

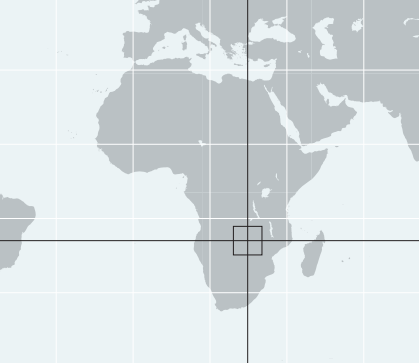
APRIL 2017

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
MAY 29–JULY 2, 2017



COVER IMAGE:

ZAMBIA

An enthusiastic field service group leaving for witnessing activity in Lusaka, Zambia.
The well-maintained Kingdom Hall serves as a powerful witness to Jehovah

PUBLISHERS
183,586

BIBLE STUDIES
415,706

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE
(2016)
782,527

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“What You Vow, Pay”

“You must pay your vows to Jehovah.”—MATT. 5:33.

HE WAS a valiant leader; she was a submissive wife. He was a brave warrior; she was a humble homemaker. Besides worshipping the same God, what could Judge Jephthah and Elkanah’s wife Hannah possibly have in common? Each was under a vow to God, and they both faithfully paid their vow to him. They are excellent examples for men and women today who choose to make vows to Jehovah. However, some key questions arise: What is a vow? How serious is it to make a vow to God? What lessons can we learn from Jephthah and Hannah?

² As used in the Bible, a vow is a solemn promise that is made to God. A person promises to perform some act, to offer some gift, to enter some type of service, or to abstain from certain things. Vows are made voluntarily, of one’s own free will. Nevertheless, they are sacred and binding in God’s eyes because they carry the force of an oath—a sworn statement—that promises that a person will or will not do a certain thing. (Gen. 14:22, 23; Heb. 6:16, 17) What do the Scriptures say about the seriousness of making vows to God?

1. (a) What did Judge Jephthah and Hannah have in common? (See opening pictures.) (b) What questions will be answered in this article?
- 2, 3. (a) What is a vow? (b) What do the Scriptures say about making vows to God?

SONGS: 124, 51

**HOW DO YOU FEEL
ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE
OF LIVING UP TO . . .**

your dedication vow?

your marriage vow?

the vow that you have taken
if you are in special full-time
service?

³ The Mosaic Law stated: “If a man makes a vow to Jehovah or swears an oath to impose on himself a vow . . . , he must not violate his word. He should do everything he vowed he would do.” (Num. 30:2) Later, Solomon was inspired to write: “Whenever you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he finds no pleasure in the stupid ones. What you vow, pay.” (Eccl. 5:4) Jesus confirmed the seriousness of making vows when he stated: “It was said to those of ancient times: ‘You must not swear without performing, but you must pay your vows to Jehovah.’” —Matt. 5:33.

⁴ It is clear, then, that it is a very serious matter to make promises to God. The way we treat our vows affects our relationship with Jehovah. David wrote: “Who may ascend to the mountain of Jehovah, and who may stand up in his holy place? Anyone . . . who has not sworn a false oath by My [Jehovah’s] life, nor taken an oath deceitfully.” (Ps. 24:3, 4; ftn.) What did Jephthah and Hannah vow, and how easy was it for them to pay their vow?

THEY FAITHFULLY PAID THEIR VOW TO GOD

⁵ **Jephthah** faithfully kept the promise that he had made to Jehovah when going out to war against the Ammonites, who had been terrorizing God’s people. (Judg. 10:7-9) Earnestly desiring a victory, Jephthah vowed: “If you give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever

comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites will become Jehovah’s.” The result? The Ammonites were conquered, and it was Jephthah’s beloved daughter who came out to meet him upon his victorious return. She would be the one who would “become Jehovah’s.” (Judg. 11:30-34) What did that mean for her?

⁶ To pay her father’s vow, Jephthah’s daughter had to serve Jehovah full-time at his sanctuary. Was it a thoughtless vow that Jephthah had made? No, for he might well have known that his daughter could be the one who would come out of his house to meet him. Even so, it was an emotionally difficult situation for father and daughter—a real sacrifice for both of them. When he saw her, Jephthah “ripped his garments” and said that his heart was broken. His daughter ‘wept over her virginity.’ Why? Jephthah had no son, and his only daughter would never be able to marry and bear him grandchildren. There would be no way to pass on the family name and legacy. That was not the most important consideration, though. Jephthah said: “I have opened my mouth to Jehovah, and I am unable to turn back.” And his daughter replied: “Do to me as you have promised.” (Judg. 11:35-39) These were loyal individuals who would never have thought of breaking a vow that was made to the Most High God—no matter what it cost them personally.—**Read Deuteronomy 23:21, 23; Psalm 15:4.**

-
4. (a) How serious is it to make a vow to God?
(b) What do we want to learn about Jephthah and Hannah?
5. What did Jephthah vow, and what was the result?

-
6. (a) How easy was it for Jephthah and his daughter to pay his vow to God? (b) What do Deuteronomy 23:21, 23 and Psalm 15:4 impress upon you about making a vow to God?

⁷ **Hannah** was another one who faithfully kept the vow that she had made to Jehovah. She made her promise when she was in great anguish and distress over her barrenness and the constant insults she was subjected to. (1 Sam. 1:4-7, 10, 16) Hannah poured out her soul to God and vowed: “O Jehovah of armies, if you look upon the affliction of your servant and remember me and you do not forget your servant and give to your servant a male child, I will give him to Jehovah all the days of his life, and no razor will touch his head.”* (1 Sam. 1:11) Hannah’s request was granted, and she gave birth to her firstborn—a son. What joy that brought her! Still, she did not forget the vow she had made to God. When she gave birth to her baby boy, she announced: “It is from Jehovah that I have asked him.”—1 Sam. 1:20.

⁸ As soon as young Samuel was weaned, at about the age of three, Hannah did exactly as she had vowed to God. She did not even think of doing otherwise. She took Samuel to High Priest Eli at the tabernacle in Shiloh and said: “It was for this boy that I prayed, and Jehovah granted my petition that I asked of him. I, in turn, now lend him to Jehovah. For all his days, he is lent to Jehovah.” (1 Sam. 1:24-28) There, “the boy Samuel continued growing up be-

* According to Hannah’s vow, her child would become a lifelong Nazirite, meaning that he was to be singled out, dedicated, and separated for Jehovah’s sacred service.—Num. 6:2, 5, 8.

7. (a) What did Hannah vow, and why, and how did it turn out for her? (b) What did Hannah’s vow mean for Samuel? (See footnote.)

8. (a) How easy was it for Hannah to pay her vow? (b) How do David’s expressions recorded in Psalm 61 remind you of Hannah’s exemplary attitude?

fore Jehovah.” (1 Sam. 2:21) But what did that mean for Hannah? She dearly loved her little boy, but now she would not be able to have everyday contact with him during his boyhood. Think of how she longed to cuddle him, to play with him, to nurture him—to share in all the endearing memories that a loving mother cherishes as she watches her little one grow up. Even so, Hannah had no regrets about keeping her vow to God. Her heart rejoiced in Jehovah. —1 Sam. 2:1, 2; **read Psalm 61:1, 5, 8.**

⁹ Now that we understand how serious it is to make a vow to God, let us consider these questions: What sort of vows might we as Christians make? Also, how determined should we be to keep our vows?

YOUR DEDICATION VOW

¹⁰ The most important vow that a Christian can make is the one with which he dedicates his life to Jehovah. Why so? Because, in private prayer, he solemnly promises Jehovah that he will use his life to serve God forever, no matter what. To use Jesus’ words, a person thus ‘disowns himself,’ gives up all rights to himself, and vows to put God’s will above everything else in his life. (Matt. 16:24) From that day forward, ‘he belongs to Jehovah.’ (Rom. 14:8) Anyone who makes a dedication vow should take it very seriously, just as did the psalmist who spoke of the vows he had made to God: “With what will I repay Jehovah for all the good he has done for me? I will pay my vows to Jehovah in the presence of all his people.”—Ps. 116:12, 14.

9. What questions remain to be answered?

10. What is the most important vow that a Christian can make, and what does it entail?



Are you paying
your vows to
Jehovah?

