The background of the magazine cover features a photograph of a woman and two young girls in a rural, possibly refugee, setting. The woman, in the center, wears a patterned headwrap and a light-colored ribbed top. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the right. To her left, a young girl looks directly at the camera. To her right, another young girl looks off to the side. In the background, a vast, hilly landscape is visible, covered with numerous small, simple dwellings. The overall scene suggests a community in a difficult environment.

JANUARY 15, 1998

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Amid Turmoil



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Christianity in Action—Amid Turmoil
- 8 "Walking by Faith, Not by Sight"
- 13 Keep On Walking With God
- 19 Planning Ahead for Our Loved Ones
- 23 Strengthening Our Faith in God's Word

- 29 Philemon and Onesimus—United in Christian Brotherhood
- 32 They Silently Praise Their Creator

WATCHTOWER STUDIES

FEBRUARY 16-22: "Walking by Faith, Not by Sight." Page 8. Songs to be used: 98, 144.

FEBRUARY 23-MARCH 1: Keep On Walking With God. Page 13. Songs to be used: 55, 106.

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CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Amid Turmoil

IT ALL began suddenly one day in April 1994. A plane crash killed the presidents of Burundi and Rwanda. Within hours violence of horrifying proportions engulfed Rwanda. In little more than three months, over 500,000 Rwandans—men, women, and children—were dead. Some people refer to the period as “the genocide.”

Half of Rwanda’s 7.5 million inhabitants had to flee. This included 2.4 million who sought refuge in neighboring countries. It was the largest and swiftest refugee exodus in modern history. Refugee camps were hastily established in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), Tanzania, and Burundi. Some of these camps—the largest in the world—gave shelter to 200,000 people.

Among the refugees were many of Jehovah’s Witnesses, a peace-loving people who apply Bible principles in their lives. In whatever land they live, they maintain strict neutrality and apply the principle embodied in these words of Isaiah 2:4: “They will have to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war anymore.” Jehovah’s Witnesses are widely recognized as a religious group that did not participate in the genocide in Rwanda.

Jesus Christ said that his followers are “no part of the world.” Because they are “in the world,” however, they cannot always escape the turmoil of the nations. (John 17:11, 14) During the genocide in Rwanda, some 400 Witnesses lost their lives. About

2,000 Witnesses and persons interested in the Kingdom message became refugees.

Does being no part of the world mean that Jehovah’s Witnesses do nothing when calamity strikes? No. God’s Word says: “If a brother or a sister is in a naked state and lacking the food sufficient for the day, yet a certain one of you says to them: ‘Go in peace, keep warm and well fed,’ but you do not give them the necessities for their body, of what benefit is it? Thus, too, faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself.” (James 2:15-17) Love of neighbor also motivates the Witnesses to help those who do not share their religious views.—Matthew 22:37-40.

Although Jehovah’s Witnesses worldwide yearned to help their fellow believers facing the calamitous situation in Rwanda, coordination of the relief effort was assigned to Western Europe. In the summer of 1994, a team of Witness volunteers from Europe rushed to help their Christian brothers and sisters in Africa. Well-organized camps and field hospitals were set up for the Rwandan refugees. Huge quantities of clothing, blankets, food, and Bible literature were flown in or shipped to them by other means. More than 7,000 afflicted persons—nearly three times the number of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Rwanda at the time—benefited from the relief effort. By December of that year, thousands of refugees, including most of those who were Jehovah’s Witnesses, returned to Rwanda to rebuild their lives.

War in Congo

In 1996, warfare erupted in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This area borders Rwanda and Burundi. Again there was raping and killing. Amid whizzing bullets and burning villages, people fled for their lives. Jehovah's Witnesses were caught in the turmoil, and about 50 died. Some were killed by stray bullets. Others were slain because they belonged to a particular ethnic group or were mistaken for enemies. One village where 150 Witnesses lived was destroyed by fire. In other villages dozens of houses and some Kingdom Halls were burned down. Deprived of homes and possessions, Witnesses fled to other areas and were helped by fellow worshipers there.

Hunger follows war, as crops are ruined, food reserves are looted, and supply lines are cut off. Available food is expensive. In Kisangani, at the beginning of May 1997, two pounds of potatoes cost about three dollars, far beyond the financial means of most people. The majority could afford to eat only one meal a day. Of course, disease follows food shortages. Malnutrition weakens the body's ability to ward off malaria, diarrheic

diseases, and gastric problems. Particularly do children suffer and die.

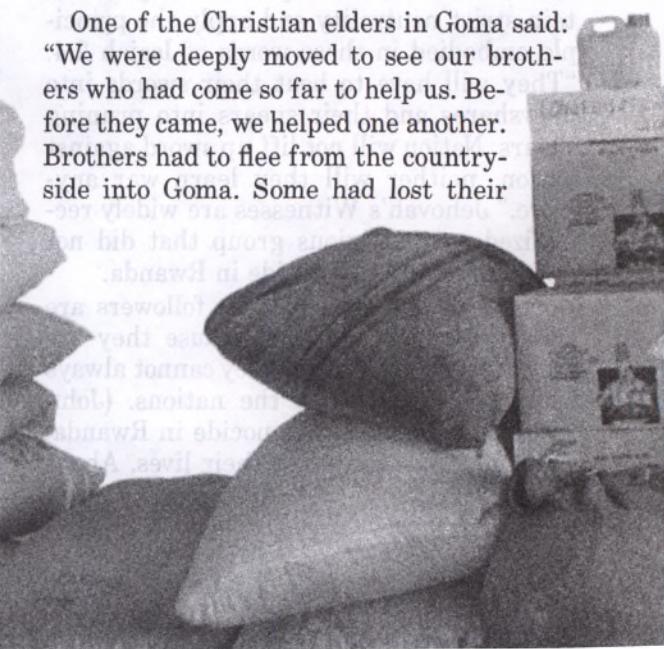
Assessing the Need

Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe again swiftly responded to the need. By April 1997 a relief team of Witnesses that included two medical doctors had flown in with medicine and money. In Goma local Witnesses had already organized relief committees to assess the situation so that immediate aid

**Since 1994, Jehovah's
Witnesses in Europe alone have
sent more than 190 tons of food,
clothing, medicine, and other
relief supplies to the Great Lakes
region of Africa**

could be given. The team explored the city and the surrounding areas. Messengers were sent out to obtain reports from more distant places. Information was also obtained from Kisangani, situated over 600 miles west of Goma. Local brothers helped coordinate relief efforts in Goma, where some 700 Witnesses live.

One of the Christian elders in Goma said: "We were deeply moved to see our brothers who had come so far to help us. Before they came, we helped one another. Brothers had to flee from the countryside into Goma. Some had lost their



homes, and they left their fields. We took them into our homes and shared our clothing and what little food we had. What we could do locally was not much. Some of us were suffering from malnutrition.

"The brothers from Europe, however, brought money that enabled us to buy food, which was scarce and very expensive. The food came at an important time, since many had nothing to eat in their homes. We distributed the food both to Witnesses and non-Witnesses. If the help had not come when it did, many more would have died, especially children. Jehovah saved his people. Non-Witnesses were very impressed. Many commented on our unity and love. Some acknowledged that ours is the true religion."

Though food was purchased locally and medicine was administered, more was required. There was a need for clothing and blankets, as well as greater supplies of food and medicine. Assistance was also needed to rebuild homes that had been destroyed.

People Give Generously

The brothers in Europe were again eager to help. The office of Jehovah's Witnesses at Louviers, France, sounded out the call in congregations in the Rhône Valley, Normandy, and part of the Paris area. Here another Scriptural principle came into play: "He that sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he that sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has resolved in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."—2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.

