, Professor Grace Davie of Britain's Exeter University said: "Individuals simply 'pick and mix' from the diversity on offer. Religion, like so many other things, has entered the world of options, lifestyles and preferences."



reject what you don't like. He stated: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake day after day and follow me continually." Jesus taught people that the Christian way of life was one of personal sacrifice and effort.—Luke 9:23.

## Marketing Religion in North America

Unlike the situation in Canada—where, observers comment, people have a tendency to be skeptical about religion—the trend in the United States is for people to take matters of faith seriously. According to some major opinion-research firms, fully 40 percent of people surveyed claim that they go to church every week, although head counts indicate the real figure to be nearer 20 percent. Over 60 percent say they believe the Bible to be God's Word. However, their enthusiasm for a certain church can be short-lived. Many churchgoers in the United States switch religions easily. If a preacher loses his popularity or charisma, he can soon lose his congregation—and often a substantial income as well!

Some churches study business methods to learn how better to "market" their religious services. Congregations pay thousands of dollars to hire church consulting firms. "It was a great investment," said one satisfied pastor, according to a report on such firms. Mega-churches, with congregation members numbering into the thousands, do so well finan-

cially that they draw the attention of business publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Economist*. These report that mega-churches typically offer "one-stop shopping" for body and soul." Church complexes may include restaurants, cafés, beauty salons, saunas, and sports facilities. Attractions include theater, visiting celebrities, and contemporary music. But what do the preachers teach?

Not surprisingly, 'the gospel of prosperity' is a popular theme. Believers are told that they will be rich and healthy if they contribute generously to their church. As for morals, God is often presented as tolerant. A sociologist says: "American churches are therapeutic, not judgmental." Popular religions usually focus on self-help tips for success in life. Increasingly, people feel comfortable in non-denominational churches, where doctrines, which are considered to be divisive, are hardly mentioned. However, politics are introduced, often clearly and specifically. Recent examples have been a cause of embarrassment for some clergy.

Is there a religious revival in North America? In 2005, *Newsweek* magazine reported on the popularity of "hollering, swooning, foot-stomping services," as well as other religious practices, but pointed out: "Whatever is going on here, it's not an explosion of people going to church." The fastest-growing cat-

egory in surveys that ask people to give their religious affiliation is "None." Certain congregations are growing only because others are in decline. People are said to be abandoning "in droves" traditional religions with their ceremonies, organ music, and robed clergy.

In our brief discussion, we have seen churches fragmenting in Latin America, los-

ing their congregations in Europe, and retaining support by offering entertainment and excitement in the United States. Of course, there are many exceptions to these general trends, but the overall picture is one of churches struggling to retain popularity. Does this mean that Christianity is on the decline?

# WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR CHRISTIANITY?

**W**ILL the world be converted to Christianity, or will Christianity die out? Did Christianity remain pure as a beacon in a darkened world, or was it adulterated? These are questions that concern us to this day.

Using a simple illustration, Jesus showed that immediately after he planted the seeds of Christianity, an enemy, Satan, would interfere. (Matthew 13:24, 25) Thus, it was not a mere social phenomenon that caused Christianity to be transformed during the first few centuries after Jesus' ministry. It was enemy action, Satan's action. Today the churches of Christendom are perpetuating mistakes made in the past and are reaping the effects.—2 Corinthians 11:14, 15; James 4:4.

## A Sneak Attack on Christianity

Jesus foretold that his teachings would be subverted. He said: "The kingdom of the heavens has become like a man that sowed fine seed in his field. While men were sleeping, his enemy came and oversowed weeds in among the wheat, and left." Surprisingly, when servants brought the evil deed to the man's attention and asked for permission to collect the weeds, the man said: "No; that by no chance, while collecting the weeds, you uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the harvest season I will tell the reapers, First collect the weeds and bind them in bundles to burn them up, then go to gathering the wheat into my storehouse."—Matthew 13:24-30.

As Jesus himself explained, in his illustration the man who sowed wheat in the field represents Jesus, and the seeds he planted represent true Christians. The enemy who sowed weeds among the wheat represents "the Devil." The weeds represent lawless, apostate men who falsely claim to be servants of God. (Matthew 13:36-42) The apostle Paul gave further details of what would happen. He said: "I know that after my going away

*"His enemy came and oversowed weeds."*

**—Matthew 13:25**





**You are warmly invited to any Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, where free Bible education is offered**

oppressive wolves will enter in among you and will not treat the flock with tenderness, and from among you yourselves men will rise and speak twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves."—Acts 20:29, 30.

#### **Christianity Subverted**

Did what Jesus illustrated and what Paul foretold come true? It certainly did. Ambitious men took control of the congregation that Jesus had established and used it for their own ends. Jesus had told his followers: "You are no part of the world." (John 15:19) Nevertheless, power-hungry men formed alliances with rulers and formed State churches that amassed immense power and wealth. These churches taught "twisted things." For example, they taught people to worship the State and to sacrifice their lives for it in warfare. Thus, so-called Christians participated in Crusades and slaughtered people whom they considered to be unbelievers. They also went to war and killed their own "brothers" of the same religion. They certainly did not practice Christian neutrality and love of neighbor.—Matthew 22:37-39; John 15:19; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; 1 John 4:8, 11.

Clearly, the churches that for centuries have called themselves Christian represent merely a facade of Christianity. This explains why, as we observed in the preceding articles, there is a continuing trend of churches fragmenting into sects, churches meddling in politics, and churches disregarding God's laws. Such bad fruitage is the product, not of true Chris-



tianity, but of counterfeit Christianity, which the Devil planted. Where is this false religion heading? As Jesus showed in his illustration, it will not simply die out for lack of support. It will be judged and destroyed.

#### **True Christians Shining in the Darkness**

Before the "weeds" of false Christianity are collected and destroyed, however, Jesus' illustration indicates something else that must happen. For centuries the growth of false Christian "weeds" was so extensive that the "wheat" of true Christianity was practically obscured. But Jesus described the wheat being separated from the weeds during the "harvest," which he said represents "a conclusion of a system of things." He also said: "At that time the righteous ones will shine as brightly as the sun." (Matthew 13:39-43) The evidence shows that we have been living in the *conclusion of the system of* things since World War I, which took place over 90 years ago. (Matthew 24:

"We must obey God as ruler rather than men."  
—Acts 5:29.



3, 7-12) Has this part of Jesus' prophetic illustration also come true?

True Christians have been separated out from the "weeds" of Christendom. Jehovah's Witnesses are 'shining as brightly as the sun,' helping others to know the true God, Jehovah. The Witnesses do not debase his standards. Rather, people who become Witnesses usually must make extensive changes in their lifestyle to obey the Christian principles found in the Bible.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not offer entertainment at their meetings, but they do offer free Bible education. They also share warm love and friendship, qualities that they learn from their study of the Scriptures. They believe that God will transform the earth into a paradise and have it inhabited by the meek of the earth, as he originally purposed. But first the world must be cleansed of the negative influence of false religion, known in the Bible as Babylon the Great. According to Bible prophecy,



Jehovah will soon bring about that radical change.—Matthew 5:5; Revelation 18:9-10, 21.

Once obedient mankind have been relieved of the deceptive practices of false religion, true Christian worship will unite all of those living on earth. What a wonderful future for the true Christianity that Jesus planted! Edenic Paradise will be restored to a peaceful earth, with no divisive religions to sow discord again!

*"Then go to gathering wheat into my storehouse."*  
—Matthew 13:30





Aspen leaves

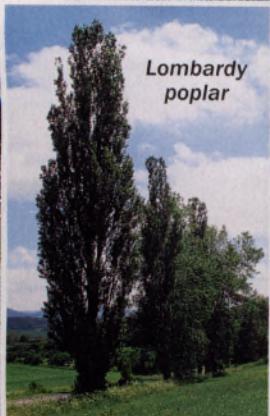
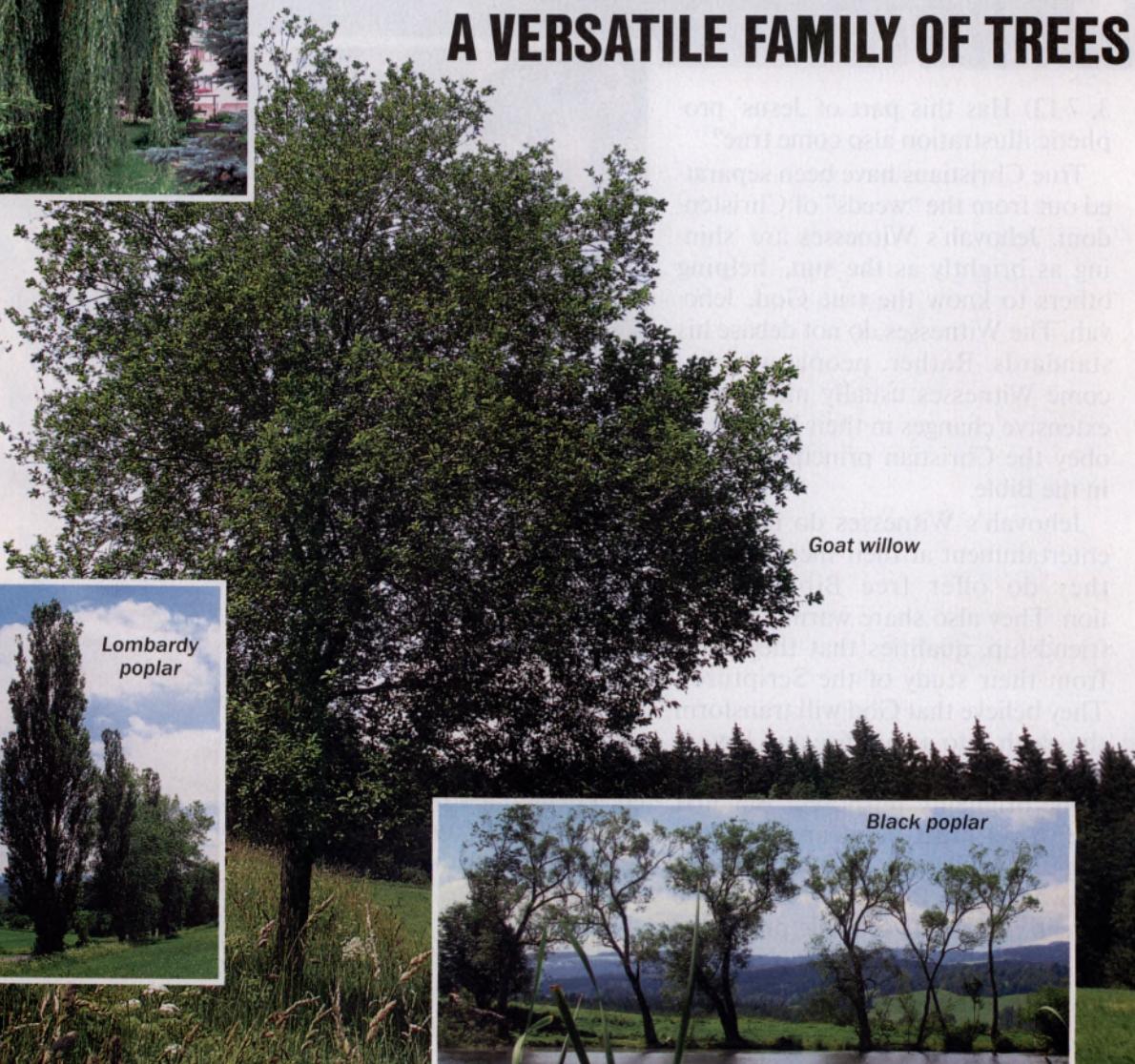