Dedication vow
(See paragraph 10)

Special full-time
service vow
(See paragraph 19)

Marriage vow
(See paragraph 14)

¹¹ Have you dedicated your life to Jehovah and symbolized your dedication by water baptism? If so, that is wonderful! Recall that on your baptism day, before eyewitnesses, you were asked whether you had dedicated yourself to Jehovah and understood that “*your dedication and baptism identify you as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses in association with God’s spirit-directed organization.*” Your affirmative answers served as a public declaration of your unreserved dedication and showed that you were qualified

11. What happened on your baptism day?

for baptism as an ordained minister of Jehovah. You must have made Jehovah very happy!

¹² Baptism is just the beginning, though. Thereafter, we want to continue living up to our dedication in faithful service to God. Hence, we might ask ourselves: ‘How has my spiritual life progressed since my baptism? Am I continuing to serve Jehovah wholeheartedly? (Col. 3:23) Am I praying, reading God’s Word, attending congregation

12. (a) What questions do we do well to ask ourselves? (b) What qualities did Peter say we should look for in ourselves?

meetings, and sharing in the ministry as often as possible? Or has there been some lessening of these spiritual activities?’ The apostle Peter explained that we can avoid becoming inactive in our service if we keep supplying to our faith knowledge, endurance, and godly devotion.—**Read 2 Peter 1:5-8.**

¹³ There is no way to undo a dedication vow, taking back what we promised God. If a person tires of serving Jehovah or of living a Christian way of life, he cannot claim that he was never really dedicated and that his baptism was invalid.* To all intents and purposes, he presented himself as one who was wholly dedicated to God. He will be accountable before Jehovah and the congregation for any serious sins that he may commit. (Rom. 14:12) May it never be said of us that ‘we left the love we had at first.’ Instead, we want Jesus to be able to say of us: “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and ministry and endurance, and that your deeds of late are more than those you did at first.” (Rev. 2:4, 19) May we zealously continue to live up to our dedication vow—to Jehovah’s delight.

YOUR MARRIAGE VOW

¹⁴ The second most important vow that a person can make is the marriage vow. Why so? Because marriage is sacred. Before God and eyewitnesses, the bride and groom exchange their marriage vows. They usually promise that

* Considering the steps that the elders take to be sure that a person is qualified for baptism, it would be extremely rare for anyone’s baptism to be invalid.

13. What must a dedicated, baptized Christian realize?

14. What is the second most important vow that a person can make, and why?

they will love, cherish, and respect each other and that they will do so “*for as long as [they] both shall live together on earth according to God’s marital arrangement.*” Others may not have said these exact words, but they still made a vow before God. They are then pronounced husband and wife, and their marriage is meant to be a lifelong bond. (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:39) “Therefore,” to use Jesus’ words, “what God has yoked together, let no man put apart”—neither the husband nor the wife nor anyone else. Thus, couples entering marriage must have the view that divorce is not an option.—Mark 10:9.

¹⁵ Of course, there has never been a perfect marriage. Each marriage is made up of two imperfect people. That is why the Bible says that married people “will have tribulation” at times. (1 Cor. 7:28) Sad to say, many individuals in this world have a casual attitude toward marriage. When the relationship becomes strained, they just give up and walk out on their marriage mate. That, however, is not the Christian way. Breaking one’s marriage vow is equivalent to lying to God, and God hates liars! (Lev. 19:12; Prov. 6:16-19) The apostle Paul wrote: “Are you bound to a wife? Stop seeking a release.” (1 Cor. 7:27) Paul could say that because he knew that Jehovah also hates a treacherous divorce.—Mal. 2:13-16.

¹⁶ Jesus taught that the only Scriptural ground for dissolving a marriage vow is when an innocent mate chooses not to forgive an adulterous partner. (Matt.

15. Why must Christians not adopt the world’s casual attitude toward marriage?

16. What does the Bible say about divorce and separation?

19:9; Heb. 13:4) What, then, about separating from one's marriage mate? The Bible is clear on this too. (**Read 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11.**) The Bible does not set out grounds for marital separation. However, some married Christians have viewed certain situations as a reason for separation, such as the *extreme* endangerment of one's life or spirituality by an abusive or apostate spouse.*

¹⁷ When individuals approach congregation elders for advice about marital problems, the elders do well to ask whether the couple have recently watched the video *What Is True Love?* and studied together the brochure *Your Family Can Be Happy*. Why? Because these tools highlight the godly principles that have helped many to strengthen their marriage. One couple said: "Since we have been studying this brochure, our marriage has been happier than ever." A wife said of her 22-year-long marriage that was at the point of a breakup: "We are both baptized, but we were on two different pages emotionally. The video came right on time! We are doing much better now as a couple." Are you married? By all means, apply Jehovah's principles in your marriage. Doing so will help you to live up to your marriage vow—happily!

THE VOW OF SPECIAL FULL-TIME SERVANTS

¹⁸ Did you realize what else Jephthah and Hannah had in common? Their re-

* See the book "Keep Yourselves in God's Love," pp. 219-221.

17. How can a Christian couple make their marriage a lasting union?

18, 19. (a) What have many Christian parents done? (b) What can be said about those who are in special full-time service?

spective vows resulted in Jephthah's daughter and Hannah's son being devoted to special, sacred service at the tabernacle. That meant a most satisfying way of life. Today, many Christian parents have encouraged their children to take up the full-time ministry and to center their lives on their service to God. Those who have done so are worthy of sincere commendation.—Judg. 11:40; Ps. 110:3.

¹⁹ Currently, there are some 67,000 members of the Worldwide Order of Special Full-Time Servants of Jehovah's Witnesses. Some perform Bethel service, others engage in construction or in circuit work, serve as field instructors or special pioneers or missionaries or as Assembly Hall or Bible school facility servants. They are all bound by a "Vow of Obedience and Poverty," with which they agree to do whatever is assigned to them in the advancement of Kingdom interests, to live a simple lifestyle, and to abstain from secular employment without permission. It is not the people but their assignments that are viewed as special. They realize the seriousness of humbly living up to their solemn vow for as long as they remain in special full-time service.

²⁰ How many of the vows that we have discussed have you made to God—one, two, or all three? You surely realize that your vows should not be treated lightly. (Prov. 20:25) The failure to keep one's word to Jehovah and to pay a vow may have serious consequences. (Eccl. 5:6) So let us happily 'sing praises to Jehovah's name forever as we pay our vows day after day.'—Ps. 61:8.

20. What should we do "day after day," and why?



What Will Go When God's Kingdom Comes?

“The world is passing away and so is its desire, but the one who does the will of God remains forever.”—1 JOHN 2:17.

“DEAD MAN WALKING!” That cry rings out as a dangerous criminal is led from his prison cell, metal doors clanging behind him. Why do the man’s guards say such a thing? The man seems relatively healthy; no physical problem is about to rob him of his life. However, the guards are leading him to a place of execution. That condemned criminal is as good as dead.*

² In a sense, today’s system of things is like that man on death row. This wicked world has long since been condemned, and its execution is now close at hand. The Bible says: “The world is passing away.” (1 John 2:17) The system’s end is a certainty. And yet, there is a key difference between this world’s end and that of the prisoner. At the prisoner’s execution, some may protest the sentence, questioning its justice or perhaps hoping for a last-minute stay of

* This paragraph describes a prison custom that was common practice years ago in some parts of the United States.

1, 2. (a) In what way might this system of things be compared to a condemned criminal? (See opening picture.) (b) What will be the response to the execution of this wicked system?

SONGS: 139, 144

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What will Jehovah do about wicked people and corrupt organizations?

How will Jehovah rid the earth of wrong activities and distressful conditions?

How can you make sure that you will remain when this wicked world passes away?

execution. In the case of this world, though, the sentence has been determined by the perfectly just Sovereign of the universe. (Deut. 32:4) There will be no stay of execution, and there will be no lingering doubts about the justice of the sentence. After it is carried out, every thinking creature in the universe will heartily agree that justice was done. The relief will be immense!

³ What, though, is included in “the world” that is “passing away”? Much of what people today commonly consider to be permanent features of life in this world will be gone. Is that sad news? Far from it! In fact, it is a vital part of the “good news of the Kingdom.” (Matt. 24:14) So let us focus on what will be gone when God’s Kingdom comes. We will consider four broad categories: wicked people, corrupt organizations, wrong activities, and distressful conditions. In each case, we will examine (1) how these features of life affect us now, (2) what Jehovah will do about them, and (3) how he will replace them with what is truly good.