Thousands joyfully seized the opportunity to give. Boxes

and bags of clothes, shoes, and other items poured into the Kingdom Halls and then were transported to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in France. There 400 volunteers were ready to take part in the next step of the "Help Zaire" operation. As the donated goods poured in, these volunteers sorted, folded, and packed the clothing into boxes that were stacked 30 to a pallet. Children had thought about their young brothers and sisters in Africa and had sent toys—shiny toy cars, spinning tops, dolls, and teddy bears. These were packed along with the items necessary for life. In all, nine 40-foot containers were filled and shipped to Congo.

How much aid has been sent to Central Africa with the help of thousands of Witnesses in Belgium, France, and Switzerland? By June 1997 the total amount was 1,100 pounds of medicine, 10 tons of high-protein biscuits, 20 tons of other foods, 90 tons of clothing, 18,500 pairs of shoes, and 1,000 blankets. Bible literature was also flown in. All of this was greatly appreciated, comforting the refugees and aiding them to endure their trials. The cost of the supplies totaled nearly \$1,000,000, U.S. Such contributions were evidence of the brotherhood and love among those who serve Jehovah.

Distribution in Congo

As the goods began to reach Congo, two brothers and one sister came from France to work with the local relief committees.



CHRISTIAN LOVE PUT INTO PRACTICE

Among those who eagerly participated in the "Help Zaire" project in France was Ruth Danner. As a child, she was imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps because of her Christian faith. She commented: "We were so happy to do something for our brothers and sisters in Africa! But there was something that made me doubly happy. In 1945, when we came back

home from Germany, we had absolutely nothing. Even the clothing we wore was borrowed. Soon, though, we received material help from our spiritual brothers in America. So this relief effort allowed me to return the kindness shown to us so long ago. What a privilege it is to be part of such a large family of brothers who put Christian love into practice!"—John 13:34, 35.

Regarding the gratitude shown by the Congolese Witnesses, Joseline said: "We received many letters of appreciation. One poor sister gave me a malachite ornament. Others gave us pictures of themselves. As we were leaving, sisters kissed me, hugged me, and wept. I wept too. Many made such comments as, 'Jehovah is good. Jehovah thinks about us.' So they recognized that the credit for this giving belonged to God. When we were distributing food, the brothers and sisters praised Jehovah with Kingdom songs. It was very touching."

A medical doctor named Loic was one member of the team. Many crowded into the Kingdom Hall and waited patiently for their turn to seek his help. Wanting to do something too, one Congolese sister made and contributed about 40 doughnuts for those waiting to see the doctor. Since about 80 people were waiting, each one received half a doughnut.

Aid to Non-Witnesses

This humanitarian aid was not given exclusively to Jehovah's Witnesses. Others also benefited, just as many did in 1994. This is in harmony with Galatians 6:10, which states: "Really, then, as long as we have time favorable for it, let us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to us in the faith."

The Witnesses distributed medicine and clothing to several primary schools and an orphanage near Goma. The orphanage is

home to 85 children. On an earlier trip to assess the situation, the relief team visited the orphanage and promised to supply them with 50 boxes of high-protein biscuits, boxes of clothing, 100 blankets, medicine, and toys. The children lined up in the courtyard and sang for the visitors. Next they made a special request—might they have a football so that they could play soccer?

Several weeks later the relief team fulfilled their promise to bring supplies. Impressed by the generosity and by what he had read in the Bible literature he had been given, the director of the orphanage said that he was on the way to becoming one of Jehovah's Witnesses. And were the children given a football? "No," answered Claude, the coordinator of the relief team from France. "We gave them two footballs."

Refugee Camps

Aid was not limited to Congo. Thousands of refugees had fled from the war zone to a nearby country where three refugee camps had hastily been set up. Witnesses traveled there, too, in order to see what could be done. When this report was prepared, the camps sheltered 211,000 refugees, mostly from Congo. About 800 were Witnesses and their children and individuals interested in the good news of the Kingdom. An immediate problem in the camps was a lack of food. At one camp, there was sufficient food for only three days, and it included three-year-old beans.

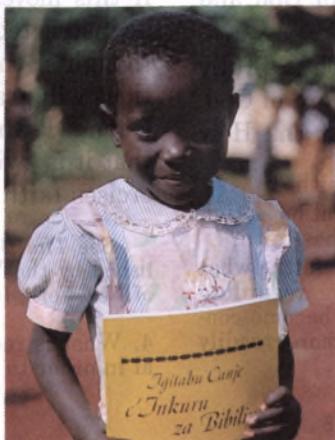


Nevertheless, the Witnesses were in good spirits. Though they had little Bible literature, they conducted regular open-air meetings to build themselves up spiritually. They were also busy preaching the good news of God's Kingdom to others in the camps.—Matthew 24:14; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

The investigation team of Witnesses included a medical doctor. Though the authorities allowed them to spend only a few days at each camp, they held medical consultations. They left medicine and money with Christian elders. Thus, the brothers were able to survive. They also hoped that the Witnesses in the camps could soon return to their homeland.

Soon—an earthly paradise with plenty for all

What about the future? Jesus Christ foretold that our day would be one of great turmoil, a time marked by wars and food shortages. (Matthew 24:7) Jehovah's Witnesses know that God's Kingdom alone will end the suffering that now exists on the earth. Under its rule, our earthly home will become a paradise of peace, plenty, and everlasting happiness for obedient mankind. (Psalm 72:1, 3, 16) Meanwhile, the Witnesses will proclaim the good news of that heavenly Kingdom and will also continue to help fellow worshipers and others in times of need.



“WALKING BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT”

“We are walking by faith, not by sight.”—2 CORINTHIANS 5:7.

EVERY time we pray in harmony with the directions set out in God's Word, we indicate that we have at least some measure of faith. When we begin to witness to others about God's Kingdom, this too shows faith. And when we dedicate our lives to Jehovah, we are giving evidence that it is our desire to ‘*walk by faith*,’ that is, to pursue a life course that is governed by faith.—2 Corinthians 5:7; Colossians 1:9, 10.

If we are truly going to live in such a manner, we need faith that is well-founded. (Hebrews 11:1, 6) Many people are attracted to Jehovah's Witnesses because of the high moral standards and the love that they see among the Witnesses. That is a fine start, but it does not mean that such people have faith. Others may have a marriage mate or a parent who is strong in faith, and they may share in some of the activities engaged in by that one whom they love. Having such an influence in one's home is truly a blessing, but this too is no substitute for personal love of God and personal faith.—Luke 10:27, 28.

Those who truly walk by faith are fully convinced that the Bible is the Word of God. There is abundant evidence that the Holy