Weeping willow

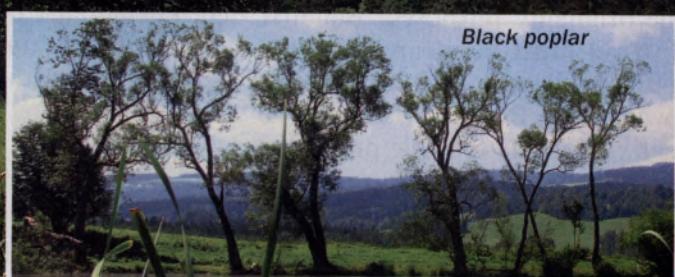
BY AWAKE! WRITER IN  
THE CZECH REPUBLIC

# Willows

## A VERSATILE FAMILY OF TREES



Lombardy poplar



Black poplar

**O**NE is slender and upright, with a lofty bearing. The other slouches, with its head drooping. In spite of their contrasting posture, however, they are actually closely related. What are they? Trees—the poplar and the weeping willow. Both are members of the willow family.

Willow trees are often found along the banks of rivers and shallow streams. Here in the Czech Republic, they thrive in marshlands, where they quickly sprout from tiny sprigs. Willows can reach a height of over 100 feet. Their leaves may be slender and hang gracefully from long, lean branches. Or, as in the case of shining willows and pussy willows, they may have rather broad leaves.

Although there are over 350 species of willows and poplars, one in particular often captures the imagination—the weeping willow. Another species, called the goat willow, is known for its woolly flower clusters, or catkins, which sprout before the leaves are formed. It is said that when these little clusters emerge, spring will soon follow.

#### An Extended Family

Poplar trees are a familiar sight in Bohemia, the region where Prague, the Czech capital, is located. There are at least 35 species of poplars, all of which belong to the willow family. The black poplar is perhaps the most common, and it is often found along the streams and in the damp woods of Bohemia. One variety of black poplar known as the Lombardy, or Italian, poplar has a slender trunk with upward-pointing branches that grow close to the tree's main body. This beautiful tree can reach a height of 115 feet, the equivalent of an 11-story building! Italian poplars can also be found along many roadways, brightening the rural landscape, especially in the autumn when the leaves turn a brilliant yellow.

Aspens are also a type of poplar. They are not as tall, and their treetops are somewhat thinner. Aspens have another distinguishing characteristic—the slightest touch of a gentle breeze causes their leaves to quiver.

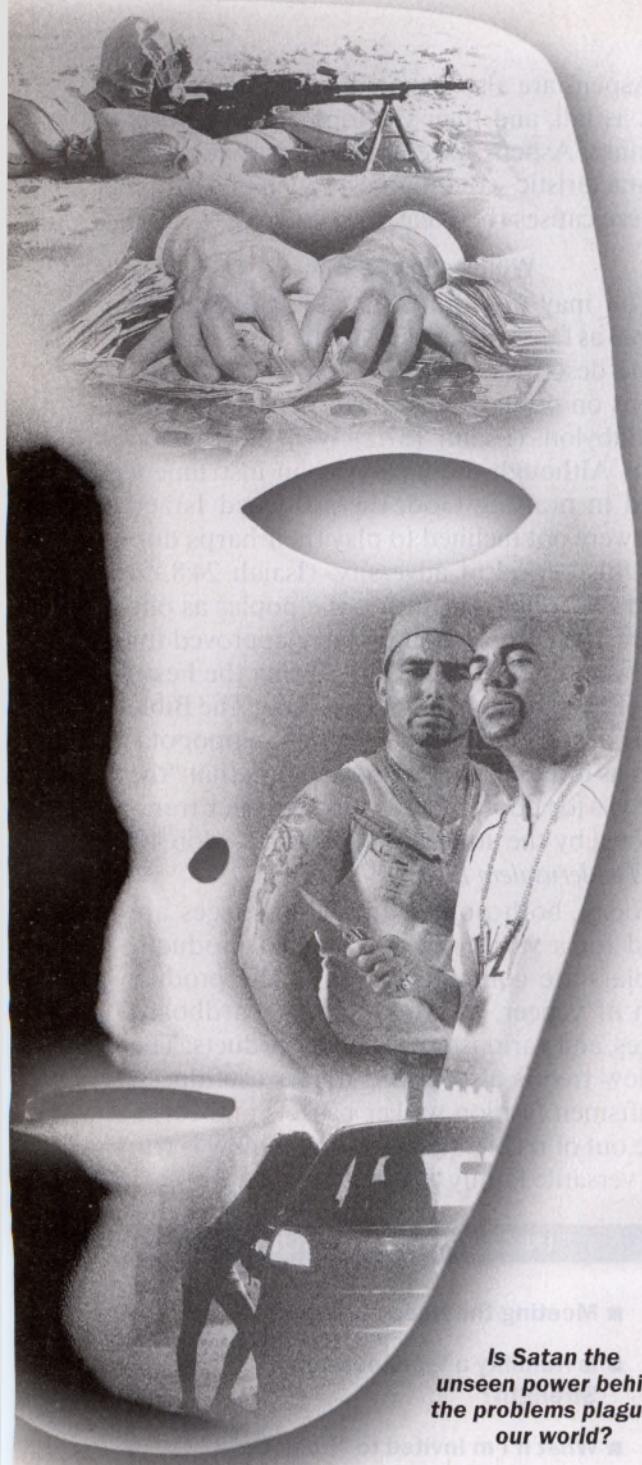
#### Willows in the Bible?

You may not think that the poplar tree grows as far south as the Middle East. Yet, the Bible describes the Israelites' hanging their harps on poplar trees when they were exiles in Babylon. (Psalm 137:2) Why did they do that? Although the harp was an instrument used in praising God, the saddened Israelites were not inclined to play their harps during this period of adversity. (Isaiah 24:8, 9) God's Word also identifies the poplar as one of the trees whose boughs were approved for use when booths were built during the Festival of Ingathering. (Leviticus 23:40) The Bible book of Job describes the fearless hippopotamus as dwelling in streams and says that "the willows [or poplars, according to other translations] by the stream shelter him."—Job 40:22, *The Jerusalem Bible*.

Today, both poplar and willow trees are used for a variety of commercial products. Poplars are commonly used in the production of veneer, plywood, crates, cardboard boxes, and various other paper products. The willow tree is also prized for its usefulness. Craftsmen fashion wicker baskets and furniture out of its pliable twigs. The willow is truly a versatile family of trees!

#### IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

- Meeting the Needs of Today's Youth
- Is Humility a Weakness or a Strength?
- What if I'm Invited to "Hook Up"?



***Is Satan the  
unseen power behind  
the problems plaguing  
our world?***

## THE BIBLE'S VIEWPOINT

# Who Is Satan? Is He Real?

SOME modern scholars say that Satan is not a real person. They claim that he was merely created in the imagination of men. This controversy is nothing new. "The Devil's deepest wile," wrote 19th-century poet Charles-Pierre Baudelaire, "is to persuade us that he does not exist."

Is Satan a real person? If so, where did he come from? Is he the unseen power behind the problems plaguing our world? How can you avoid his evil influence?

### What the Bible Says

The Bible describes Satan as a real person who exists in the invisible spirit realm. (Job 1:6) It tells us about his vicious and ruthless qualities as well as his evil actions. (Job 1:13-19; 2:7, 8; 2 Timothy 2:26) It even records conversations that Satan had with God and with Jesus.—Job 1:7-12; Matthew 4:1-11.

Where did such an evil being come from? Long before man existed, God created his "firstborn" Son, who eventually came to be known as Jesus. (Colossians 1:15) In time, other "sons of God," called angels, were created. (Job 38:4-7) All were perfect and righteous. However, one of those angels would become Satan.