WICKED PEOPLE

⁴ *How do wicked people affect us now?* After foretelling that this present era would involve “critical times hard to deal with,” the apostle Paul was inspired to write: “Wicked men and impostors will advance from bad to worse.” (2 Tim. 3:1-5, 13) Have you seen those prophetic words come true? Many of us have been victims of wicked people, such as violent bullies, hateful bigots,

and vicious criminals. Some of those are openly wicked; others are impostors, hiding what they do under an appearance of righteousness. Even if we ourselves have not been victims, such wicked people still affect us. We are sickened at heart when we learn of their horrible acts. The way the wicked brutalize children, the elderly, and other defenseless ones fills us with horror. Wicked people exhibit a spirit that seems subhuman, animalistic, even demonic. (Jas. 3:15) Happily, Jehovah’s Word counters such bad news with good news.

⁵ *What will Jehovah do?* Right now Jehovah is giving wicked people an opportunity to change. (Isa. 55:7) As individuals, they have not yet received their final judgment. It is this system that stands condemned. But what of those individuals who refuse to change, who continue to support this system right up to the time of the great tribulation? Jehovah has promised to rid the earth of wicked people for all time. **(Read Psalm 37:10.)** The wicked may think that they are safe from such judgment. Many have learned to hide what they do, and in this world they often seem to escape justice and consequences. (Job 21:7, 9) Yet, the Bible reminds us: “God’s eyes are upon the ways of a man, and He sees all his steps. There is no darkness or deep shadow where wrongdoers can conceal themselves.” (Job 34:21, 22) There is no hiding from Jehovah God. No impostor can fool him; no shadow is so dark or deep that God’s limitless vision cannot pierce right to the heart of matters. After Armageddon, then, we may look

3. We will discuss what four categories that will be gone when God’s Kingdom comes?

4. In what ways do wicked people affect us now?

5. (a) What opportunity is still open to wicked individuals? (b) What will be the final outcome for wicked people who refuse to change?

where the wicked used to be, but we will not see them. They will be gone—forever!—Ps. 37:12-15.

⁶ *Who will remain in place of wicked people?* Jehovah makes this heartwarming promise: “The meek will possess the earth, and they will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.” Later in the same psalm, we read: “The righteous will possess the earth, and they will live forever on it.” (Ps. 37:11, 29) Who are “the meek” and “the righteous”? The meek are those who humbly accept Jehovah’s teaching and guidance; the righteous are those who love doing what is right in the eyes of Jehovah God. In today’s world, righteous people are greatly outnumbered by the wicked. But in the new world to come, the meek and the righteous will be neither a minority nor a majority; they will be the *only* people alive. Truly, a population of such people will make the earth a paradise!

CORRUPT ORGANIZATIONS

⁷ *How do corrupt organizations affect us now?* Much of the evil that is done in this world is the work not of individuals but of organizations. Think, for instance, of the religious organizations that deceive millions of people about the nature of God, the trustworthiness of the Bible, the future of the earth and mankind—and many other subjects. Or what about the governments that promote war and ethnic violence, that oppress the poor and defenseless, that thrive on bribery and favoritism? What about

greedy corporations that pollute the environment, deplete natural resources, and exploit the gullibility of consumers in order to bring untold wealth to a few while millions struggle in poverty? Without question, corrupt organizations are responsible for much of the misery in today’s world.

⁸ *What will Jehovah do?* The great tribulation will begin when the political elements turn against all false religious organizations as represented by the prostitute called Babylon the Great. (Rev. 17:1, 2, 16; 18:1-4) Those religious organizations will be completely destroyed. What, though, about all the other corrupt organizations? The Bible uses mountains and islands to picture many of the organizations and institutions that seem so solid to mankind today. **(Read Revelation 6:14.)** God’s Word foretells that the governments and all their dependent organizations will be rocked from their foundations. The great tribulation will reach its climax with the destruction of all the governments of this old world and all those who side with them against God’s Kingdom. (Jer. 25:31-33) Afterward, there will be no corrupt organizations at all!

⁹ *What will replace corrupt organizations?* After Armageddon, will there be any organization on earth? The Bible tells us: “There are new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to his promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell.” (2 Pet. 3:13) The old heavens and earth, the corrupt

6. Who will remain in place of wicked people, and why is that good news?

7. How do corrupt organizations affect us today?

8. According to the Bible, what will happen to organizations that seem solid to many people today?

9. Why can we be sure that the new earth will be well-organized?

governments and the earthly society under their control, will be gone. They will be replaced by what? The expression “new heavens and a new earth” means that there will be a new government and a new earthly society over which that government rules. The Kingdom under Jesus Christ will perfectly reflect the personality of Jehovah God, who is a God of order. (1 Cor. 14:33) So the “new earth” will be organized. There will be good men to care for matters. (Ps. 45:16) They will be directed by Christ and his 144,000 corulers. Imagine a time when all corrupt organizations will be replaced by a single, unified, and incorruptible organization!

WRONG ACTIVITIES

¹⁰ *How do wrong activities affect us now?* We live in a world full of wrongdoing. Immoral, dishonest, and brutally violent deeds seem to saturate this system of things. Parents in particular often struggle to shield their children from such wrongdoing. The entertainment industry seems to become ever more skillful at glamorizing all kinds of wrongdoing while making a mockery of Jehovah’s standards of right and wrong. (Isa. 5:20) True Christians work against that trend. They fight to protect their integrity in an atmosphere that promotes disrespect for Jehovah’s standards.

¹¹ *What will Jehovah do about wrong activities?* Consider what he did about the wrongdoing that was common in Sodom and Gomorrah. **(Read 2 Peter 2:6-8.)**

10. What kind of wrong activities are common where you live, and how are you and your family affected?

11. What do we learn from Jehovah’s judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah?

The righteous man Lot was tormented by all the wrongdoing that surrounded him and his family. When Jehovah brought destruction on that entire region, he was doing more than just putting an end to the wrongdoing there. He was “setting a pattern for ungodly people of things to come.” Just as Jehovah put an end to all the immoral activities back then, so he will put an end to similar wrongdoing today when he brings judgment against this present system of things.

¹² *What will replace wrong activities?* The Paradise earth will be bustling with happy activity. Think of the thrilling work of turning this planet into a paradise or of building homes for ourselves and our loved ones. Consider the prospect of welcoming back millions from the dead and helping to educate them about Jehovah’s ways as well as the history of his dealings with mankind. (Isa. 65:21, 22; Acts 24:15) Our lives will be full of activity that will contribute to our joy and to Jehovah’s praise!

DISTRESSFUL CONDITIONS

¹³ *How do distressful conditions affect us now?* Wicked people, corrupt organizations, and wrong activities all work together to produce distressing living conditions on this earth. Who of us can claim to be untouched by warfare, poverty, or racism? And what about sickness and death? Those conditions touch us all. They are the direct results of the

12. What are some activities that you look forward to taking part in when this old system of things is gone?

13. The rebellion of Satan, Adam, and Eve has resulted in what distressful world conditions today?

rebellion against Jehovah on the part of three wicked individuals—Satan, Adam, and Eve. None of us can now escape the disorder that their rebellion unleashed.

¹⁴ *What will Jehovah do about distressful conditions?* Consider warfare. Jehovah promises to put an end to it for all time. **(Read Psalm 46:8, 9.)** What about sickness? He will wipe it out. (Isa. 33:24) And death? Jehovah will swallow it up forever! (Isa. 25:8) He will end poverty. (Ps. 72:12-16) He will do the same for all the other distressful conditions that make life miserable today. He will even drive away the bad “air” of this world system, for the bad spirit of Satan and his demons will be gone at last.—Eph. 2:2.

¹⁵ Can you imagine a world without warfare, sickness, or death? Just think—no armies, navies, or air forces! No weapons or war memorials. No hospitals, doctors, nurses, or health insurance; no morgues, funeral homes, undertakers, or cemeteries! And with crime gone, there will be no security industry, no alarm systems, no police forces, perhaps no locks or keys! Think of the anxiety that will no longer trouble our mind and heart.

¹⁶ *What will life be like when distressing conditions are gone?* It is not easy to imagine. We have lived in this old world so long that we may have stopped noticing how much stress we feel over world conditions. Similarly, people who live

14. What will Jehovah do about distressful conditions? Give an example.

15. What are some things that will be gone forever after Armageddon?

16, 17. (a) What relief will Armageddon survivors feel? Illustrate. (b) How can we be sure that we will remain after this old world is gone?