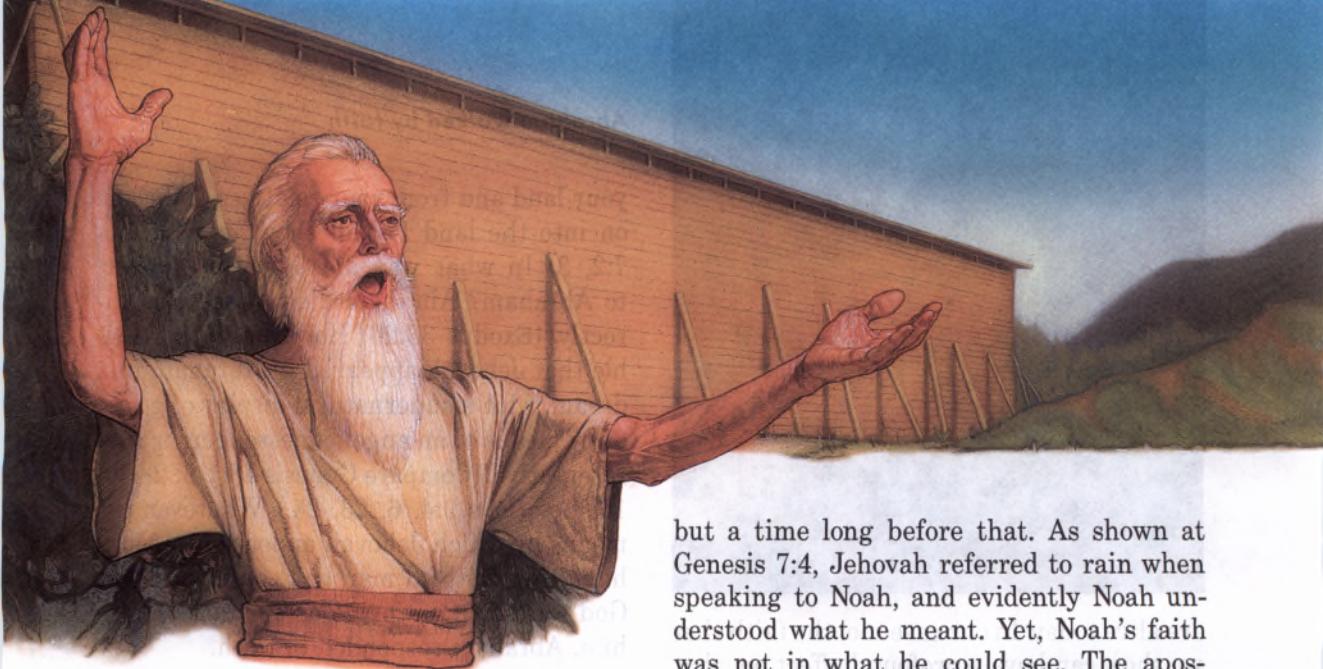
1. What is meant by “walking by faith”?
2. Why is participation in congregation activities not necessarily proof that one has faith?
3. (a) For us to have well-founded faith, what conviction must we personally have regarding the Bible? (b) Why do some people become convinced of the Bible's inspiration more readily than others do?

Scriptures are, indeed, “inspired of God.”* (2 Timothy 3:16) How much of this evidence must be examined before a person is convinced? That may depend on his background. What fully satisfies one person may not persuade another. In some cases, even though a person is shown an abundance of irrefutable evidence, he may still resist the conclusion toward which it points. Why? Because of desires buried deep in his heart. (Jeremiah 17:9) Thus, although a person may profess interest in God's purpose, his heart may crave approval by the world. He may not want to let go of a manner of life that conflicts with Bible standards. However, if anyone is truly hungry for truth, if he is honest with himself, and if he is humble, he will in time realize that the Bible is God's Word.

Often in just a few months, people who are being helped to study the Bible appreciate that they have already seen more than enough proof that it is the Word of God. If this moves them to open their heart to be instructed by Jehovah, then their inmost thoughts, their desires, and their motivations will gradually be molded by what they learn. (Psalm 143:10) Romans 10:10 says that it is “with the heart” that a person exercises faith. Such faith expresses how the

* See *The Bible—God's Word or Man's?*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

4. What is required on the part of an individual in order to acquire faith?



individual really feels, and it will be manifest in his course of life.

Noah Acted on Well-Founded Faith

⁵ Noah was one who had well-founded faith. (Hebrews 11:7) What basis did he have for it? Noah had God's word, not in written form, but as spoken to him. Genesis 6:13 says: "God said to Noah: 'The end of all flesh has come before me, because the earth is full of violence as a result of them.'" Jehovah directed Noah to build an ark and provided details regarding its construction. Then God added: "As for me, here I am bringing the deluge of waters upon the earth to bring to ruin all flesh in which the force of life is active from under the heavens. Everything that is in the earth will expire."—Genesis 6:14-17.

⁶ Had there been rain prior to this? The Bible does not say. Genesis 2:5 says: "Jehovah God had not made it rain." But this is how Moses, who lived centuries later, expressed matters in discussing not Noah's day

5, 6. On what was Noah's faith based?

but a time long before that. As shown at Genesis 7:4, Jehovah referred to rain when speaking to Noah, and evidently Noah understood what he meant. Yet, Noah's faith was not in what he could see. The apostle Paul wrote that Noah was "given divine warning of things not yet beheld." God told Noah that He was going to bring upon the earth "the deluge of waters," or "the heavenly ocean," as a footnote in the *New World Translation* expresses it at Genesis 6:17. Down to that time, such a thing had never occurred. But all creation visible to Noah stood as an evident demonstration that God could indeed bring such a destructive deluge. Moved by faith, Noah built the ark.

⁷ God had not given Noah a date when the Deluge would begin. But Noah did not use that as an excuse for adopting a wait-and-see attitude, putting ark-building and preaching in second place in his life. In ample time, God told Noah when to move into the ark. Meanwhile, "Noah proceeded to do according to all that God had commanded him. He did just so." (Genesis 6:22) Noah walked by faith, not by sight. How grateful we are that he did! Because of his faith, we

7. (a) What did Noah not need in order to do what God had commanded him? (b) How are we benefited by considering Noah's faith, and how can our faith be a blessing to others?



are alive today. In our case too, the faith that we show can have a profound effect on what the future holds not only for us but also for our children and for other people around us.

The Faith of Abraham

⁸ Consider another example—that of Abraham. (Hebrews 11:8-10) Upon what did Abraham base his faith? The surroundings in which he grew up in Ur of the Chaldeans were idolatrous and materialistic. But other influences shaped Abraham's outlook. No doubt he could associate with Noah's son Shem, whose life overlapped his by 150 years. Abraham became convinced that Jehovah is "the Most High God, Producer of heaven and earth."—Genesis 14:22.

⁹ Something else had a profound influence on Abraham. Jehovah "appeared to . . . Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he took up residence in Haran, and he said to him, 'Go out from

8, 9. (a) Upon what did Abraham base his faith? (b) In what way did Jehovah 'appear' to Abraham?

Moses and Aaron displayed faith when before Pharaoh

Abraham walked by faith

your land and from your relatives and come on into the land I shall show you.'" (Acts 7:2, 3) In what way did Jehovah 'appear' to Abraham? Abraham did not see God directly. (Exodus 33:20) However, it is possible that Jehovah appeared to Abraham in a dream, with a supernatural display of glory, or by means of an angelic messenger, or representative. (Compare Genesis 18:1-3; 28:10-15; Leviticus 9:4, 6, 23, 24.) Whatever the means by which Jehovah appeared to Abraham, that faithful man had confidence that God was setting a precious privilege before him. Abraham responded in faith.

¹⁰ Abraham's faith did not depend on his having details about the land to which God was directing him. It did not hinge on his knowing when that land would be given to him. He had faith because he knew Jehovah as God Almighty. (Exodus 6:3) Jehovah told Abraham that he would have offspring, but at times Abraham wondered how that

10. How did Jehovah fortify Abraham's faith?



could be. He was getting old. (Genesis 15:3, 4) Jehovah fortified Abraham's faith by telling him to look up at the stars and count them if he could. "So your seed will become," said God. Abraham was deeply moved. It was obvious that the Creator of those awe-inspiring heavenly bodies could fulfill what he had promised. Abraham "put faith in Jehovah." (Genesis 15:5, 6) Abraham did not believe simply because he liked what he was hearing; he had well-founded faith.

¹¹ When Abraham was close to 100 years of age and his wife, Sarah, near the age of 90, Jehovah again stated his promise that Abraham would have a son and that Sarah would be the mother. Abraham realistically gave thought to their situation. "But because of the promise of God he did not waver in a lack of faith, but became powerful by his faith, giving God glory and being fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to do." (Romans 4:19-21) Abraham knew that the promise of God could not fail. Later, because of his faith, Abraham obeyed when God told him to take his son Isaac to the land of Moriah and offer him up as a sacrifice. (Genesis 22:1-12) Abraham had full confidence that the God who had miraculously caused that son to be born could also bring him back to life in order to fulfill the further promises that He had made in connection with him.—Hebrews 11:17-19.