Satan was not his given name at the time of his creation. It is a descriptive

name, which means “Adversary; Enemy; Accuser.” He came to be called Satan because he chose a life course in opposition to God.

Feelings of pride and rivalry toward God grew within this spirit creature. He wanted others to worship him. When God’s firstborn Son, Jesus, was on the earth, Satan even attempted to get Jesus to “do an act of worship” to him.—Matthew 4:9.

Satan “did not stand fast in the truth.” (John 8:44) He implied that God was a liar, when, in fact, he was the liar. He told Eve that she could be like God, whereas he wanted to be like God. And through his deceitful ways, he achieved his selfish desire. To Eve, he made himself higher than God. By obeying Satan, Eve accepted Satan as her god.  
—Genesis 3:1-7.

By fomenting rebellion, this once trusted angel made himself Satan—an adversary and enemy of God and man. The designation “Devil,” which means “Slanderer,” was also added to this wicked one’s description. This leader of sin eventually influenced other angels to disobey God and join his rebellion. (Genesis 6:1, 2; 1 Peter 3:19, 20) These angels did not make mankind’s situation better. Because of their imitating Satan’s selfish ways, “the earth became filled with violence.”  
—Genesis 6:11; Matthew 12:24.

### How Powerful Is Satan’s Influence?

A criminal may wipe his fingerprints from the crime scene in an attempt to leave no trace of his identity. However, when the police arrive, they realize that if a crime has been committed, there must be a criminal. Satan, the original “manslayer,” tries to leave no trace of his identity. (John 8:44; Hebrews

2:14) When speaking with Eve, Satan hid his identity behind a serpent. He is still trying to hide today. He “has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” so as to conceal the extent of his powerful influence.—2 Corinthians 4:4.

However, Jesus identified Satan as the criminal mastermind behind the corrupt world we live in. He called him “the ruler of this world.” (John 12:31; 16:11) “The whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one,” wrote the apostle John. (1 John 5:19) Satan effectively uses “the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life” in “misleading the entire inhabited earth.” (1 John 2:16; Revelation 12:9) He is the one whom mankind in general obeys.

As was the case with Eve, those obeying Satan, in effect, make him their god. Hence, Satan is “the god of this system of things.” (2 Corinthians 4:4) The effects of his rule include hypocrisy and lies; war, torture and destruction; crime, greed and corruption.

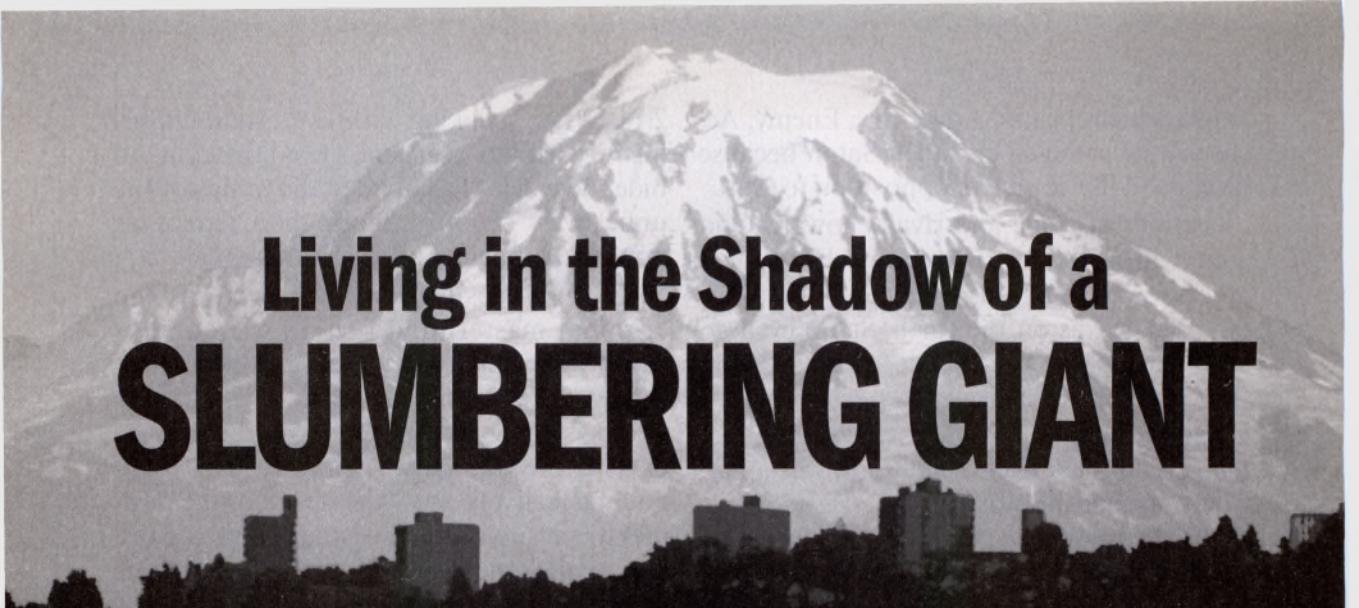
### How You Can Avoid His Influence

The Bible warns: “Keep your senses, be watchful.” Why? Because “your adversary, the Devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone.” (1 Peter 5:8) Though this scripture is sobering, it is reassuring to know that only those who do not keep their senses—those not keeping on the watch—will be “overreached by Satan.”  
—2 Corinthians 2:11.

It is vital that we accept the reality of Satan’s existence and allow God to ‘make us firm’ and ‘make us strong.’ In that way we can take a “stand against [Satan]” and put ourselves on God’s side.—1 Peter 5:9, 10.

### HAVE YOU WONDERED?

- Where did Satan come from?—Job 38:4-7; John 8:44.
- How much does Satan influence the world?—John 12:31; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9.
- What can we do to protect ourselves from Satan’s evil designs?—1 Peter 5:8-10.



# Living in the Shadow of a SLUMBERING GIANT

**Volcanoes have always been a source of mystery.**

**They can slumber quietly for centuries, only to awaken suddenly in a manner that is both spectacular and deadly. Within minutes a volcanic eruption can devastate a countryside and destroy life.**

**N**O ONE doubts that volcanoes are dangerous. During the past three centuries alone, they have taken hundreds of thousands of lives. Of course, most of us live at a safe distance from these slumbering giants, but millions of earth's inhabitants reside near active volcanoes. For example, Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is a short distance from Pichincha, a volcano located northwest of the city. Mount Popocatepetl, whose name in the Aztec language means "Smoking Mountain," is some 40 miles from Mexico City. The large cities of Auckland, New Zealand, and Naples, Italy, are situated on or at the foot of volcanoes. In all, millions of people live with the possibility that the earth's forces beneath them could roar violently, bringing a sleeping giant back to life.

## A Dangerous Giant

The inhabitants of Naples have been coexisting with Mount Vesuvius for some 3,000

years. This mountain is located just seven miles from Naples. It is actually a cone within the rim of ancient Monte Somma. Vesuvius ranks among the most dangerous volcanoes on earth. Since its base lies below sea level, the mountain is much larger than it appears.

Mount Vesuvius has a long history of activity. It has come to life more than 50 times since the famous eruption of 79 C.E., which destroyed the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. About 4,000 people were killed during a destructive eruption in 1631. At that time the word "lava" came into use. Derived from the Latin *labi*, meaning "to slide," it aptly describes the lava flows that run down the steep slopes of Vesuvius.

Throughout the centuries Vesuvius has continued to simmer. It erupted in 1944 during World War II, greeting Allied troops with clouds of ash. The nearby towns of Massa



**Visitors walking  
near the main  
crater of Vesuvius**

©Danilo Donadoni/Marka/age fotostock

**Naples, Italy, in front of  
Mount Vesuvius**

© Tom Pfeiffer



**An artist's impression of the great eruption  
of 79 C.E., which destroyed the cities of  
Pompeii and Herculaneum**

© North Wind Picture Archives

and San Sebastiano were engulfed, as was the famous mountainside funicular railcar popularized in the Italian folk song “Funiculi, Funiculà.”

Today, the inhabitants of Naples seem to go about their lives oblivious of the danger that is so near. Tourists marvel at the historical and architectural landmarks. Shops and cafés bustle with activity, and white sails dot the waters of the Bay of Naples. Vesuvius itself remains a popular attraction and is viewed more as a friendly companion than a dangerous slumbering giant.

#### **Auckland—A City of Volcanoes**

The harbor city of Auckland, New Zealand, is dotted with volcanic cones. Indeed, its



more than one million inhabitants live amid 48 small volcanoes. Ancient volcanic valleys form two harbors, where islands are the remnants of volcanic activity. The most visible island is 600-year-old Rangitoto, which rises out of the water with the same symmetrical contours as Vesuvius. On the occasion of the island's birth, a nearby Maori village was buried in ash.

Aucklanders have learned to live with their

**Rangitoto, one of Auckland's many volcanic islands**



volcanoes. The volcanic cone named Maungakiekie is today a public park and a sheep farm and is located in the middle of Auckland. Some volcanoes are now lakes, parks, or sports fields. One is a cemetery. Many residents choose to live on the volcanic slopes to take advantage of the panoramic views.

When the Auckland area was settled, first by Maori and then 180 years ago by Europeans, it is unlikely that much thought was given to its volcanic past. Instead, the land was simply available and close to the sea—and it had fertile soil. That last characteristic is also true of volcanic soils in other parts of the world. In Indonesia, for example, some of the best rice-growing regions are in the shadow of active volcanoes. Prime agricultural areas in the western United States have soil that is largely of volcanic origin. With the right conditions, land buried in lava can sprout vegetation less than a year after an eruption.