Imagine a world without warfare, sickness, or death!

(See paragraph 15)

near a busy train station may no longer notice the noise, and those who live near a garbage dump may no longer notice the smell. Ah, but take away all those negative factors—what relief!

¹⁷ What will replace the stresses we feel now? Psalm 37:11 answers: “They will find exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.” Do not those words touch your heart? That is what Jehovah wants for you. By all means, then, do everything in your power to stay close to Jehovah God and his organization during these stressful last days! Cherish your hope, ponder over it, make it real in your mind and heart—and share it generously with others! (1 Tim. 4:15, 16; 1 Pet. 3:15) That way, you can be sure that you will not pass away with this condemned old world. On the contrary, you will remain—alive and joyful—for all eternity!

Determined to Be a Soldier of Christ

AS TOLD BY DEMETRIUS PSARRAS

As bullets whizzed around me, I slowly raised a white handkerchief. The soldiers who were shooting yelled for me to come out from my hiding place. Cautiously, I approached them, not knowing whether I would live or die. How did I come to be in this predicament?



I ENTERED this world the seventh of eight children born to hardworking parents in Karítsa, a small village in Greece. The year was 1926.

The year before, my parents had met John Papparizos, a zealous and talkative Bible Student, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then called. Impressed by John's sound Scriptural reasoning, they began attending meetings of the Bible Students in our village. My mother had an unshakable faith in Jehovah God, and even though she was illiterate, she shared it with others at every appropriate opportunity. Sadly, my father focused on people's imperfections and gradually gave up attending Christian meetings.

My siblings and I respected the Bible but grew up distracted by youthful pleasures. Then, in

1939, as World War II engulfed Europe, an event in our village jolted us. Our neighbor and cousin, Nicolas Psarras, a newly baptized Witness, was conscripted into the Greek army. Nicolas, aged 20, boldly told the military authorities, "I cannot fight because I am a soldier of Christ." He was tried by a military court and sentenced to ten years in jail. We were stunned!

Fortunately, early in 1941, the Allied army briefly entered Greece and Nicolas was released from jail. He made his way back to Karítsa, where my older brother, Ilias, bombarded him with questions about the Bible. I eagerly listened in. Afterward, Ilias and I and our youngest sister, Efmorfia, started to study the Bible, and we regularly attended meetings with the Witnesses. The

following year, the three of us dedicated our lives to Jehovah and got baptized. Later, four more of our siblings also became faithful Witnesses.

In 1942, the Karitsa Congregation had nine young men and women between the ages of 15 and 25. We all knew that severe trials lay ahead. So to strengthen ourselves, we got together whenever we could to study the Bible, sing spiritual songs, and pray. As a result, our faith was strengthened.

CIVIL WAR

Just as World War II was ending, Greek communists rebelled against the Greek government, triggering a bitter civil war. Communist guerrillas roamed the countryside, forcing villagers to join their ranks. When they raided our village, they kidnapped three young Witnesses—Antonio Tsoukaris, Ilias, and me. We pleaded that we were Christian neutrals; yet they forced us to march to Mount Olympus, about 12 hours from our village.

Soon afterward, a communist officer ordered us to join a guerrilla raiding party. When we explained that true Christians do not take up arms against their fellow man, the enraged officer dragged us before a general. When we repeated our story, the general ordered, “Then take a mule and carry the wounded from the battlefield to the hospital.”

“But what if we were captured by government soldiers?” we replied. “Would they not view us as active combatants?” “Then deliver bread to the front lines,” he said. “But what if an officer sees us with the mule and orders us to carry weapons to the front lines?” we reasoned. The general thought long and hard. Finally, he exclaimed: “Well, surely you can look after sheep! Stay on the mountain and tend the flocks.”

So as the civil war raged around us, the three of us felt that our consciences would allow us to take care of the sheep. A year later, Ilias, as the oldest son, was allowed to return home to care for our widowed mother. Antonio fell sick and was released. I, however, remained a captive.

Meanwhile, the Greek army was steadily closing in on the communists. The group holding me captive fled through the mountains toward neighboring Albania. Nearing the border, we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by Greek soldiers. The rebels panicked and fled. I hid behind a fallen tree, which led to my encounter with the soldiers mentioned earlier.

When I told the Greek soldiers that I had been held captive by the communists, they took me to be assessed at a military camp near Véroia, the ancient Bible city of Beroea. There I was ordered to dig trenches for the soldiers. When I refused, the commanding officer ordered me into exile on

Demetrius and
friends at Karitsa



the dreaded penal isle of Makrónisos (Makronisi).

ISLAND OF TERROR

The bleak, waterless, sun-drenched rock called Makrónisos sits on the Attica coast about 30 miles (50 km) from Athens. The island is just eight miles (13 km) long and 1.5 miles (2.5 km) across at its widest point. Yet, from 1947 to 1958, it hosted more than 100,000 prisoners, including active and suspected communists, former resistance fighters, and scores of faithful Witnesses of Jehovah.

When I arrived in early 1949, the prisoners were divided into several camps. I was placed in a low-security camp along with several hundred other men. About 40 of us slept on the ground in a canvas tent designed to hold 10 people. We drank putrid water and ate mostly lentils and eggplants. The constant dust and wind made life miserable. But at least we did not have to haul rocks endlessly back and forth, a sadistic torture that broke the bodies and minds of many unfortunate prisoners.

One day while walking on the beach, I met several Witnesses from other camps. How we rejoiced to be together! Taking great care to avoid detection, we met whenever we could. We also discreetly preached to other prisoners, some of whom later became Jehovah's Witnesses. Those activities and heartfelt prayer helped to sustain us spiritually.

INTO A FIERY FURNACE

After I had been through ten months of "rehabilitation," my captors decided that it was time I put on a military uniform. When I refused, they hauled me before the camp commandant. I handed the man a written statement, saying, "I only want to be a soldier of Christ." After threatening me, the commandant handed me over to his second-in-command, a Greek Orthodox archbishop decked out in full religious regalia.

When I boldly answered his questions from the Scriptures, he angrily roared: "Take him away. He is a fanatic!"

The following morning, soldiers again ordered me to put on an army uniform. When I refused, they beat me with their fists and a wooden baton. They then took me to the camp infirmary to confirm that my bones were not broken and dragged me back to my tent. This daily ritual continued for two months.

Because I would not compromise my faith, the frustrated soldiers finally tried a new tack. Tying my hands behind my back, soldiers savagely beat the soles of my feet with ropes. Through the intense pain, I recalled Jesus' words: "Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you . . . Rejoice and be overjoyed, since your reward is great in the heavens, for in that way they persecuted the prophets prior to you." (Matt. 5: 11, 12) Finally, after what seemed to be an eternity, I fell unconscious.

I awoke in an icy cell without bread, water, or a blanket. Even so, I felt calm and composed. As the Bible promises, "the peace of God" was 'guarding my heart and my thoughts.' (Phil. 4:7, fn.) The following day, a kindly soldier gave me bread and water and an overcoat. Then another soldier gave me his rations. In these and many other ways, I felt Jehovah's tender care.

The authorities viewed me as an incorrigible rebel and took me to Athens to face a military court. There I was sentenced to three years in prison on Yíaros (Gyaros), an island about 30 miles (50 km) east of Makrónisos.

"WE CAN TRUST YOU"

Yíaros prison was a huge red-brick fortress holding more than 5,000 political prisoners. It also held seven Witnesses of Jehovah, all imprisoned for their Christian neutrality. Although it was strictly forbidden, the seven of us secretly met together to study the Bible. We even regularly received smuggled copies of *The Watch-*

tower, which we copied by hand to use in our studies.

One day while we were secretly studying, a prison guard stumbled on our gathering and confiscated our literature. We were summoned to the deputy warden's office, fully expecting that our sentences would be extended. Instead, the deputy warden said: "We know who you are, and we respect your stand. We know that we can trust you. Go back to work." He even assigned some of us easier duties. Our hearts swelled with gratitude. Even in prison our Christian integrity could bring praise to Jehovah.

Our steadfastness also brought other fine results. After closely observing our good behavior, a prisoner who was a professor of mathematics was moved to ask about our beliefs. When we Witnesses were released in early 1951, he too was released. Later, he became a baptized Witness and a full-time evangelizer.

STILL A SOLDIER

As for me, after my release, I returned to my family at Karítsa. Later, along with many of my countrymen, I migrated to Melbourne, Australia. There I met and married Janette, a fine Christian sister, and we raised a son and three daughters in the Christian way.