¹² Abraham showed that he was governed by faith not merely in isolated circumstances but throughout his life. During his lifetime Abraham did not receive from God any

11. (a) As he neared 100 years of age, how did Abraham react to God's promise that aged Sarah would bear a son? (b) With what sort of faith did Abraham face the test involved in taking his son to Mount Moriah to offer him as a sacrifice?

12. How long did Abraham continue to walk by faith, and what reward awaits him and his family members who demonstrated strong faith?

portion of the Promised Land as an inheritance. (Acts 7:5) Yet, Abraham did not grow weary and return to Ur of the Chaldeans. For 100 years, right down to his death, he lived in tents in the land to which God had directed him. (Genesis 25:7) Concerning him and his wife Sarah, their son Isaac, and their grandson Jacob, Hebrews 11:16 says: "God is not ashamed of them, to be called upon as their God, for he has made a city ready for them." Yes, Jehovah has a place for them in the earthly realm of his Messianic Kingdom.

¹³ There are those among Jehovah's servants today who are like Abraham. They have walked by faith for many years. In the strength that God gives, they have overcome mountainlike obstacles. (Matthew 17:20) They are not wavering in faith because they do not know just when God is going to give them the inheritance that he has promised. They know that the word of Jehovah cannot fail, and they count it a priceless privilege to be numbered among his Witnesses. Is that how you feel?

The Faith That Moved Moses

¹⁴ Another example of faith is Moses. What was the foundation for his faith? It was laid in infancy. Although Pharaoh's daughter found Moses in a papyrus chest in the Nile River and took him as her son, Moses' own Hebrew mother, Jochebed, nursed the boy and had him in her care during his early years. Jochebed evidently taught him well, inculcating love for Jehovah and appreciation for His promises to Abraham. Later, as a member of Pharaoh's household, Moses "was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." (Acts 7:20-22; Exodus 2:1-10;

13. Who among Jehovah's servants today give evidence of having faith like that of Abraham?

14. How was the foundation laid for Moses' faith?

6:20; Hebrews 11:23) In spite of Moses' favored position, however, his heart was with God's enslaved people.

¹⁵ In his 40th year, Moses struck down an Egyptian in order to deliver an Israelite who was being treated unjustly. This incident showed how Moses viewed God's people. Indeed, "by faith Moses, when grown up, refused to be called the son of the daughter of Pharaoh." Instead of clinging to "the temporary enjoyment of sin" as a member of the Egyptian court, he had been moved by faith to identify himself with the ill-treated people of God.—Hebrews 11:24, 25; Acts 7:23-25.

¹⁶ Moses was eager to take action to bring relief to his people, but God's time for their deliverance had not yet come. Moses had to flee from Egypt. Not until about 40 years later did Jehovah by means of an angel commission Moses to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of that land. (Exodus 3:2-10) How did Moses react? He did not express doubt as to Jehovah's ability to deliver Israel, but he did feel inadequate for the role that God set before him. Lovingly, Jehovah provided the encouragement that Moses needed. (Exodus 3:11-4:17) Moses' faith grew strong. He went back to Egypt and repeatedly warned Pharaoh face-to-face of plagues that would come upon Egypt for that ruler's failure to let Israel go to worship Jehovah. Moses had no personal power to cause those plagues. He walked by faith, not by sight. His faith was in Jehovah and his word. Pharaoh threatened Moses. But Moses persevered. "By faith he left Egypt, but not fearing the anger of the king, for he contin-

15. What did identifying himself with Jehovah's people mean for Moses?

16. (a) What commission did Jehovah give to Moses, and how did God help him? (b) In carrying out his commission, how did Moses show faith?

ued steadfast as seeing the One who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27) Moses was not perfect. He made mistakes. (Numbers 20:7-12) After being commissioned by God, however, his overall course of life was governed by faith.

¹⁷ May your faith prove to be like that of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. It is true that they did not see God's new world in their day. (Hebrews 11:39) It was not yet God's appointed time; there were other aspects of his purpose that still needed to be accomplished. Yet, their faith in God's word did not waver, and their names are in God's book of life.

¹⁸ "God foresaw something better for us," wrote the apostle Paul. That is, God fore-saw something better for those who, like Paul, have been called to heavenly life with Christ. (Hebrews 11:40) These are the ones that Paul particularly had in mind when he wrote the words recorded at 2 Corinthians 5: 7: "We are walking by faith, not by sight." When that was written, none of them had yet attained to their heavenly reward. They could not see it with their physical eyes, but their faith in it was well-founded. Christ

17. Walking by faith resulted in what for Noah, Abraham, and Moses, even though they did not live to see God's new world?

18. For those called to heavenly life, why has it been necessary to walk by faith?

What Is Your Comment?

- What is involved in "walking by faith"?
- How can we benefit from the way Noah showed faith?
- How does the way Abraham exercised faith help us?
- Why does the Bible point to Moses as an example of faith?

had been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those to be blessed with heavenly life. And over 500 witnesses had seen him before his ascension to heaven. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8) They had ample reason to govern their entire life course by that faith. We too have sound reasons for walking by faith.

¹⁹ Today, Jehovah is not speaking to his people by means of an angel, as he did to Moses at the burning bush. God has spoken by means of his Son. (Hebrews 1:1, 2) What God said by means of him, He had recorded in the Bible, which has been translated into the languages of people around the world.

19. As shown at Hebrews 1:1, 2, by means of whom has God spoken to us?

²⁰ We have much more than Noah, Abraham, and Moses had. We have the complete Word of God—much of it already fulfilled. In view of all that the Bible says about men and women who proved themselves faithful witnesses of Jehovah in the face of trials of every sort, Hebrews 12:1 urges: “Let us also put off every weight and the sin that easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Our faith is not something to take for granted. “The sin that easily entangles us” is lack of faith. A hard fight is required if we are to keep on “walking by faith.”

20. How is our situation much more favorable than that of Noah, Abraham, and Moses?

KEEP ON WALKING WITH GOD

“Keep walking by spirit and you will carry out no fleshly desire at all.”—GALATIANS 5:16.

THE Bible tells us that Enoch “kept walking with the true God.” In spite of the shocking speech and ungodly conduct of people around him, he persisted in walking with God until the end of his life at 365 years of age. (Genesis 5:23, 24; Jude 14, 15) Noah too “walked with the true God.” He did so while raising his family, while coping with a world influenced by rebel angels and their violent offspring, and while caring for all the details involved in building a huge ark that was larger than any seagoing vessel of ancient times. He kept on walking with God after the Deluge, even when rebellion

1. (a) Amid what conditions and for how long did Enoch walk with God? (b) How long did Noah walk with God, and what heavy responsibilities did he have?

against Jehovah again reared its head at Babel. Indeed, Noah kept on walking with God right down till his death at 950 years of age. —Genesis 6:9; 9:29.

² When saying that these men of faith “walked” with God, the Bible is using the term in a metaphoric sense. It means that Enoch and Noah conducted themselves in a way that gave evidence of strong faith in God. They did what Jehovah commanded them and regulated their lives in harmony with what they knew about him from his dealings with humankind. (Compare 2 Chronicles 7:17.) Not only did they express mental agreement with what God said and did but they acted on everything he

2. What is meant by ‘walking with God’?

required—not just some of it but all of it to the extent possible for them as imperfect humans. Thus Noah, for example, did exactly what God commanded him. (Genesis 6:22) Noah was not running ahead of the directions given to him, and he was not negligently lagging behind. As one who enjoyed intimacy with Jehovah, feeling free to pray to God and cherishing divine direction, he was walking with God. Are you doing that?

A Consistent Course of Life

³ It is heartwarming to observe people start walking with God. As they take positive steps in harmony with Jehovah's will, they give evidence of faith, without which no one can please God. (Hebrews 11:6) How we rejoice that each year, on an average for the past five years, over 330,000 persons have dedicated themselves to Jehovah and have presented themselves for water baptism! But it is also important for them and for all of us to keep on walking with God.

—Matthew 24:13; Revelation 2:10.