#### **Early Warning Systems**

Many would wonder, 'Doesn't living near a volcano pose risks?' The an-

swer, of course, is yes. But scientists are able to monitor earthquake and volcanic activity closely. For example, the United States Geological Survey keeps an eye on active volcanoes around the world—including those in Naples and Auckland, where contingency plans are in place. Using 24-hour satellite Global Positioning Systems and seismometer networks, scientists can detect magmatic and underground movement.

Vesuvius is under constant surveillance. Erring on the side of caution, Italian authorities have developed emergency plans to cope with an eruption of the magnitude of the one that occurred in 1631. Experts claim that those who live in the danger zone can be warned and evacuated *before* an eruption occurs.

Auckland is situated in what scientists call a monogenetic volcanic field. This means that instead of an existing volcano coming to life, a completely new one could form in a different location. Experts say that this would occur only after a period of earthquakes lasting from several days to several weeks. Such ad-



## **BE PREPARED!**

Are you ready for a natural disaster? Be aware of the risks in your area. Plan in advance where to meet if family members are separated and whom you will notify of your whereabouts. Keep emergency supplies on hand, including food and water, a first-aid kit, clothing, radios, waterproof flashlights, and spare batteries. Have enough so that you can be self-sufficient for several days.



Above and right:  
**Mount Popocatepetl, Mexico**

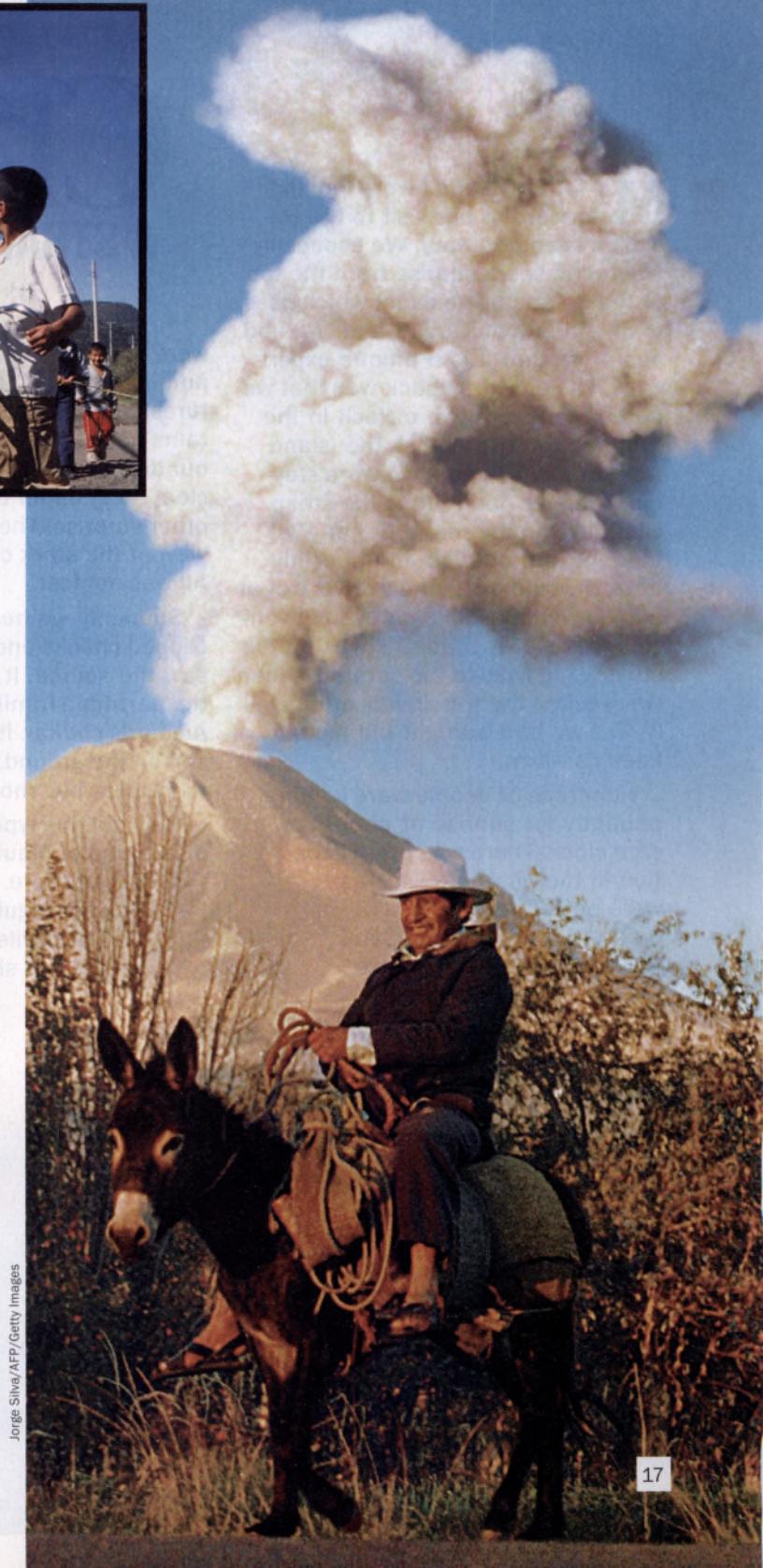
▲ AFP/Getty Images

vance warning should allow time for people to seek refuge in a safe area.

#### Keeping Risks in Focus

Although monitoring volcanoes is a vital task, it is of little use if warnings are not heeded. In 1985, authorities in Armero, Colombia, were warned of an impending eruption of Nevado del Ruiz. While the mountain rumbled some 30 miles away, giving a clear warning, the townspeople were told simply to remain calm. More than 21,000 died in the mudflows that engulfed the city.

While catastrophes like that are rare, the quiet intervals between eruptions have been used for further research and preparation. Thus, continued monitoring, adequate preparation, and public education can help lessen the risks incurred by those living in the shadow of a slumbering giant.



Jorge Silva/AFP/Getty Images

# The Chukar

## A STRANGER IN PARADISE

MY FRIENDS and I were looking forward to our visit to the Hawaiian island of Maui. We especially wanted to see a sunrise from the top of the Haleakala volcano, which rises to an altitude of 10,023 feet. We had been told that it is a unique experience. The only drawback was that we had to get up at two o'clock in the morning to drive across the island from Kapalua, where we were staying. Then we had to face the steep climb up the mountain by car. We thought that at such an unearthly hour, it would be a lonely drive. Not at all! We were part of a caravan of vehicles that slowly made its way up the curving highway to the summit. When we reached the top, it was quite chilly. But we had brought blankets to keep us warm.

Hundreds of people were waiting patiently for sunrise at about six o'clock. There was great expectation in the air, and cameras were poised to catch this breathtaking sight. Surprise! At the critical moment, we

were horrified to see a great bank of clouds come pouring into the crater, denying us our historic pictures! But it is a chance one always takes with mountains near the Pacific Ocean. So we had to swallow our disappointment and wait for the clouds slowly to clear away under the heat of the rising sun. Then, another surprise! There unfolded before us a panoramic view of the stark crater crisscrossed by hiking paths. All was not lost.

Suddenly we heard a strange sound—a series of clipped chucks ending in "chuKAR, chuKAR." Then we saw the source. It was a beautiful Eurasian bird of the partridge family, the chukar, whose Latin name is *Alectoris chukar*. It spends most of the breeding season on the ground, where it roosts. It did not attempt to fly away but chose rather to run away.

How did this type of bird happen to be on the paradise island of Maui? Apparently chukars had been introduced there. On the North American continent, they are regularly released for hunting purposes. We felt privileged that we had at least been able to view this shy bird close-up.—Contributed.



## Violence "Just to Pass the Time"

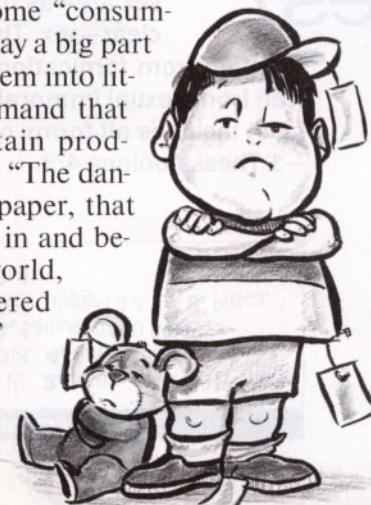
"Beatings and humiliation perpetrated by minors and recorded on video with their mobile phones is increasing," says the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Some victims never recover after the severe beatings they receive. Why do youths commit these crimes? "They do not do it to steal or because of racism or because they belong to a gang. They do it—and this is the appalling novelty—just to pass the time," explains the magazine *XL*. "Sometimes they are drunk and sometimes not," says Vicente Garrido, a psychologist who specializes in criminology. "Yet, the common factor is a lack of remorse."

## Little Interest in Tropical Diseases

Most tropical diseases are neglected by medical research. Why? "The sad situation is that . . . the pharmaceutical industry isn't looking for [new treatments]," says Michael Ferguson, a molecular biologist at the University of Dundee, Scotland. There is no financial incentive for drug companies to do so, since they stand no chance of recovering their investment. These companies prefer to produce high-earning drugs for such conditions as Alzheimer's disease, obesity, and impotence. In the meantime, says the magazine *New Scientist*, an estimated "1 million people worldwide die each year from malaria, while safe and effective treatments remain as elusive as ever."

## Young "Consumers"

According to La Sapienza University, in Rome, Italy, children as young as three years of age can distinguish different brands on the market, and by the age of eight, they become "consumers." TV commercials play a big part in their lives, turning them into little "dictators," who demand that their parents buy certain products, says *La Repubblica*. "The danger is," states the newspaper, that children "end up living in and believing in an unreal world, where whatever is offered (and bought) is a must."



■ "All-day television, the demise of the family meal and even the forward-facing design of [strollers]" are inhibiting child-parent communication. One result is that children starting school "resort to tantrums" when they cannot express themselves.