Today, past the age of 90, I am still active as a Christian elder. Because of my old injuries, my body and feet sometimes ache, especially after I share in the preaching work. Nevertheless, I am as determined as ever to be a "soldier of Christ."
—2 Tim. 2:3.

With my wife, Janette

With other exiled Witnesses
on Makrónisos Island





“The Judge of All the Earth” Always Does What Is Right

“The Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice.”—DEUT. 32:4.

SONGS: 12, 135

**HOW WILL REMEMBERING
THESE VERSES HELP US
IF WE EXPERIENCE
INJUSTICE?**

Micah 7:7

Proverbs 19:3

Matthew 18:15

“WILL the Judge of all the earth not do what is right?” (Gen. 18:25) With that question, Abraham expressed confidence that Jehovah would render perfect justice in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham was convinced that Jehovah would never act unjustly by “putting the righteous man to death with the wicked one.” Such an act was “unthinkable” to Abraham. Some 400 years later, Jehovah said of himself: “The Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness who is never unjust; righteous and upright is he.”—Deut. 31:19; 32:4.

² Why could Abraham express confidence that Jehovah would always render a righteous judgment? Because Jehovah is the greatest example of justice and righteousness. In fact, the Hebrew words rendered “justice” and “righteousness” often appear together in the Hebrew Scriptures. Basically, there is no distinction between what is just and what is right. Logically, since Jehovah is the ultimate standard

1. How did Abraham express confidence in Jehovah’s sense of justice? (See opening picture.)
2. Why can it be said that Jehovah is incapable of injustice?

of righteousness, his view of matters will always be just. Further, according to his own written Word, “he loves righteousness and justice.”—Ps. 33:5.

³ Honesthearted ones are comforted by the knowledge that Jehovah is always just, for the world is saturated with injustice. As a result, individuals have at times become the victims of gross wrongs. For example, some people have been unjustly convicted and imprisoned. Only with the introduction of DNA evidence in a review of the case have some been freed after spending decades in prison for crimes they did not commit. While such wrongful imprisonments are a cause of frustration and even anger, Christians may find another type of injustice even more difficult to bear.

IN THE CONGREGATION

⁴ Christians expect to experience some injustice outside the Christian congregation. However, our faith may be put to the test if we observe or experience what seems to be an injustice inside the congregation. How will you react if you believe that you have experienced some wrong in the congregation or in your dealings with a fellow Christian? Will you allow that to be a cause for stumbling?

⁵ Because all of us are imperfect and subject to sin, we realize that there is a possibility that we could either experience injustice ourselves or be the cause of it for someone else in the con-

gregation. (1 John 1:8) Although such instances are rare, faithful Christians are not surprised or stumbled when injustices do occur. For good reason, Jehovah has provided practical advice in his Word to assist us to maintain our integrity, even if we experience wrongs at the hands of fellow believers.—Ps. 55:12-14.

⁶ Consider the experience of Willi Diehl. Beginning in 1931, Brother Diehl served faithfully at the Bethel home in Bern, Switzerland. In 1946, he attended the eighth class of Gilead School in New York, U.S.A. After graduation, he was eventually assigned to the circuit work in Switzerland. In his life story, Brother Diehl related: “In May 1949, I informed headquarters in Bern that I planned to marry.” The response from the Bern office? “No privileges other than regular pioneering.” Brother Diehl went on to explain: “I was not permitted to give talks . . . Many no longer greeted us, treating us like disfellowshipped persons.”

⁷ How did Brother Diehl handle that situation? He stated: “We knew, however, that getting married was not unscriptural, so we took refuge in prayer and put our trust in Jehovah.” Eventually, the mistaken view regarding marriage that prompted the injustice was corrected, and Brother Diehl’s privileges of service were restored. His loyalty to Jehovah was rewarded.* We do well to ask ourselves: ‘Would I

3. Relate an example of injustice in today’s world.

4. How might a Christian’s faith be tested?

5. Why should it come as no surprise if a Christian observes or experiences injustice in the congregation?

* See Willi Diehl’s life story, “Jehovah Is My God, in Whom I Will Trust,” in the November 1, 1991, issue of *The Watchtower*.

6, 7. What injustice did one brother experience in the congregation, and what qualities helped him to handle the matter properly?

demonstrate a similar spiritual outlook if I experienced such injustice? Would I patiently wait on Jehovah, or would I be inclined to take matters into my own hands?’—Prov. 11:2; **read Micah 7:7.**

⁸ On the other hand, you could mistakenly conclude that you have been a victim of injustice or that another member of the congregation has been. This could happen because of our imperfect view of matters or because we do not have all the facts. In either case, whether our understanding of matters is accurate or mistaken, prayerful reliance on Jehovah, combined with loyalty, will prevent us from ever becoming “enraged against Jehovah.”—**Read Proverbs 19:3.**

⁹ Let us reflect on three examples of injustice that occurred among Jehovah’s people in Bible times. In this article, we will consider Abraham’s great-grandson Joseph and his experience with his brothers. In the next article, we will examine Jehovah’s dealings with Israel’s King Ahab as well as the apostle Peter’s experience in Syrian Antioch. As we discuss these examples, look for lessons that will help you maintain your spiritual focus and preserve your relationship with Jehovah, especially when you believe that you have experienced injustice.

JOSEPH—VICTIM OF INJUSTICE

¹⁰ Joseph, a faithful servant of Jeho-

8. Why might you mistakenly conclude that you have been a victim of injustice or that someone else has been?

9. What examples will we consider in this article and in the next?

10, 11. (a) What injustices did Joseph experience? (b) What opportunity presented itself while Joseph was in prison?

vah, experienced injustice, not only at the hands of outsiders but also, more painfully, at the hands of his fleshly brothers. When Joseph was in his late teens, his brothers kidnapped him and sold him as a slave. Against his will, he was taken to Egypt. (Gen. 37:23-28; 42: 21) After some time in that foreign country, he was falsely accused of attempted rape and was imprisoned without a trial. (Gen. 39:17-20) His ordeal as a slave and a prisoner lasted for about 13 years. What lessons can we learn from Joseph’s experience that will help us if we face injustice at the hands of a fellow believer?

¹¹ Joseph had an opportunity to present his case to a fellow prisoner. That prisoner was the former chief cupbearer of the king. During the time that Joseph and the cupbearer were imprisoned together, the cupbearer had a dream, which Joseph interpreted. Joseph explained that the cupbearer would be restored to his former position in Pharaoh’s court. When Joseph shared this divinely inspired interpretation, he took advantage of the opportunity to explain his own situation. We can learn valuable lessons not only from what Joseph said but also from what he did not say.—Gen. 40:5-13.

¹² **Read Genesis 40:14, 15.** Notice that Joseph described himself as having been “kidnapped.” The original-language term literally means that he had been “stolen.” Clearly, he was the

12, 13. (a) How did Joseph’s words to the cupbearer show that he did not passively accept the injustices he suffered? (b) What details did Joseph evidently not include in his conversation with the cupbearer?



Negative speech may cause a problem to get out of control
(See paragraph 14)



victim of injustice. Joseph also stated that he was not guilty of the crime for which he was imprisoned. On that basis, he asked the cupbearer to mention him to Pharaoh. Why? He explained his goal: “In order to get me out of this place.”

¹³ Were Joseph’s words those of a man who passively accepted his situation? Certainly not. He was keenly aware that he was the victim of many injustices. He clearly explained the facts to the cupbearer, who perhaps would be in a position to assist him. Note, however, that there is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that Joseph ever told anyone—not even Pharaoh—that his brothers were his kidnappers. In fact, when his brothers came to Egypt and were reconciled with Joseph, Pharaoh welcomed them and invited them to make their home in Egypt and to enjoy “the best of all the land.”—Gen. 45:16-20.

¹⁴ When a Christian believes that he is the victim of injustice, he should be careful not to engage in harmful gossip. Of course, it is entirely proper to seek assistance from the elders and to inform them if a member of the congregation is guilty of a serious wrong. (Lev. 5:1) However, in many cases that do not involve serious wrongdoing, it may be possible to resolve a difference without involving anyone else, not even the elders. **(Read Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15.)** May we loyally handle such matters in line with Bible principles. In some cases, we may come to realize that we were not the victim of an injustice after all. How grateful we would be that we did not make a situation worse by slandering a fellow Christian! Remember, whether we are right or wrong, engaging in hurtful speech will never improve

14. What will protect us from the trap of negative speech even if we experience injustice in the congregation?

a situation. Loyalty to Jehovah and to our brothers will protect us from making such a mistake. Speaking of “the one who is walking faultlessly,” the psalmist said that “he does not slander with his tongue, he does nothing bad to his neighbor, and he does not defame his friends.”—Ps. 15:2, 3; Jas. 3:5.