⁴ In Moses' day, it took faith for an Israelite family to celebrate the Passover in

3. What is vitally important for all who are dedicated and baptized servants of God?
4. Although they showed some faith, why did most of the Israelites who left Egypt not enter the Promised Land?

In Our Next Issue

Sound Basis for Optimism Today

Jehovah Is a God of Covenants

Is It Praise or Flattery?

Egypt and to spatter the blood on the doorposts and on the upper part of the doorway of their home. (Exodus 12:1-28) However, the faith of many wavered when they saw Pharaoh's army close behind them at the Red Sea. (Exodus 14:9-12) Psalm 106:12 shows that when they had safely passed through on the dry seabed and had seen the surging waters annihilate the Egyptian army, they again "had faith in [Jehovah's] word." A short time later in the wilderness, however, the Israelites began to complain about drinking water, food, and oversight. The negative report of 10 of the 12 spies who returned from the Promised Land made them fearful. Under those circumstances, as Psalm 106:24 says, "they had no faith in [God's] word." They wanted to go back to Egypt. (Numbers 14:1-4) Whatever faith they had came to life only when they saw certain extraordinary displays of divine power. They did not keep on walking with God. As a result, those Israelites did not enter the Promised Land.—Psalm 95:10, 11.

⁵ The Bible admonishes us: "Keep testing whether you are in the faith, keep proving what you yourselves are." (2 Corinthians 13:5) Being "in the faith" means adhering to the body of Christian beliefs. This is vital if we are to succeed in walking with God all the days of our life. To walk with God, we must also exercise the quality of faith, fully trusting in Jehovah. (Proverbs 3:5, 6) There are numerous traps and pitfalls that can ensnare those who fail to do so. What are some of these?

Shun the Snare of Self-Confidence

⁶ Everyone who has studied the Bible,

5. How are 2 Corinthians 13:5 and Proverbs 3:5, 6 related to walking with God?
6. What do all Christians know about fornication and adultery, and how do they feel about these sins?

dedicated his life to Jehovah, and been baptized knows that God's Word condemns fornication and adultery. (1 Thessalonians 4: 1-3; Hebrews 13:4) Such ones agree that this is right. They mean to live in harmony with it. Yet, sexual immorality continues to be one of Satan's most effective snares. Why?

⁷ Initially, those who get involved in such immoral conduct may not be planning to do so. Perhaps that was also true of the Israelites on the Plains of Moab. To Israelite men who were weary of life in the wilderness, the Moabite and Midianite women who enticed them may at first have seemed friendly and hospitable. But what happened when the Israelites accepted invitations to fellowship with people who served Baal and not Jehovah, people who allowed their girls (even from prominent families) to have sexual relations with men that they had not married? When men from the camp of Israel began to view such associations as desirable, they were enticed to do things they knew were wrong, and this cost them their lives.—Numbers 22:1; 25:1-15; 31:16; Revelation 2:14.

⁸ What might cause a person to fall into a similar snare in our day? Although he may know the seriousness of sexual immorality, if he does not also appreciate the danger of self-confidence, he may allow himself to get into a situation where the enticement to wrongdoing overwhelms his reason.—Proverbs 7:6-9, 21, 22; 14:16.

⁹ In plain language God's Word warns us not to be misled into thinking that we are so strong that bad associations will not cor-

7. On the Plains of Moab, how did Israelite men get involved in conduct that they knew was wrong?

8. In our day, what may lead a Christian into sexual immorality?

9. What Scriptural warnings can safeguard us against immorality?

rupt us. That includes watching television programs that feature the lives of immoral people and looking at magazines that stimulate immoral desires. (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12; 15:33) Even association with fellow believers under wrong circumstances can lead to serious problems. The attraction between the sexes is strong. With loving concern Jehovah's organization has therefore cautioned against being alone and out of public view with someone of the opposite sex to whom we are not married or who is not a family member. In order to keep on walking with God, we need to shun the snare of self-confidence and heed the warning counsel that he gives us.—Psalm 85:8.

Do Not Let Fear of Man Control You

¹⁰ Another danger is identified at Proverbs 29:25, which says: "Trembling at men is what lays a snare." A hunter's snare often involves a noose that pulls tight around the neck or ropes that entangle the feet of an animal. (Job 18:8-11) Trembling at men can similarly choke a person's ability to speak freely and to conduct himself in a way that pleases God. The desire to please others is normal, and a callous disregard for what other people think is not Christian. But balance is needed. When concern about possible reactions of other humans causes a person to do what God forbids or to refrain from doing what God's Word commands, that individual has been ensnared.

¹¹ The protection against such a snare lies, not in one's natural disposition, but in "trusting in Jehovah." (Proverbs 29:25b) With trust in God, even a person who is

10. How does "trembling at men" lay a snare?

11. (a) What is the safeguard against allowing fear of man to control one? (b) How has Jehovah helped his servants who were struggling with fear of men?

shy by nature can prove to be courageous and steadfast. As long as we are surrounded by the pressures of this satanic system of things, we will need to be on guard against the ensnaring fear of man. Although the prophet Elijah had a fine record of courageous service, when Jezebel threatened to have him put to death, he fearfully fled. (1 Kings 19:2-18) Under pressure, the apostle Peter fearfully denied knowing Jesus Christ, and years later he allowed fear to cause him to conduct himself in a manner contrary to the faith. (Mark 14:66-71; Galatians 2:11, 12) However, both Elijah and Peter accepted spiritual help and, with confidence in Jehovah, continued to serve God acceptably.

¹² Many of Jehovah's servants in our day have also learned how to win out over ensnaring fear. A teenage Witness in Guyana acknowledged: "At school the fight to resist peer pressure is strong." But she added: "So is my faith in Jehovah." When her teacher ridiculed her before the entire class on account of her faith, she quietly prayed to Jehovah. Later in private she gave a tactful witness to the teacher. During a visit to his hometown in Benin, a young man who was learning Jehovah's requirements determined to get rid of an idol that his father had crafted for him. The young man knew that the image was lifeless, and he did not fear it, but he was also aware that irate vil-

lagers might seek to kill him. He prayed to Jehovah, and then at night he took the idol into the bush and disposed of it. (Compare Judges 6:27-31.) When a woman in the Dominican Republic began to serve Jehovah, her husband demanded that she choose between him and Jehovah. The man threatened her with divorce. Would fear make her abandon her faith? She replied: "If infidelity were involved, I would be ashamed, but I am not ashamed of serving Jehovah God!" She kept on walking with God, and in time her



12. What modern-day examples show how individuals have been helped to avoid letting fear cause them to hold back from pleasing God?

Many keep on walking with God throughout life

husband joined her in doing Jehovah's will. With complete trust in our heavenly Father, we too can avoid allowing the fear of man to cause us to hold back from doing what we know will be pleasing to Jehovah.

Avoid Minimizing Counsel

¹³ Though some snares used by hunters are designed to catch any animal that chances to pass a certain place, other snares lure animals by means of de-

13. About what snare are we warned at 1 Timothy 6:9?



ceptively appealing bait. To many humans, riches are like that. (Matthew 13:22) At 1 Timothy 6:8, 9, the Bible encourages us to be content with sustenance and covering. Then it warns: "Those who are determined to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin."

¹⁴ Despite this warning, many get ensnared because they do not apply the counsel to themselves. Why? Could it be that pride pushes them to insist on adhering to a life-style that calls for more than the "sustenance and covering" with which the Bible urges us to be content? Do they perhaps minimize the Bible's warning because they define riches in terms of what very wealthy people possess? The Bible simply sets the determination to be rich in contrast with being content with sustenance and covering. (Compare Hebrews 13:5.) Does "the desire of the eyes"—the desire to possess things that they see, even at the sacrifice of spiritual pursuits—cause them to push the interests of true worship into second place? (1 John 2:15-17; Haggai 1:2-8) How much happier are those who truly take to heart the Bible's counsel and walk with God by making the service of Jehovah the focal point of their lives!