—THE INDEPENDENT, BRITAIN.

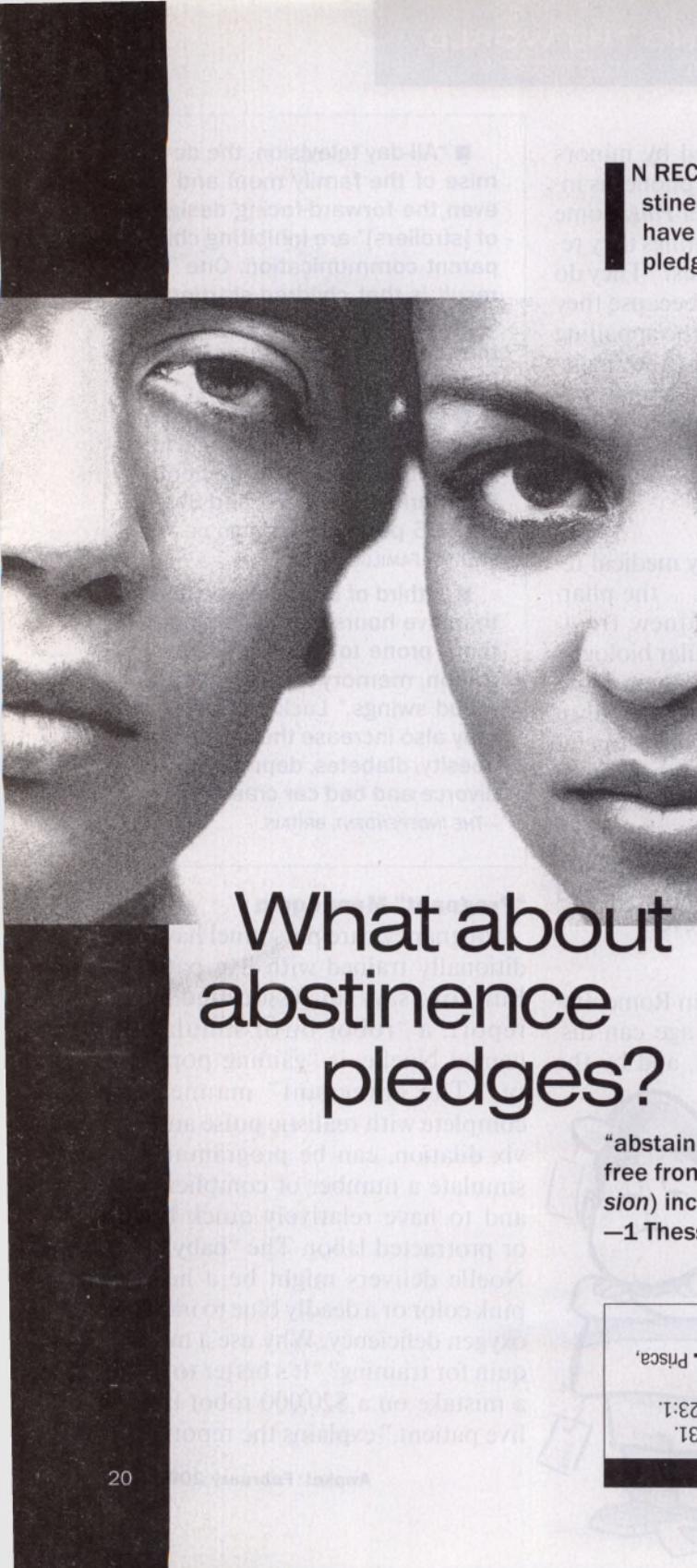
■ In Spain 23 percent of children are born out of wedlock. In France the figure is 43 percent; Denmark, 45 percent; and Sweden, 55 percent.—INSTITUTO DE POLÍTICA FAMILIAR, SPAIN.

■ A third of Britons sleep less than five hours nightly, making them prone to "poor concentration, memory lapses, [and] mood swings." Lack of sleep may also increase the "risk of obesity, diabetes, depression, divorce and bad car crashes."

—THE INDEPENDENT, BRITAIN.

## "Pregnant" Mannequin

Pregnancy-care personnel have traditionally trained with live patients. But now, says an Associated Press report, a "robot birth simulator," named Noelle, is "gaining popularity." The "pregnant" mannequin, complete with realistic pulse and cervix dilation, can be programmed to simulate a number of complications and to have relatively quick births or protracted labor. The "baby" that Noelle delivers might be a healthy pink color or a deadly blue to indicate oxygen deficiency. Why use a mannequin for training? "It's better to make a mistake on a \$20,000 robot than a live patient," explains the report.



## What about abstinence pledges?

**N** RECENT years, pledges of virginity or abstinence, such as "No sex until marriage," have become popular among youths. These pledges reflect commendable goals and are in harmony with Bible commands. (1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:5) However, their effectiveness is debatable. According to one survey, about 60 percent of teens broke their pledge within a year.

In addition, there is concern over just how some youths define "abstinence" and "virginity." Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese wrote in their book *Boy Crazy!*: "The rise of oral sex, even anal sex, has been linked by experts to kids wanting to stay 'technically' virgins. They decide anything that's not intercourse isn't sex."

Evidently, that view is widespread. After interviewing more than a thousand teenagers, one author said: "It seemed like maybe one or two in a hundred considered oral sex to be sex." He added: "You should realize that's probably how your teen—and probably even your preteen—thinks."

Those who adhere to Bible standards realize that oral sex and anal sex are—as their very names make clear—sex. The Bible command to

"abstain from fornication" ("be . . . completely free from sexual immorality," *Today's English Version*) includes all forms of illicit sexual relations.  
—1 Thessalonians 4:3.

- 1. Solomon—Proverbs 9:10.
- 2. Jesus—Luke 6:31.
- 3. Paul—1 Corinthians 13:8.
- 4. David—Psalm 23:1.
- 5. Joshua, 1450 B.C.E.
- 6. Samuel, 1090 B.C.E.
- 7. Paul, 56 C.E.
- 8. Deborah—Judges 4:4, 9.
- 9. Piscata,
- or Phisilla.—Romans 16:3; 4.

# HOW TO COPE WITH THE TRIALS OF Traffic

BY AWAKE! WRITER IN SPAIN

**Y**OU have an appointment with the doctor, so you leave home with what you think is plenty of time to spare. But you did not count on running into a traffic jam. As the minutes tick by and your car slowly crawls along, you begin to get more and more anxious. Finally, you make it to the doctor's office a half hour late.

One of the greatest frustrations of city life is traffic, especially the bumper-to-bumper traffic that clogs the streets and poisons the air. Unfortunately, this daily tribulation experienced by millions of city dwellers shows no sign of letting up.

The Texas Transportation Institute reported concerning the United States: "Congestion has grown everywhere in areas of all sizes." The report added that the authorities are simply not able to devise solutions adequate for coping with the growing demands of city travelers. The situation is similar all over the world. Several thousand motorists in China recently found themselves stuck in a 60-mile-long traffic jam that took the police *several days* to unravel. In Mexico City a 12-mile drive through the city center can take over four hours—longer than it would take for the average pedestrian to walk the same distance.

The reason why city roads are clogged is not hard to find. Cities keep on growing relentlessly, and now about half the world's population live in urban areas.

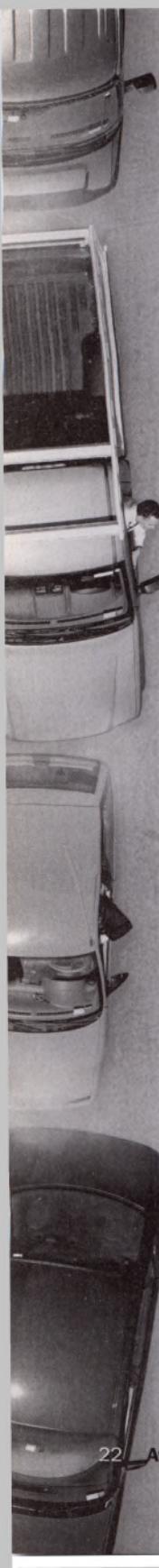
As cities grow, so do the numbers of vehicles. One writer put it this way: "Too many people own too many cars, and they want to drive them in the same constricted space."

## Why Traffic Problems Are Hard to Solve

Mankind's reliance on the motorcar means that cities must cope with growing numbers of vehicles. With a population of about four million, the city of Los Angeles, in the United States, now has more cars than people! Other cities may not have gone that far yet, but few can cope with the growing influx of vehicles. "Cities have not been conceived for the automobile," states Carlos Guzmán, president of Madrid's Urban Commission. Ancient cities with narrow streets suffer the most, but even in modern metropolises, wide roads quickly become snarled, especially during the morning and evening rush hours. "Large cities are now congested most of the day, and congestion is getting more acute," observes Dr. Jean-Paul Rodrigue in his report "Urban Transport Problems."

Since cars sell much more quickly than governments can build highways, a rapid growth in the number of vehicles can overwhelm even the best road system. "In the long run," explains the book *Stuck in Traffic—Coping With Peak-Hour Traffic Congestion*, "building new roads or expanding existing ones does not reduce the intensity of





peak-hour traffic congestion to any extent."

Lack of sufficient parking facilities also leads to congestion. At any given moment, a significant number of the cars on city streets may be circulating merely for the purpose of finding somewhere to park. It is estimated that air pollution caused by traffic—mainly in cities—causes the death of some 400,000 people every year. According to one report, air contamination in Milan, Italy, is so bad that spending one day breathing the air of the city streets is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes.

The cost of traffic congestion must also be measured in the hours wasted and the stress suffered by drivers. The emotional toll is hard to quantify, but one study in the United States calculated that the economic cost of traffic jams in 75 of the country's largest cities amounted to about 70 billion dollars a year. Can anything be done to relieve the situation?