REMEMBER YOUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

¹⁵ We find a more important lesson in Joseph’s relationship with Jehovah. Throughout his 13-year ordeal, Joseph demonstrated that he had Jehovah’s view of matters. (Gen. 45:5-8) He never blamed Jehovah for his situation. Although he did not forget the wrongs he suffered, he did not become embittered by them. Most important, he did not allow the imperfections and wrong actions of others to separate him from Jehovah. Joseph’s loyalty gave him the opportunity to see Jehovah’s hand in correcting the injustices and in blessing him and his family.

¹⁶ In a similar way, we must cherish and guard our relationship with Jehovah. Never should we allow the imperfections of our brothers to separate us from the God we love and worship. (Rom. 8:38, 39) Instead, if we experience injustice at the hands of a fellow worshipper, let us be like Joseph and draw even closer to Jehovah, striving to have his view of matters. When we have done all that we Scripturally can to remedy the situation, we need to leave the

matter in Jehovah’s hands, confident that he will correct it in his own time and way.

TRUST “THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH”

¹⁷ As long as we live in this system of things, we can expect to experience injustices. On rare occasions, you or someone you know may experience or observe what seems to be an injustice in the congregation. Do not let yourself be stumbled. (Ps. 119:165) Instead, as faithful servants of God, we loyally and prayerfully rely on him. At the same time, we modestly acknowledge that we likely do not have all the facts. We are keenly aware that the fault may lie in our imperfect view of matters. As we learned from the example of Joseph, we want to avoid negative speech, knowing that such speech only makes a bad situation worse. Finally, rather than taking matters into our own hands, let us be determined to be loyal and wait patiently on Jehovah to correct matters. Such an approach is sure to bring Jehovah’s approval and blessing, just as it did in the case of Joseph. Yes, we can be certain that Jehovah, “the Judge of all the earth,” will always do what is right, “for all his ways are justice.”—Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4.

¹⁸ In the next article, we will consider two additional instances of unjust treatment that occurred among Jehovah’s people in Bible times. A review of these accounts will highlight how humility and a willingness to forgive are related to Jehovah’s view of justice.

15. How did Joseph’s relationship with Jehovah prove to be a blessing to him?

16. Why should we draw even closer to Jehovah if we experience injustice in the congregation?

17. How can we show that we have confidence in “the Judge of all the earth”?

18. What will we consider in the next article?



Do You Share Jehovah's Sense of Justice?

“I will declare the name of Jehovah . . . , a God of faithfulness who is never unjust.”—DEUT. 32:3, 4.

IMAGINE the scene. A man is falsely accused of a capital offense. To the shock and dismay of his family and friends, he is convicted on the basis of false testimony presented by witnesses who are known to be good-for-nothing men. A sick feeling overwhelms lovers of justice as they witness the execution of that innocent man and his sons. This is not an imaginary account. This was the experience of a faithful servant of Jehovah named Naboth, who lived during the reign of King Ahab of Israel.—1 Ki. 21:11-13; 2 Ki. 9:26.

² In this article, we will consider not only Naboth's experience but also that of a faithful elder in the first-century Christian congregation who made an error in judgment. In considering these Bible examples, we will learn that humility is essential if we are to demonstrate that we share Jehovah's sense of justice. We will also learn how a willingness to forgive when we observe injustices in the congregation can reflect Jehovah's view of justice.

1, 2. (a) What injustice did Naboth and his sons experience? (b) What two qualities will we consider in this article?

SONGS: 5, 46

HOW WILL REMEMBERING THESE VERSES HELP US IF WE EXPERIENCE INJUSTICE?

Deuteronomy 32:4

1 Peter 5:5

Matthew 6:14

A PERVERSION OF JUSTICE

³ Naboth was faithful to Jehovah at a time when most Israelites were following the bad example of King Ahab and his wife, wicked Queen Jezebel. Those Baal worshippers had no respect for Jehovah or appreciation for his standards. On the other hand, Naboth valued his relationship with Jehovah even more than life itself.

⁴ **Read 1 Kings 21:1-3.** When Ahab offered to purchase Naboth's vineyard or to give him a better vineyard in its place, Naboth refused. Why? He respectfully explained: "It is unthinkable, from Jehovah's standpoint, for me to give you the inheritance of my forefathers." Naboth's refusal was based on Jehovah's law to the nation of Israel that forbade the permanent sale of one's tribal inheritance. (Lev. 25:23; Num. 36:7) Clearly, Naboth had Jehovah's view of matters.

⁵ Sadly, Naboth's refusal triggered a series of reprehensible acts on the part of both King Ahab and his wife. In order to obtain the vineyard for her husband, Jezebel orchestrated the false accusation against Naboth, which resulted in the execution of both Naboth and his sons. How would Jehovah deal with this tragic injustice?

GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT

⁶ Jehovah swiftly dispatched Elijah to confront Ahab. Elijah rightly judged

3, 4. What kind of man was Naboth, and why did he refuse to sell his vineyard to King Ahab?

5. What role did Jezebel play in Naboth's murder?

6, 7. How did Jehovah show that he is a lover of justice, and why would this have been of comfort to Naboth's relatives and friends?

Ahab as a murderer and a thief. What was Jehovah's verdict in this case? Ahab, his wife, and his sons would suffer the same fate as did Naboth and his sons.—1 Ki. 21:17-25.

⁷ Although Naboth's family and friends were saddened by Ahab's murderous actions, they no doubt found some measure of comfort in knowing that Jehovah was aware of the injustice and that he quickly addressed the wrongdoing. However, their humility and their trust in Jehovah were likely put to the test by an unexpected turn of events.

⁸ When Ahab learned of Jehovah's adverse judgment, "he ripped his garments apart and put sackcloth on his body; and he went on a fast and kept lying down in sackcloth and walking despondently." Ahab humbled himself! With what result? Jehovah told Elijah: "Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the calamity during his lifetime. I will bring the calamity upon his house in the days of his son." (1 Ki. 21:27-29; 2 Ki. 10:10, 11, 17) Jehovah, "the examiner of hearts," extended a measure of mercy to Ahab.—Prov. 17:3.

HUMILITY—A PROTECTION

⁹ How did this decision affect those who knew of Ahab's terrible crime? This seeming reversal may have tested the faith of Naboth's family and friends. If so, humility would have protected them, prompting them to contin-

8. How did Ahab respond to Jehovah's judgment message, and with what result?

9. Why would humility have been a protection to Naboth's family and friends?

ue faithful in their worship of Jehovah, confident that their God is incapable of injustice. **(Read Deuteronomy 32: 3, 4.)** Naboth, his sons, and their families will experience perfect justice when Jehovah resurrects the righteous ones. (Job 14:14, 15; John 5:28, 29) Furthermore, a humble person remembers that “the true God will judge every deed, including every hidden thing, as to whether it is good or bad.” (Eccl. 12: 14) Yes, when rendering judgment, Jehovah takes into consideration factors that are unknown to us. Thus, humility protects innocent ones from spiritual disaster.

¹⁰ How will you respond if the elders make a decision that you do not understand or perhaps do not agree with? For example, what will you do if you or someone you love loses a cherished privilege of service? What if your marriage mate, your son or daughter, or your close friend is disfellowshipped and you do not agree with the decision? What if you believe that mercy was mistakenly extended to a wrongdoer? Such situations can test our faith in Jehovah and in his organizational arrangement.

10, 11. (a) Under what circumstances might our personal sense of justice be tested? (b) In what ways will humility protect us?

How will you respond if the elders announce a decision that you do not agree with?

(See paragraphs 10, 11)



How will humility protect you if you face such a test? Consider two ways.