Coping Successfully With Anxieties of Life

¹⁵ More common than determination to

14. (a) What might prevent a person from taking to heart the counsel to be content with sustenance and covering? (b) How might a wrong definition of riches cause one to minimize the warning recorded at 1 Timothy 6:9? (c) In what way might "the desire of the eyes" make some blind to the snare that awaits them?

15. What situations understandably cause anxiety to many of Jehovah's people, and to what snare must we be alert when we are under such pressure?

get rich is anxious concern over obtaining the necessities of life. Many of Jehovah's servants live with only minimal possessions. They work hard for many hours in order to have even basic clothing, a place for their family to sleep at night, and at least some food for the day. Others struggle with problems because of illness or aging of themselves or of family members. How easy it would be to let such circumstances choke spiritual interests out of their lives!—Matthew 13:22.

¹⁶ Lovingly, Jehovah tells us about the relief that will be experienced under the Messianic Kingdom. (Psalm 72:1-4, 16; Isaiah 25:7, 8) He also helps us to cope with the pressures of life now by giving us counsel on how to keep our priorities straight. (Matthew 4:4; 6:25-34) By means of the record of how he helped his servants in times past, Jehovah reassures us. (Jeremiah 37:21; James 5:11) He fortifies us with the knowledge that, regardless of any adversity that comes upon us, his love for his loyal servants remains constant. (Romans 8:35-39) To those who put their trust in Jehovah, he declares: "I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you."—Hebrews 13:5.

¹⁷ Strengthened by this knowledge, true Christians keep on walking with God instead of turning aside to worldly ways. A common worldly philosophy among the poor in many lands is that taking from someone who has more so that you can feed your family is not stealing. But those who walk by faith reject that view. They value God's approval above all else and look to him to re-

16. How does Jehovah help us to cope with the pressures of life?

17. Give examples of how individuals experiencing severe adversity have been able to keep walking with God.

ward their honest conduct. (Proverbs 30:8, 9; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 13:18) A widow in India found that willingness to work coupled with resourcefulness helped her to cope. Instead of being resentful over her lot in life, she was aware that if she put God's Kingdom and his righteousness first in her life, Jehovah would bless her efforts to obtain the necessities for herself and her son. (Matthew 6:33, 34) Many thousands around the earth demonstrate that, regardless of the adversity they may experience, Jehovah is their refuge and stronghold. (Psalm 91:2) Is that true of you?

¹⁸ As long as we live in the present system of things, there will be snares to avoid. (1 John 5:19) The Bible identifies these and shows us how to avoid them. Those who truly love Jehovah and have a wholesome fear of displeasing him can successfully deal with such snares. If they "keep walking by spirit," they will not succumb to worldly ways. (Galatians 5:16-25) Before all who truly build their lives around their relationship with Jehovah, there is the grand prospect of walking with God, enjoying intimacy with him forever.—Psalm 25:14.

18. What is the key to avoiding the snares of Satan's world?

What Is Your Comment?

- How can self-confidence be a snare?
- What can safeguard us against being controlled by fear of man?
- What might cause us to fail to apply counsel on the danger of pursuing riches?
- What can enable us to avoid being ensnared by anxieties of life?

PLANNING AHEAD *for Our Loved Ones*

THE sad story of Annie appeared recently in an African newspaper. Annie's husband was a businessman. He died in 1995, leaving behind 15 vehicles; several bank accounts; about \$4,000 (U.S.) in cash; a shop; a bar; and a three-bedroom house. What he did not leave behind was a will.

Annie's brother-in-law reportedly seized the property and money and forced her and her six children out of their home. Destitute, she and her children now live with her brother. Four of the children have had to leave school, since there is no money for fees or school uniforms.

Annie applied to a high court, which ruled that she should be given back some property, including a vehicle. But nothing was returned. She must go to court again to seek an order to force her brother-in-law to comply with the high-court ruling.

Why Think About Death?

Annie's story illustrates what may occur when a family head fails to plan for the possibility of his death. At death, all humans "leave to others their means of maintenance." (Psalm 49:10) Furthermore, the dead have no control over what is done with their possessions. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10) To have a say in what happens to his belongings, a person must arrange matters before death.

Though all of us know that we may die unexpectedly, many people fail to make advance provisions for their surviving loved ones. While our discussion will spotlight certain cultural groups in Africa, similar problems exist in other parts of the world.

Whether you take measures concerning the disposition of your property in case of death is a personal matter. (Galatians 6:5) Yet, one might ask, 'Why would a man while alive cherish and care for his wife and children but make no provision for their welfare in case he dies?' A major reason is that most of us do not like to think about the possibility that we might die, much less plan for death. In fact, we cannot foresee the day of our death, as the Bible says: "You do not know what your life will be tomorrow. For you are a mist appearing for a little while and then disappearing."—James 4:14.

Planning for the possibility of death is practical. It also shows loving concern for survivors. If we do not arrange our affairs, others will do so. Perhaps people we have never met will make decisions about our belongings and funeral arrangements. Under such circumstances in some countries, the State decides who will get our money and property. In other places, relatives decide, and these decisions are often accompanied by bickering that fosters ill will within the family. Moreover, what is decided upon may be far different from what we would have desired.

Property Grabbing

The widow suffers most when her husband dies. Besides the grief of losing her mate, she is often a victim of property grabbing. This was described earlier in the case of Annie. Part of the reason for property grabbing has to do with how wives may be regarded. In some cultures a man's wife is not considered part of his family. She is in a sense a foreigner who may at any time return to her family or remarry into another family. In contrast, the reasoning goes, a man's brothers, sisters, and parents will never leave him. If he dies, his family believes that what was his belongs to them, not to his wife and children.

Husbands who do not confide in their wives encourage such thinking. Mike discussed his business affairs only with his brothers. They knew what his assets were, but his wife knew very little. When he died, his brothers came to her and demanded a payment her husband had been expecting. She did not even know about it. Next, they seized the photocopiers and typewriters her husband had bought for her. Eventually, his brothers took over the home and everything in it. This widow and her small daughter were forced to leave, taking along only their clothing.

"The Two Will Become One Flesh"

Christian husbands love their wives and consider them worthy of trust. Such men take to heart the Scriptural counsel: "Husbands ought to be loving their wives as their own bodies." These men also agree with the divinely inspired statement: "A man will leave his father and his mother and he will stick to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."—Ephesians 5:28, 31.

Godly husbands also agree with the Christian apostle Paul, who wrote: "Certainly if anyone does not provide for those who are

his own, and especially for those who are members of his household, he has disowned the faith and is worse than a person without faith." (1 Timothy 5:8) In harmony with this principle, if a Christian husband planned a long journey, he would make sure that his family was cared for while he was away. Similarly, is it not reasonable that he would make provision for his wife and children in case of his death? It is not only practical but also loving to prepare for unexpected tragedy.