### Some Solutions That Ease the Burden

Various cities have already taken drastic measures. Singapore, which has one of the greatest concentrations of vehicles in the world, controls the number of automobiles that consumers may purchase. Historic cities, including a number of Italian cities, have banned cars completely from the city center during most of the day.

A solution proposed by other cities is a "congestion fee," whereby drivers must pay to enter the city center. In London this plan has managed to reduce traffic delays by 30 percent, and other cities seem keen to follow suit. In such places as Mexico City, Mexico, cars are allowed access to the center

only on certain days, based on the registration number of the vehicle.

City authorities have also invested huge sums in updating public transportation systems, improving highways, and building ring roads, or beltways. They use computerized systems to control traffic lights and to alert police to handle accident bottlenecks quickly. Special bus lanes and lanes that change direction according to traffic needs also help ease the flow of traffic. But success still depends largely on the cooperation of citizens.

### What Can You Do Personally?

Jesus Christ said that you should "do for others what you want them to do for you." (Matthew 7:12, *Today's English Version*) This wise advice could help alleviate some of the worst traffic problems. If, on the other hand, everyone just thinks of his own personal convenience, even the best schemes may flounder. Here are a few suggestions to help you to cope better with the traffic congestion in your city.

For short distances, walking or cycling may be the best solution. In many cases either alternative will prove quicker, easier, and healthier. For longer distances, public transportation might be the ideal option. Many cities are trying to improve bus, metro, and rail services to entice people to leave their cars behind. Using these services may also mean saving money. Even though you may have to drive part of the way, you could possibly use public transportation for accessing the city center.

If you must drive, consider the possibility of carpooling. This is one of the most effective ways of reducing rush-hour traffic. In the United States, 88 percent of all commuters use auto-

# KEEPING CALM IN Traffic Chaos

**Jaime, a taxi driver in Madrid, Spain, has had to live with traffic jams for over 30 years. Here is how he keeps cool in aggravating situations:**

■ I take something with me to read. Then if the traffic doesn't move at all, I don't get so frustrated.

■ When the traffic is crawling along, I listen to the news on the car radio or to a recording of the Bible. In this way I have something other than traffic to think about.

■ As a rule, I never use the horn, since it just disturbs others and serves no purpose. By showing courtesy to other drivers, I avoid stress and help others to do the same.

■ I try to be calm when I encounter aggressive drivers, and I give them a wide berth. There is no substitute for patience.

■ Although I attempt to find alternative routes, I let my clients know that sometimes the heavy traffic will cause a delay in their schedule. City driving and punctuality are not always compatible.



mobiles, and about two thirds of these travel alone. Convincing a significant percentage of people to travel together to work "could produce dramatic effects on the levels of delay and congestion during peak periods," states *Stuck in Traffic*. Furthermore, in many places fast lanes have been designated for cars with two or more persons. Cars with only one person are not allowed to use such lanes.

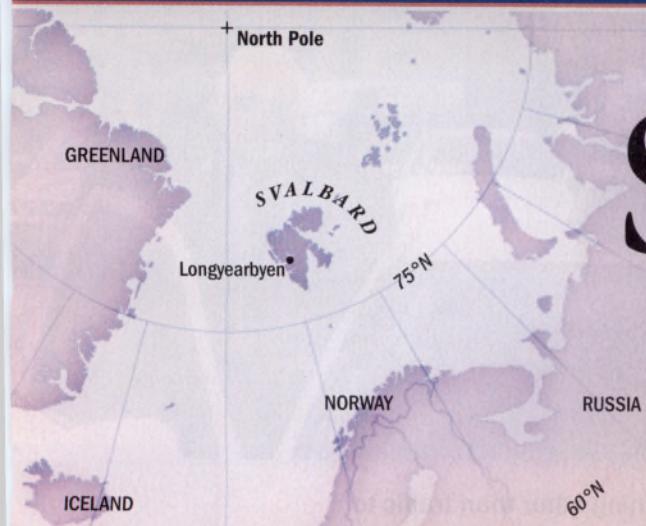
If you have some control over the time when you travel, try to avoid rush-hour traffic. This will make things easier for you and for other motorists. And if you park properly, your vehicle will not impede the free flow of traffic. Of course, even the best plans will not guarantee that you don't get stuck in a traffic jam. At such times, having the right attitude can do a lot to ease the frustration.—See the accompanying box.

Clearly, if you live in a large city, you will have to live with traffic congestion. Nevertheless, by individually taking responsible measures and by displaying courtesy and patience toward other drivers, you can learn to cope with the trials of traffic.



# Svalbard

## LAND OF THE COLD COASTS



**W**E ARE flying in the midst of a thick cloud layer, seeing nothing. Suddenly our plane emerges from the clouds and white, Arctic scenery appears below us. The view is magnificent! We gaze in fascination at glaciers, light-blue fjords, and snow-covered mountains. The wasteland of snow and ice stretches out as far as the eye can see. This is Svalbard, an archipelago near the North Pole, located between 74 and 81 degrees north latitude, and we have come here for a visit!

The name Svalbard, meaning "Cold Coast," first appeared in 1194 in Icelandic annals. But "discovery" of the land 400 years later, in 1596, actually put Svalbard on the map. That year a group of Dutch explorers led by Willem Barents were sailing northward when the lookout man sighted unknown land on the

horizon, a jagged row of mountains. These explorers had come to the northwest part of Svalbard, which Barents called "Spitsbergen," meaning "Pointed Mountains." That is now the name of the largest island of the archipelago. Barents' discovery paved the way for an epoch of bustling activity in the Svalbard area, including whaling, sealing, trapping, exploration, and eventually coal mining, scientific research, and tourism. Over the years several countries have taken part in this activity, but since 1925, the archipelago has been under Norwegian sovereignty.

### Permafrost Country and the Aurora Borealis

Our plane descends over the Ice Fjord and lands at Svalbard Airport. We pick up our rental car and drive to Longyearbyen, named after the American mining magnate John M. Longyear, who put the first coal mines in this area into operation in 1906. Longyearbyen is the largest community in Svalbard, with a population of about 2,000. Yes, in the midst of these vast areas of virtually undisturbed



nature, we find a modern township with such common things as a supermarket, a post office, a bank, a public library, schools, kindergartens, hotels, cafés and restaurants, a hospital, and a local newspaper. At more than 78 degrees north, Longyearbyen is the world's northernmost community of such size.

We find lodging at a guesthouse that was formerly part of the coal miners' quarters. It overlooks Longyearbyen, with a view of the majestic mountain Hiorthfjellet. It is October, and the mountains are shrouded in snow. The bottom of the valley is still snowless, but the ground is frozen solid. This is permafrost country. Only the surface soil thaws for a short period in the summertime. Still, because of favorable winds and ocean currents, the climate is milder here than in other areas at this latitude. From where we are staying, we can see sunshine on the mountains, while the valley is in a bluish shade. Around Long-

### ***The community of Longyearbyen***

yearbyen the sun does not rise above the horizon between October 26 and February 16. But the aurora borealis, or northern lights, often brightens the winter darkness. On the other hand, Svalbard enjoys midnight sun in the spring and summer months, and in Longyearbyen this runs from April 20 to August 23.

### **Plants and Animals**

It is 18 degrees Fahrenheit, and a sharp wind is blowing; but the sky is clear. We are ready for an excursion. Our guide takes us on a hike up to Sarkofagen Mountain and down the Longyearbreen glacier. As we climb the frozen hills, he tells us that a number of beautiful flowers grow here in the spring and summer. In fact, the vegetation is surprisingly rich in Svalbard, with about 170 flowering plant species. Two typical flowers are the white or yellow Svalbard poppy and the fragrant purple saxifrage.

Farther up the snowy mountainside, we cross some tracks of the Svalbard ptarmigan, the only resident bird in Svalbard. All the other birds, such as Brünnich's guillemots, little auks, various gulls, and purple sandpipers, are migratory. Of special interest is the arctic tern. Many of these terns migrate all the

***Many flowering plants, such as the purple saxifrage, survive in the harsh Arctic climate***

Knut Erik Weman ▼



**The Svalbard ptarmigan,  
and the Svalbard reindeer**



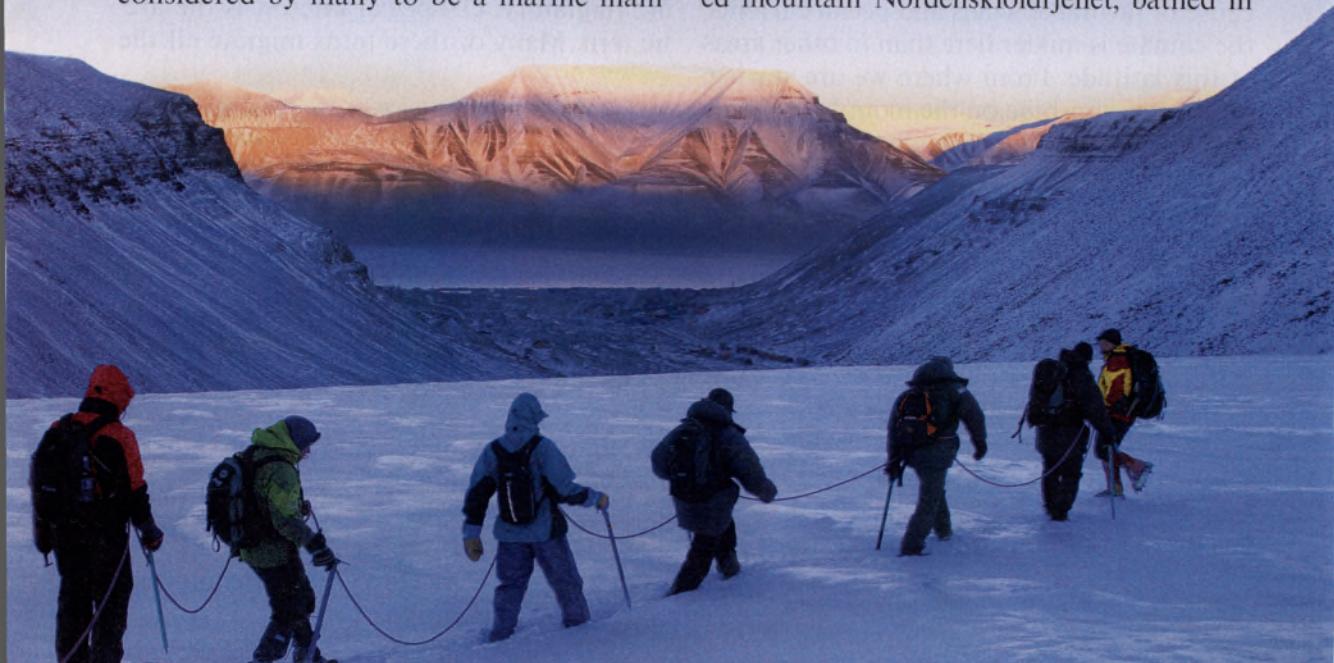
▲ way to the opposite end of the globe, to Antarctica.