¹¹ First, humility will move us to acknowledge that we do not have all the facts. No matter how much we know of a situation, only Jehovah can read a person's figurative heart. (1 Sam. 16:7) Our awareness of this undeniable truth will prompt us to be humble, to recognize our limitations, and to adjust our view of the matter. Second, humility will help us to be submissive and patient as we wait on Jehovah to correct any true injustice. It is as the wise man wrote: "It will turn out well for those who fear the true God . . . , but it will not turn out well for the wicked one, nor will he prolong his days." (Eccl. 8:12, 13) Certainly, a humble response is in the best spiritual interests of all concerned.—**Read 1 Peter 5:5.**

A CASE OF HYPOCRISY

¹² The first-century Christians in Syrian Antioch faced a situation that tested not only their humility but also their willingness to forgive. Let us consider that account and see how it will help us to examine our attitude about forgiveness and deepen our understanding of how forgiveness relates to Jehovah's view of justice.

¹³ The apostle Peter was a well-known elder in the Christian congregation. He was a personal associate of Jesus and had been entrusted with significant responsibilities. (Matt. 16:19) For example, in 36 C.E., Peter had the privilege

12. What account will we now consider, and why?

13, 14. What privileges did the apostle Peter enjoy, and how did he demonstrate courage?

of sharing the good news with Cornelius and his household. This occasion was noteworthy, since Cornelius was an uncircumcised Gentile. When Cornelius and his household received holy spirit, Peter acknowledged: "Can anyone deny water to prevent these from being baptized who have received the holy spirit just as we have?"—Acts 10:47.

¹⁴ In 49 C.E., the apostles and the elders in Jerusalem met to consider whether circumcision would be required of Gentiles who converted to Christianity. At this meeting, Peter spoke boldly, reminding the brothers that some years earlier, uncircumcised Gentiles had received the gift of the holy spirit. Peter's eyewitness testimony was very helpful to the first-century governing body in making a decision. (Acts 15:6-11, 13, 14, 28, 29) Likely, both Jewish and Gentile Christians appreciated Peter's fearlessness in presenting the facts. How easy it must have been to have confidence in such a spiritually mature man!—Heb. 13:7.

¹⁵ Shortly after the meeting in 49 C.E., Peter visited Syrian Antioch. While there, he freely associated with his Gentile brothers. No doubt, they benefited from Peter's knowledge and experience. We can imagine their surprise and disappointment, though, when Peter suddenly stopped eating with them. Other Jewish members of the congregation, even Barnabas, were wrongly influenced by Peter to do the same. What prompted a mature Christian elder to make such an error in judgment—one that could have divided the congrega-

15. What error did Peter make while in Syrian Antioch? (See opening picture.)

gation? More important, what can we learn from Peter's error that will help us if we are hurt by the words or actions of an elder?

¹⁶ **Read Galatians 2:11-14.** Peter gave in to the snare of fear of man. (Prov. 29:25) Despite his firsthand knowledge of Jehovah's thinking on the matter, Peter feared the opinion of the circumcised Jewish members of the congregation in Jerusalem. The apostle Paul, who was also present at that meeting in Jerusalem in 49 C.E., confronted Peter in Antioch and exposed his hypocrisy. (Acts 15:12; Gal. 2:13, ftn.) How would the Gentile Christians who were personally affected by Peter's mistake respond to the injustice? Would they allow themselves to be stumbled? Would Peter lose precious privileges because of his mistake?

BE FORGIVING

¹⁷ Evidently, Peter humbly accepted Paul's corrective counsel. There is no indication in the Scriptures that he lost his privileges. In fact, he was later inspired to write two letters that became part of the Bible. Notably, in his second letter, Peter refers to Paul as "our beloved brother." (2 Pet. 3:15) Although Peter's error in judgment may have been painful for the Gentile members of the congregation, Jesus, who is head of the congregation, continued to use him. (Eph. 1:22) Members of the congregation thus had an opportunity to imitate Jesus and his Father by extending forgiveness. It is to be hoped

that no one allowed himself to be stumbled by an imperfect man's mistake.

¹⁸ As was true in the first century, there are no perfect elders in the modern-day Christian congregation, "for we all make mistakes many times." (Jas. 3:2, ftn.) We may readily acknowledge this fact, but the challenge is when we are personally affected by the imperfections of a brother. In such a situation, will we reflect Jehovah's view of justice? For example, how will you respond if an elder makes a remark that hints at a degree of prejudice? Will you allow yourself to be stumbled if an elder thoughtlessly makes a statement that offends or hurts you? Rather than quickly concluding that the brother no longer qualifies as an elder, will you patiently wait on Jesus, the head of the congregation? Will you put forth the effort to see the bigger picture, perhaps reflecting on the brother's many years of faithful service? If a brother who sins against you continues to serve as an elder or even receives additional privileges, will you rejoice with him? Your willingness to forgive may well reflect Jehovah's view of justice.—**Read Matthew 6:14, 15.**

¹⁹ Lovers of justice long for the day when Jehovah will completely erase all the injustice inflicted on humans by Satan and his wicked system. (Isa. 65:17) Until then, may each of us be determined to reflect Jehovah's view of justice by humbly acknowledging our personal limitations and generously forgiving those who sin against us.

16. How was Peter corrected, and what questions arise?

17. How did Peter benefit from Jehovah's forgiveness?

18. Under what circumstances may we need to reflect Jehovah's sense of justice?

19. What should be our determination?



May Your Volunteer Spirit Bring Praise to Jehovah!

“Because of the people’s volunteering, praise Jehovah!”

—JUDG. 5:2.

SONGS: 84, 75

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE . . .

that Jehovah takes no delight in a person who neglects His work?

that Jehovah values and rewards the faithful service of mere humans?

that your displaying a volunteer spirit matters to Jehovah?

“CAN a man be of use to God? Can anyone with insight be of benefit to him? Does the Almighty care that you are righteous, or does he gain anything because you follow the course of integrity?” (Job 22:1-3) Have you ever wondered about the answers to questions such as these? When Eliphaz the Temanite first posed them to Job, Eliphaz no doubt believed that the answer was no. His associate, Bildad the Shuhite, even argued that a righteous standing before God is not possible for humans.—**Read Job 25:4.**

² These false comforters claimed that our efforts to serve Jehovah loyally are of no benefit to him at all, that our value to God is no more than that of a moth, a maggot, or a worm. (Job 4:19; 25:6) At first glance, we might conclude that Eliphaz and Bildad displayed a humble attitude. (Job 22:29) After all, from the top of a high mountain or from the window of an airplane, human activity may seem insignificant. However, is that how Jehovah views our contribution to the Kingdom work as he looks at our planet from his lofty perspective?

1, 2. (a) What did Eliphaz and Bildad claim about the effect of our service to God? (b) How did Jehovah make his feelings known?

Jehovah made his feelings known when he reproved Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for speaking falsehood but took delight in Job, referring to him as “my servant.” (Job 42:7, 8) Thus, a person can indeed “be of use to God.”

“WHAT DO YOU GIVE HIM?”

³ Elihu was not corrected by Jehovah for asking: “If you are righteous, what do you give him [God]; what does he receive from you?” (Job 35:7) Was Elihu suggesting that our efforts in God’s service are pointless? No. He was saying that Jehovah does not depend on our worship. Jehovah is complete. We cannot make him richer or stronger. On the contrary, any goodness, talent, or strength that we possess is a trust from God, and he takes note of how we use it.

⁴ Jehovah considers acts of loyal love expressed toward his servants as being rendered to him personally. “The one showing favor to the lowly is lending to Jehovah, and He will repay him for what he does,” says Proverbs 19:17. Is this scripture implying that Jehovah takes note of every act of kindness performed in behalf of lowly ones? Can we conclude that the Creator of the universe considers himself to be indebted to mere humans who perform deeds of mercy and that he views such giving as loans that he repays with favor and blessings? Yes, and this was verified by God’s own Son.
—**Read Luke 14:13, 14.**

⁵ Jehovah invited the prophet Isaiah to speak on His behalf, revealing His

pleasure in having faithful humans take part in the outworking of His purpose. (Isa. 6:8-10) Isaiah willingly accepted that invitation. Today, thousands are demonstrating that same “Here I am! Send me!” spirit in taking up challenging assignments in Jehovah’s service. Still, one might ask: ‘Does my individual effort really matter? While it is gracious of Jehovah to allow me to volunteer and participate, will he not provide whatever is needed to fulfill his Word no matter how much I personally choose to do in his service?’ Consider how the events that unfolded in the days of Deborah and Barak answer these questions.