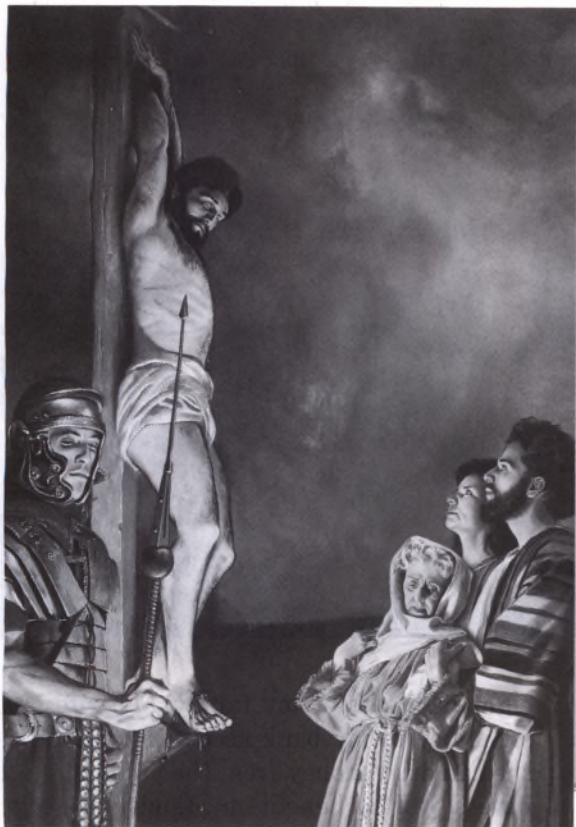
Funeral Customs

For Christian husbands there is another aspect of this matter to consider. Adding to a widow's grief over losing her mate, possessions, and possibly even her children, some societies compel her to carry out traditional mourning rites. *The Guardian* newspaper of Nigeria laments that in some areas, tradition requires a widow to sleep in the same unlit room with the corpse of her husband. In other places, widows are not allowed to leave their homes for a mourning period of nearly six months. During that time, they must not bathe, and even washing their hands before or after meals is forbidden.

Such customs present problems, especially for Christian widows. Their desire to please God moves them to avoid customs that do not harmonize with the Bible's teachings. (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17) For not complying with these customs, however, a widow may suffer persecution. She may even have to flee for her life.

Taking Legal Measures

The Bible wisely says: "The plans of the diligent one surely make for advantage." (Proverbs 21:5) What plans can a family head make? In most societies it is possible to make a will or prepare a document that



Jesus Made Provision for His Mother

"By the torture stake of Jesus, however, there were standing his mother and the sister of his mother; Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Therefore Jesus, seeing his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing by, said to his mother: 'Woman, see! Your son!' Next he said to the disciple: 'See! Your mother!' And from that hour on the disciple [John] took her to his own home."—John 19:25-27.

states how a person's property is to be distributed in case of his death. It may include details about funeral arrangements. The document may also specify what a marriage mate is to do (or not to do) in connection with funeral and mourning customs.

A woman named Leah lost her husband in death in 1992. She says: "I have five children —four girls and one boy. My husband was sick for some time before he died. But even before he became sick, he wrote out a paper saying that he wanted all his possessions to go to me and our children. This included insurance money, farmland, farm animals, and a house. He signed the will and gave it to me.... After my husband's death, the relatives wanted a share in his inheritance. I

pointed out to them that my husband had bought the farmland with his own money and that they had no right to claim anything. When they saw the written will, they accepted it."

Discussing Matters With the Family

Problems may arise if a person does not speak to his family about his beliefs and wishes. Consider the case of one man whose relatives insisted that his burial take place in the village in harmony with local custom. When their lives were threatened, his widow and her children were forced to leave his body with the extended family. She laments: "If my husband had told even one of his uncles or cousins how he wanted to be

**Many Christians
thoughtfully
take legal steps
to protect their
families**



buried, the family would not have insisted on their traditional funeral practices."

In some societies an oral agreement is as binding as a written document. This is the situation in parts of Swaziland, where many have beliefs that encourage traditional funeral and mourning procedures. Knowing this, a Christian man named Isaac called a meeting of his relatives, who were not Jehovah's Witnesses, and discussed what he wanted done after his death. He told them who was to get specific material possessions, and he explained clearly how his funeral was to be conducted. After he died, things took place according to his wishes. Isaac was given a Christian burial, and his wife was looked after well.

Protect Your Family

What you will do to protect your family in the event of your death is a personal matter, but a Christian named Edward says: "I have a life insurance policy to benefit the

eight members of my family. My wife is a signatory to my bank account. So if I die, she can draw money from the account. . . . I have a will to benefit my family. If I die, whatever I leave behind will be for my wife and children. I wrote my will five years ago. It was prepared by a lawyer, and my wife and son have a copy. In my will, I specified that my extended family should have no hand in my funeral. I belong in Jehovah's organization. So even if only one or two Witnesses are on hand to conduct my funeral, that will be sufficient. I have discussed this with my extended family members."

In a sense, making such arrangements is a gift to your family. Of course, planning for the possibility of death is not like a gift of chocolates or a bouquet of flowers. Yet, it shows your love. It proves that you want to 'provide for those who are members of your household' even when you are no longer with them.



Strengthening Our Faith in God's Word

MORE people have read the Bible than any other book. But how many have manifested faith in its message? The Bible itself explains that "faith is not a possession of all people." (2 Thessalonians 3:2) Clearly, we are not born with faith. It must be developed. Even those who have a measure of faith should not take it for granted. Faith can deteriorate and die. Hence, effort is needed to remain "healthy in faith."—Titus 2:2.

With good reason, then, the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses selected the theme "Faith in God's Word" for their 1997/98 series of district conventions. Millions of Witnesses and others have thus been privileged to gather together to strengthen their faith in God's Word.

God's Word Is Truth —The Basis of Our Faith

This was the theme of the convention's first day. It began with words of commendation to all in attendance. Presence at the convention was evidence of respect for



the Bible. Yet, sobering questions were posed regarding the quality of our faith: 'Are we able to defend our beliefs, using God's Word as the authority? Do we appreciate the spiritual food, never taking the Bible, congregation meetings, and Bible-based publications for granted? Are we growing in love, accurate knowledge, and discernment?'

The speaker encouraged

all to listen carefully, noting that "this 'Faith in God's Word' District Convention has been prepared to help us scrutinize ourselves and examine the measure and quality of faith we individually possess."

The keynote address was entitled "Walking by Faith, Not By Sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7) "The faith of those who become Jehovah's Witnesses is not credulity," said the speaker. How true this is! Genuine faith is not blind. It is based on realities. Hebrews 11:1 says: "Faith is the assured expectation of things hoped for, the evident demonstration of realities though not beheld." The speaker observed: "If we are truly going to walk by faith, we need



Many volunteers worked cheerfully to accommodate thousands of delegates

faith that is well-founded.” Because we walk by faith, not by sight, we do not need details about how and when Jehovah will accomplish every aspect of his purpose. What we already know about him gives us absolute confidence in his power to fulfill his promises lovingly and righteously.

The talk “Christian Youths—A Vital Part of the Congregation” reminded young ones of how precious they are to Jehovah. They were encouraged to grow spiritually by pursuing such goals as reading the entire Bible and meeting the requirements for dedication and baptism. The pursuit of supplementary education is a personal matter to be decided with one’s parents, but if it is undertaken, the objective should always be to be equipped to serve God more effectively. Secu-

lar education can serve a beneficial purpose when we “make sure of the more important things” that are related to our faith.—Philippians 1:9, 10.

Next came a symposium of three talks on the theme “Whose Standards Do You Observe?” Faith in God’s Word motivates us to adhere to Bible standards. Christians obey Jehovah’s laws and principles. For instance, the Scriptures admonish us not to use obscene and abusive speech. (Ephesians 4:31, 32) The speaker asked: “When annoyed or irritated, do you scream abuse at your mate or your children?” Of course, that would be unchristian. God also has standards regarding our personal appearance. Christians should clothe themselves “in well-arranged dress, with modesty.” (1 Tim-

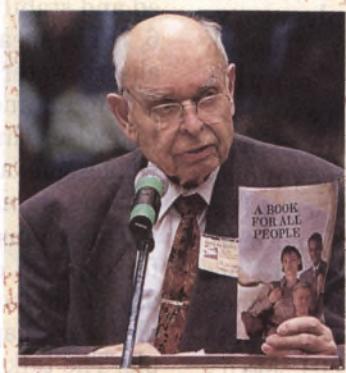




Large stadiums like this were used around the world

othy 2:9, 10) The word "modesty" carries the thought of self-respect, a sense of honor, sobriety, and moderation. We are motivated by love for others and are guided by Bible principles and by a sense of what is appropriate.