We also come across tracks of the arctic fox. This sly animal is a scavenger, eating carcasses and scraps, but it supplements its menu with young birds and eggs. The fox is one of the two true land mammals native to Svalbard. The other is the good-natured Svalbard reindeer. We see the latter at close range several times during our stay in Svalbard. It looks at us calmly and lets us get rather close to take photographs before it withdraws. This reindeer is short-legged with thick, warm fur. Now in the autumn it is quite plump—its layer of extra fat is its food reserve, necessary for the cold winter.

The polar bear, the king of the Arctic, is considered by many to be a marine mam-

mal, since it spends most of its time on sea ice hunting for seals. But you can meet lone bears roaming almost anywhere in Svalbard. Our guide hopes that we will not. The polar bear can be very aggressive, so our guide carries a rifle for safety. Since 1973 all hunting of polar bears has been banned, and any killing of a polar bear is investigated. Although the polar bear population is now rather large in the Svalbard area, there are serious worries about the future of this majestic animal. The Arctic may seem white, fresh, and pure, but toxic pollutants such as PCBs have impacted the environment. The pollutants accumulate in polar bears, since they are at the top of the food chain, and this appears to impair their reproductive ability.

We reach the top of Sarkofagen Mountain and are rewarded with a thrilling view of numerous white peaks in the distance. To the southwest is the impressive, rounded mountain Nordenskiöldfjellet, bathed in



sunlight. Far below us is Longyearbyen; and high above us, the light-blue Arctic sky. We truly feel that we are standing on the top of the globe. Some slices of bread and a cup of black-currant "toddy"—a common hiker's drink consisting of black-currant juice, sugar, and hot water—give us refreshment, and we are ready for the descent by way of Longyearbreen glacier.

### **Coal Mining and Threatened Animals**

A visit to an old coal mine is another interesting experience. Our burly guide, a veteran coal miner, shows us Mine 3, just outside Longyearbyen. Wearing overalls and hard hats with headlamps, we accompany him deep into the mountain. We are told that coal mining has been the cornerstone activity on Svalbard since the early 1900's. For many years the miners led a very harsh existence. They would often crawl on their hands and knees in long drifts, or passageways, in horizontal coal layers that in some places measured just over two feet high. We get the opportunity to try it ourselves and really do not envy the miners. Their labor was hard, the air was full of coal and rock dust, the noise level was high, and there was an ever-present danger of explosions and cave-ins. Now more modern methods are being used. Coal mining is still an essential part of Svalbard's economy, but for the past few decades, tourism has become increasingly important.

People have not always taken the vulnerability of the Arctic wildlife into consideration. At times, the hunting of whales, walrus, reindeer, polar bears, and other animals put some species in danger of extinction in Svalbard. However, preservation regulations have helped rehabilitate several threatened animal species.

### **A Geologist's Paradise**

Svalbard has been described as a "paradise for geologists." Since the vegetation is very sparse, the landscape is like a geologic picture

book. We notice the characteristic geologic structures in the mountains, which consist of clearly defined strata and look almost like huge layer cakes. Rocks are found from all epochs of earth's history. Some were formed by sand and clay; others by organic material. Over the ages many dead plants and animals were covered by clay and preserved as fossils. In fact, fossils are found in rock from all geologic periods.

In the Svalbard museum, we study a number of fossils of thermophilic plants and animals, showing that the climate on the archipelago was previously much warmer than today. In some places in Svalbard, the coal layers are as much as 15 feet thick! In the coal layers, fossil remains have been found of both coniferous and deciduous trees. Fossil footprints of a plant-eating dinosaur are another evidence that previously the climate was milder and the vegetation richer.

How can these big climatic changes be explained? We ask geologist Torfinn Kjaernet, representative of the Directorate of Mining in Longyearbyen. He tells us that most geologists think that the main reason is continental drift. Geologists say that Svalbard is situated on a tectonic plate that has drifted northward for a very long time, possibly from as far south as near the equator. According to modern satellite monitoring, Svalbard is still drifting northeast by a couple of centimeters a year.

As our plane leaves Svalbard, we feel that our visit has given us much to reflect on. The vast Arctic landscape, the well-adapted animals, and all the different plants make us think about the diversity of creation, man's insignificance, and the way humans have handled their stewardship of the earth. Flying south, we get a last glimpse of the land of the cold coasts, where some snow-clad mountain-tops jut up through the cloud layer and glow with a pale, pinkish hue in the afternoon sun.

## Homosexuality —How can I avoid it?

*"When I was 12, I was attracted to a girl at school. I was confused and worried that I might be a lesbian."*

—Anna.\*

*"During my teens I struggled with an attraction to other males. Deep down, I knew those thoughts weren't normal."*

—Olef.

*"My girlfriend and I kissed once or twice. Since I still liked boys, I wondered if I might be bisexual."*

—Sarah.

**T**ODAY'S tolerant attitudes have prompted a number of youths to experiment with same-sex relationships. "Many girls in my school claim to be either lesbian, bisexual, or 'bi-curious,'" says 15-year-old Becky. Christa, 18, finds the situation similar at her school. "Two classmates have actually propositioned me," she says. "One wrote me a note asking if I wanted to see what it was like to be with a girl."

With same-sex relationships being flaunted so openly, you may wonder: Is homosexuality really bad? What if I'm attracted to someone of my sex? Does that mean I'm gay?"

### How Does God View Homosexuality?

Today, many people—even some clergymen—soft-pedal the issue of homosexuality. Yet, the Bible leaves no room for confusion. It tells us that Jehovah God made man and woman and that he purposed for sexual desires to be fulfilled only between husband and wife. (Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:24) It comes as no surprise, then, that the Bible condemns homosexual acts.—Romans 1:26, 27.

Of course, many would say that the Bible is out-of-date. For example, 14-year-old Megan asserts, "Some of the things stated in the Bible have no place in today's world." But why are some so quick to make that claim?

\* Names in this article have been changed.

Often, it is because the Bible's view conflicts with their own. They reject God's Word because it teaches something different from what they *want* to believe. That view is biased, though, and the Bible encourages us to rise above such closed-minded thinking! In fact, in his Word, Jehovah God urges us to consider the fact that his commandments are for our good. (Isaiah 48:17, 18) That is reasonable. After all, who knows our human makeup better than our Creator?

As a young person, you may be experiencing a variety of emotions. What if you feel attracted to a member of the same sex? Does this automatically mean that you are a homosexual? No. Remember, you are in "the bloom of youth," a period in which you are subject to involuntary sexual arousal. (1 Corinthians 7:36) For a time, your attention may focus on a member of the same sex. But having such an attraction does not mean that you are gay. In fact, statistics indicate that such inclinations usually fade in time. Still, you might wonder, 'How do these desires start in the first place?'

Some say that homosexuality is rooted in the genes. Others say it is a learned behavior. It is not the purpose of this article to delve into the "nature-versus-nurture" debate. Indeed, it seems that it would be a gross oversimplification to attribute homosexuality to a single cause. Homosexuality—much like other forms of behavior—appears to be far more complex than that.

Regardless of the cause, the important thing to realize is that the Bible condemns homosexual acts. Thus, the person who is struggling with same-sex desires is presented with a reachable goal—*he or she can choose not to act on those desires*. To illustrate: A person might be "disposed to rage." (Proverbs 29:22) In the past he may have freely given in to fits of anger. After studying the Bible, though, he becomes aware of the need to develop self-control. Does this mean that he will never again feel anger welling up inside him? No.

However, because he knows what the Bible says about uncontrolled anger, he refuses to succumb to his feelings. It is similar with a person who has felt attracted to others of the same sex but who has now come to learn what the Bible says about homosexual practices. On occasion, an improper desire may still present itself. Nevertheless, by heeding the counsel of the Bible, the person can refrain from acting on that desire.

Granted, same-sex desires may be strongly entrenched. Be assured, though, that even deeply rooted wrong desires are not insurmountable. (1 Corinthians 9:27; Ephesians 4:22-24) Ultimately, *you* are in control of how you will live. (Matthew 7:13, 14; Romans 12:1, 2) And despite claims to the contrary, you *can* learn to control your impulses—or at least refrain from acting on them.

### Reject Wrong Practices

How can you keep from getting involved in homosexual practices?