PARALYZED BY FEAR, THEN FORTIFIED BY GOD

⁶ The Israelites had been “harshly oppressed” by Canaanite King Jabin for 20 years. Villagers were afraid even to be seen in public. From a military standpoint, they were ill-equipped, having neither offensive weapons nor defensive armor, whereas their enemies had 900 war chariots with iron scythes.—Judg. 4:1-3, 13; 5:6-8.*

⁷ Nevertheless, Jehovah gave Barak this clear command through Deborah the prophetess: “Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun with you. I will bring to you Sisera, the chief of Jabin’s army, along with his war chariots and his

* A scythe is a sharp, long, and sometimes curved blade. Scythes would have stuck out from the chariots, possibly from the axles. Who would dare approach such a frightening war machine?

3. What did Elihu say about our efforts to serve Jehovah, and what did he mean?

4. To what does Jehovah liken our kindly giving to others?

5. What questions will we now consider?

6. What contrast was there between Israel’s villagers and Jabin’s army?

7, 8. (a) What initial instructions did Jehovah give Barak? (b) How did Israel defeat Jabin’s army? (See opening picture.)

troops to the stream of Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.”—Judg. 4:4-7.

⁸ Word spread. The volunteers gathered at Mount Tabor. Barak wasted no time in following Jehovah’s instructions. **(Read Judges 4:14-16.)** During the main battle in Taanach, a sudden cloudburst turned the surroundings into a marsh. Barak chased Sisera’s army all the way to Harosheth—a 15-mile (24 km) route. At some point along the way, Sisera abandoned his once frightening but now useless chariot and ran to Zaananim, perhaps near Kedesh. He sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and was welcomed by Jael. Exhausted from battle, he fell asleep. Sisera was now vulnerable to Jael’s decisive act of courage to put him to death. (Judg. 4:17-21) Israel’s enemy was defeated!*

A CONTRAST IN ATTITUDE TOWARD VOLUNTEER SERVICE

⁹ Judges chapters 4 and 5 should be studied together, for each chapter reveals details not contained in the other. For instance, Judges 5:20, 21 reports: “From heaven the stars fought; from their orbits they fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon washed them away.” Is this a reference to angelic assistance, or was there some sort of meteorite shower? The account does not elaborate. But to what else besides divine intervention can we attribute such torrential rains at that precise location and exact moment, so as to swamp 900

war chariots? Three times at Judges 4: 14, 15, the victory is attributed to Jehovah. None of the 10,000 Israelite volunteers could boast about bringing this deliverance.

¹⁰ Strangely, though, in the midst of Deborah and Barak’s victory song praising Jehovah for a miraculous conquest, they sang: “‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of Jehovah, ‘yes, curse its inhabitants, for they did not come to the assistance of Jehovah, to the assistance of Jehovah with the mighty ones.’”—Judg. 5:23.

¹¹ Meroz was evidently cursed so effectively that it is difficult to say with certainty what it was. Could it have been a city whose inhabitants failed to respond to the initial rally for volunteers? If it lay on Sisera’s escape route, did its citizens have a chance to detain him but fail to seize the opportunity? How could they not have heard of Jehovah’s call for volunteers? Ten thousand people from their region had been assembled for this offensive. Imagine the people of Meroz catching sight of this vicious warrior as he ran right through their streets alone and desperate. This would have been a splendid opportunity to advance Jehovah’s purpose and experience his blessing. Yet, at that critical moment when given a choice between doing something and doing nothing, did they give in to indifference? What a contrast that would have been to Jael’s courageous action described in the very next verses!—Judg. 5:24-27.

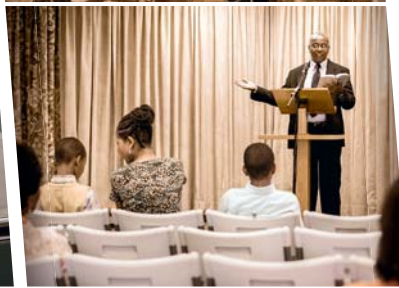
¹² At Judges 5:9, 10, we see a further

* Further details of this thrilling account are set forth in *The Watchtower* of August 1, 2015, pp. 12-15.

9. What details does Judges 5:20, 21 provide regarding the battle against Sisera?

10, 11. What was “Meroz,” and why was it cursed?

12. What contrast in people’s attitude is seen at Judges 5:9, 10, and how should this affect us today?



Before making a decision, think of the effect it will have on your family and the congregation
(See paragraph 15)



contrast between the attitude of those who marched with Barak and that of those who did not. Deborah and Barak commended “the commanders of Israel, who went as volunteers with the people.” How different they were from the “riders on tawny donkeys,” who were too proud to participate, and those “who [sat] on fine carpets,” loving a life of luxury! Unlike those “who walk[ed] on the road,” preferring the easy way, those who went with Barak were willing to do battle on the rocky slopes of Tabor and in the swampy valley of Kishon! All the pleasure-seekers were urged to “consider!” Yes, they needed to meditate on their missed opportunity to help Jehovah’s cause. So, too, should any who today are holding back from serving God fully.

¹³ Those who volunteered witnessed firsthand how Jehovah magnifies his

13. How did the attitude of the tribes of Reuben, Dan, and Asher differ from that of Zebulun and Naphtali?

sovereignty. They had something of substance to speak about as “they were recounting the righteous acts of Jehovah.” (Judg. 5:11) On the other hand, the tribes of Reuben, Dan, and Asher were each singled out at Judges 5:15-17 for giving more attention to their own material interests—as represented by their flocks, ships, and harbors—than to the work that Jehovah was having done. By contrast, Zebulun and Naphtali “risked their lives to the point of death” to support Deborah and Barak. (Judg. 5:18) This contrast in attitude toward volunteer service contains an important lesson for us.

“PRAISE JEHOVAH!”

¹⁴ Today, we are not called on to engage in physical warfare, but we are privileged to show courage by our zealous preaching activity. The need for volunteers in Jehovah’s organization is

14. How do we show our support for Jehovah’s sovereignty today?

greater than ever. Millions of brothers, sisters, and young people are offering themselves in various fields of full-time service as pioneers, as Bethelites, as Kingdom Hall construction volunteers, and as volunteers at assemblies and conventions. Think, too, of elders who carry weighty responsibilities with Hospital Liaison Committees and convention organization. Be assured that Jehovah deeply appreciates your willing spirit, and he will not forget it.—Heb. 6:10.

¹⁵ Each of us does well to ask himself: ‘Am I content to let others carry the bulk of the workload? Am I allowing undue emphasis on material interests to interfere with my volunteer spirit? Like Barak, Deborah, Jael, and the 10,000 volunteers, do I have the faith and courage to use whatever is at my disposal to carry out the clear command of Jehovah? If I am contemplating a major move to another city or country for perceived economic advantages, do I give prayerful consideration to the effect this would have on my family and on the congregation?’*

¹⁶ Jehovah dignifies us by allowing us to share in supporting his sovereignty. Since the Devil first enticed humans to support his rival sovereignty, your siding

* See the article “Anxiety About Money” in the July 1, 2015, issue of *The Watchtower*.

15. How can we determine that we are not being overcome by indifference toward Jehovah’s work?

16. What can we give to Jehovah that he does not already have?

with Jehovah’s rulership sends Satan a message that is loud and clear. The faith and integrity that motivate your volunteer spirit are pleasing to Jehovah. (Prov. 23:15, 16) He uses your display of support to make a reply to the taunts of Satan. (Prov. 27:11) Thus, by your loyal obedience, you are, in effect, giving Jehovah something that he considers precious, and he finds profound joy in this.

¹⁷ Soon the earth will be filled with those who prefer Jehovah’s sovereignty over any other. How we long for that day! With Deborah and Barak, we sing: “Let all your enemies perish, O Jehovah, but let those who love you be like the sun rising in its glory.” (Judg. 5:31) This petition will be answered when Jehovah brings an end to Satan’s wicked world! When the battle of Armageddon begins, there will be no need for human volunteers to rout the enemy. That will be the time for us to “stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah.” (2 Chron. 20:17) But in the meantime, there are many opportunities for us to support Jehovah’s cause with courage and zeal.

¹⁸ “Because of the people’s volunteering, praise Jehovah!” Thus, Deborah and Barak began their victory song with praise, not to creatures, but to the Most High. (Judg. 5:1, 2) Likewise today, may your volunteer spirit move all those who benefit from it to “praise Jehovah!”

17. What does Judges 5:31 indicate for the future?

18. What is the effect of your volunteer service on those who benefit from it?