■ **First** Throw all your anxieties upon Jehovah in prayer, confident that "he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 55:22) Jehovah can fortify you with a peace that "excels all thought." This can 'guard your heart and your mental powers' and give you "power beyond what is normal" to keep from acting on wrong desires. (Philippians 4:7; 2 Corinthians 4:7) Sarah, who struggled with the fear that she might be bisexual, says: "Whenever my thoughts disturb me, I pray; and Jehovah sustains me. Without his help I couldn't have dealt with this problem. Prayer is my lifeline!" —Psalm 94:18, 19; Ephesians 3:20.

■ **Second** Fill your mind with upbuilding spiritual thoughts. (Philippians 4:8) Read the Bible daily. Never underestimate its power to shape your mind and heart for good. (Hebrews 4:12) A young man named Jason says: "The Bible—including scriptures such as 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10 and Ephesians 5:3—has had a powerful effect on me. I read

**Seek the support of a mature Christian adult**



these scriptures whenever wrong desires occur.”

■ **Third** Shun pornography and gay propaganda, which will only fuel wrong thoughts.\* (Psalm 119:37; Colossians 3:5, 6) Some motion pictures and television programs also foster the belief that homosexuality is nothing more than a so-called alternative lifestyle. “The world’s warped thinking affected my mind and added to my sexual confusion,” says Anna. “Now I steer clear of anything or anyone that promotes homosexuality.”—Proverbs 13:20.

■ **Fourth** Seek out a confidant, and talk to him or her about your thoughts. (Proverbs 23:26; 31:26; 2 Timothy 1:1, 2; 3:10) Olef, who sought the help of a Christian elder, recalls: “His counsel was very effective. I wished I had spoken to him a lot earlier.”

\* “Metrosexuality”—a lifestyle in which men give excessive attention to themselves and particularly their appearance—has done much to blur the line between gay and straight. According to the man who reportedly coined the term, the metrosexual “might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference.” The popularity of the term, says one encyclopedia, “followed the increasing integration of gay men into mainstream society and a correspondingly decreased taboo towards homosexuality and changing masculinity.”

#### TO THINK ABOUT

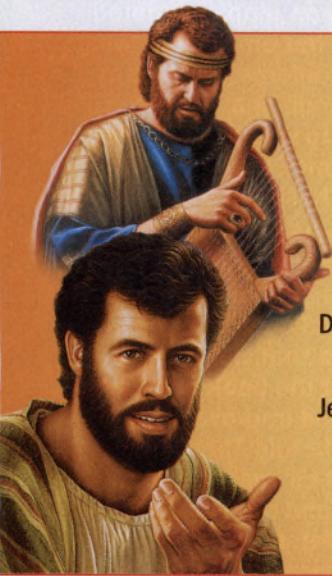
- Why does God disapprove of homosexuality?
- What can you do if you are struggling with same-sex attraction?
- In whom can you confide if you are battling homosexual urges?

#### Do Not Give Up!

Of course, some would say that there’s no point in doing all this, that you should simply embrace your sexuality and accept what you are. But the Bible says that you can do better than that! It tells us, for example, that some early Christians who had formerly practiced homosexuality changed. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11) You too can win the battle—even if at this point it is only being waged in your heart.

If your desires persist, do not give up or conclude that you are a lost cause. (Hebrews 12:12, 13) All of us battle wrong inclinations at times. (Romans 3:23; 7:21-23) If you refuse to act on wrong desires, in time they may subside. (Colossians 3:5-8) Above all, lean on Jehovah for help. He loves you and knows what will make you happy. (Isaiah 41:10) Yes, “trust in Jehovah and do good . . . , and he will give you the requests of your heart.”—Psalm 37:3, 4.

More articles from the “Young People Ask . . .” series can be found at the Web site  
**[www.watchtower.org/ype](http://www.watchtower.org/ype)**



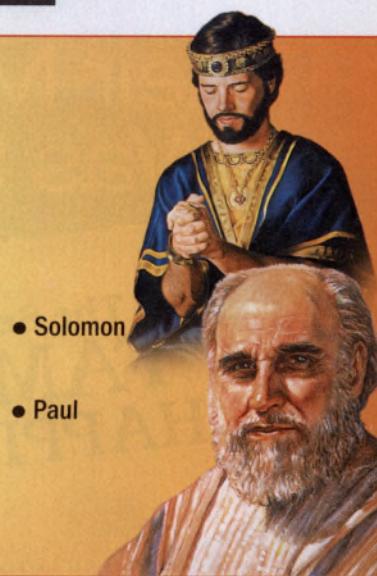
David •

Jesus •

### WHO SAID IT?

Draw a line connecting the statement to the person who said it.

1. "The fear of Jehovah is the start of wisdom."
2. "Just as you want men to do to you, do the same way to them."
3. "Love never fails."
4. "Jehovah is my Shepherd. I shall lack nothing."



• Solomon

• Paul

■ **For Discussion:** What is one other fact that you know about each of these Bible characters?

### WHEN IN HISTORY?

Name the writer(s) of each of the Bible books below, and draw a line connecting the book to the approximate date it was completed.

(Answers on page 20)



5

Joshua



6

Ruth



7

Romans

1090 B.C.E. 1078 B.C.E.  
1450 B.C.E.

36 C.E. 56 C.E.

### WHO AM I?

8. I foretold that Sisera would be killed by a woman.

### WHO AM I?

9. My husband and I risked our necks to save Paul.

A circular collage of three smaller illustrations. At the top, a hand is shown with fingers spread. In the bottom left, a person's feet are shown walking on a path. In the bottom right, a person is walking away from the viewer.

### Children's Picture Search

Can you find these pictures in this issue? In your own words, describe what is happening in each picture.

### FROM THIS ISSUE

Answer these questions, and provide the missing Bible verse(s).

**Page 6** To be a follower of Christ, what must a person do?  
(Luke 9:\_\_\_\_)

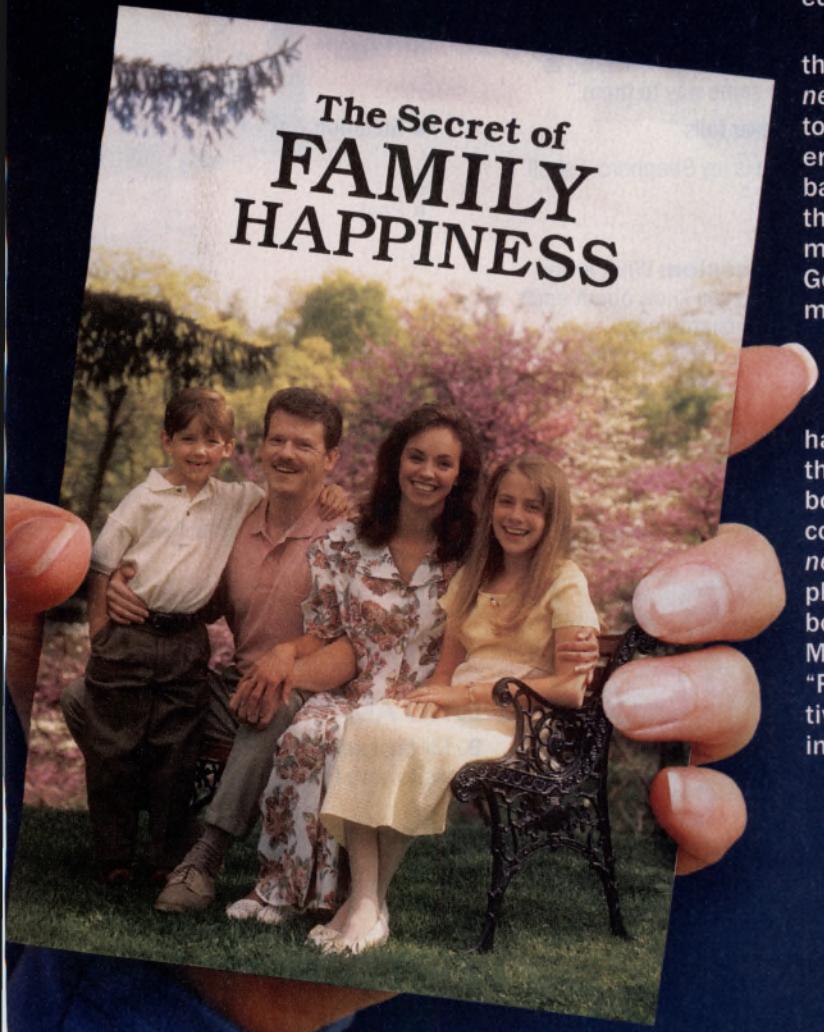
**Pages 7-8** What did the apostle Paul say would happen to the Christian congregation after he went away?  
(Acts 20:\_\_\_\_)

**Page 13** What has Satan done to the minds of many?  
(2 Corinthians 4:\_\_\_\_)

**Page 28** What does the Bible say about homosexual acts?  
(Romans 1:\_\_\_\_)

31

# Their Marriage Was Saved



The Secret of  
**FAMILY**  
HAPPINESS

In South Africa an employer noted that Bella, one of her employees, was having marital problems. So the employer asked Thandi, one of Jehovah's Witnesses, to speak with Bella. Thandi learned that Bella had decided to divorce her husband.

Thandi gave Bella two copies of the book *The Secret of Family Happiness* and encouraged her to give one to her husband. Bella did. A week later Thandi learned that Bella's husband was reading the book and that their family life had improved. Three months later Bella told Thandi that God had saved their marriage by means of prayer and the *Family Happiness* book. Yet, that was not the end of the experience.

When Bella's employer heard what had happened, she recommended that all staff members obtain the book. Eventually, well over a hundred copies of the 192-page *Family Happiness* book were provided for employees of the company. Among the book's instructive chapters are "If Marriage Is at the Breaking Point," "Protect Your Family From Destructive Influences," and "Maintain Peace in Your Household."