The following two talks included verse-by-verse considerations of Hebrews 3:7-15 and 4:1-16. These Bible passages warn us against the danger of being "hardened by the deceptive power of sin." (Hebrews 3:13) How can we succeed in our fight against sin? Jehovah helps us through his Word. Indeed, "the word of God is alive and exerts power and . . . is able to discern thoughts and intentions of the heart." —Hebrews 4:12.



L. A. Swingle of the Governing Body releasing the new brochure

The final talk on the convention's first day was "A Book for All People." It highlighted the authenticity, accuracy, and practical value of the Bible. How thrilling to hear the speaker announce the release of a new 32-page brochure entitled *A Book for All People!* This new publication was prepared particularly for people who, though educated, know little about the Bible. The talk concluded with the words: "People need to examine God's Word for themselves. We are confident that if they make a firsthand examination, they will come to realize that this unique book, the Bible, is indeed a book for all people!"



Imitate the “Perfecter of Our Faith”

This theme of the convention's second day drew attention to Jesus Christ, the “Perfecter of our faith.” We need to “follow his steps closely.” (Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:21) Many in Christendom are told: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!’ But is that all there is to faith? The Bible declares that “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:26) Besides believing in Jesus, therefore, we must do the works that he did, especially by preaching the good news of God's Kingdom.

The morning program concentrated on the evangelizing work. Like Paul, we should be eager to declare the good news of salvation. (Romans 1:14-16) Jesus preached to

people everywhere. Though our regular house-to-house ministry is producing results, more and more people are not at home when we call. (Acts 20:20) Many

are in school, working, shopping, or traveling. Hence, we also need to preach in public places and wherever people can be found.

The talk “Become Rooted and Stabilized



Many were baptized in symbol of their dedication to Jehovah

in the Truth” reminded us of the great number of new disciples that are being baptized—an average of over 1,000 each day! It is vital that these new ones become well rooted and stabilized in the faith. (Colossians 2:6, 7) The speaker explained that literal roots absorb water and nutrients while also providing an anchor or support for the plant. Likewise, through good study habits and wholesome association, new disciples can become stabilized in the truth.

This counsel was especially appropriate for baptism candidates. Yes, on the second day of the convention, droves of new disciples were baptized, following Jesus' example. The talk “Faith in God's Word Leads to Baptism” reminded the candidates that being totally immersed in water is a fitting symbol of their dying to their former self-seeking course of life. Their being raised up



26 THE WATCHTOWER—JANUARY 15, 1998



Conventioners joyfully sang Kingdom songs. Inset: the drama "Keep Your Eye Simple"

from the water represents their being made alive to do God's will.

The talk "Put Up a Hard Fight for the Faith" was based on the Bible book of Jude. We were encouraged to protect our faith by resisting harmful influences, such as immorality, rebelliousness, and apostasy. Next, parents—especially fathers—received special attention in the talk "Make Provision for Your Household." Providing for the family's spiritual, physical, and emotional needs is a Scriptural obligation. (1 Timothy 5:8) This requires time, communication, and closeness. Jehovah God is certainly pleased with all the hard work Christian parents do to raise their children in the truth.

The following symposium, "To the House of Jehovah Let Us Go," built appreciation for Christian meetings. They provide rest from the anxieties of this world. At meetings we have opportunity for an interchange

of encouragement, and we can demonstrate our love for our fellow believers. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Meetings also help us to sharpen our skills as teachers, and they deepen our understanding of God's purpose. (Proverbs 27:17) May we never isolate ourselves from the congregation, and let us remember Jesus' words: "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst."—Matthew 18:20.

The last talk of the day was "The Quality of Your Faith—Tested Now." Faith that is untested has no proven worth, and its quality remains unknown. It is like a check that has not yet been cashed. Is it really worth the amount that appears on it? Similarly, our faith must be tested to prove that it has substance and real quality. (1 Peter 1:6, 7) The speaker said: "At times, the news media as well as the authorities are duped by clergymen and apostates into pinning false

labels on us, misrepresenting our Christian beliefs and way of life. . . . Will we allow those who are blinded by Satan to intimidate and dishearten us and make us feel ashamed of the good news? Will we permit lies about the truth to affect our regular meeting attendance and our preaching activity? Or will we stand fast and be courageous and more determined than ever to continue declaring the truth about Jehovah and his Kingdom?"

Live by Reason of Faith

The theme of the convention's third day was based on Paul's words: "That by law no one is declared righteous with God is evident, because 'the righteous one will live by reason of faith.'" (Galatians 3:11) The symposium, "Joel's Prophetic Words for Our Day," was one of the morning's highlights. The book of Joel points to our time and says with a sense of urgency: "Alas for the day; because the day of Jehovah is near, and like a despoiling from the Almighty One it will come!" (Joel 1:15) In a manner similar to that of relentless locusts, anointed Christians have let nothing stand in the way of Kingdom proclamation in this time of the end.

The book of Joel also gives hope, saying: "Everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe." (Joel 2:32) This means more than just using Jehovah's name. Heartfelt repentance is needed, and this includes turning our backs on wrongdoing. (Joel 2:12, 13) There is no time for delay because Jehovah will soon execute judgment upon the nations, even as he did upon Moab, Ammon, and the mountainous region of Seir in the days of King Jehoshaphat of Judah.—2 Chronicles 20:1-30; Joel 3:2, 12.

All were encouraged by the talk "Show Faith by Waiting on Jehovah." Now deep into the time of the end, we can look back on the fulfillment of many of Jehovah's prom-

ises, and we are keenly interested in things that will yet come to pass. Jehovah's people must continue to have patience, remembering that everything God has promised will occur.—Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:9, 10.

The morning program concluded with the drama "Keep Your Eye Simple." This realistic dramatization encouraged us to examine our attitude regarding material pursuits. No matter where we live, if we want our life to be free of anxiety, we must follow Jesus' counsel to keep our eye simple, clearly focused on the Kingdom of God.—Matthew 6:22.

The public talk had the intriguing title "Faith and Your Future." It offered proof of the inability of human leaders to solve the problems of the world. (Jeremiah 10:23) Man's history keeps repeating itself—on a larger and more damaging scale. How do Jehovah's Witnesses feel about the future? We believe that faithful mankind has a bright future under God's Kingdom. (Matthew 5:5) God will fulfill his promises for the benefit of all who have faith in his Word, which urges: "Search for Jehovah, you people, while he may be found. Call to him while he proves to be near."—Isaiah 55:6.

Jesus raised a vital question with our day in view. He asked: "When the Son of man arrives, will he really find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8) The final talk reviewed the convention program and showed how it provided resounding evidence that faith in God's Word exists, even though we live in a faithless and secularized world.

Still, we can individually ask ourselves, 'Am I among those with unwavering faith in God and his Word?' The "Faith in God's Word" District Convention should help us to answer yes to that question. And how thankful we are to Jehovah for strengthening our faith in him and in his inspired Word, the Bible!

PHILEMON and ONESIMUS

United in Christian Brotherhood

ONE of the apostle Paul's divinely inspired letters deals with a delicate problem involving two men. One was Philemon, and the other was Onesimus. Who were these men? What made Paul take an interest in their situation?

Philemon, the letter's recipient, lived in Colossae in Asia Minor. Unlike many other Christians in the same area, Philemon was acquainted with Paul, having embraced the good news because of the apostle's preaching activity. (Colossians 1:1; 2:1) Paul knew him to be a 'beloved fellow worker.' Philemon was an example of faith and love. He was hospitable and was a source of refreshment to his fellow Christians. Philemon was evidently also a man of some means, since his home was big enough to accommodate meetings of the local congregation. It has been suggested that Apphia and Archippus, two other individuals addressed in Paul's letter, may have been his wife and son. Philemon also had at least one slave, Onesimus.

—Philemon 1, 2, 5, 7, 19b, 22.

A Fugitive in Rome

The Scriptures do not tell us why Onesimus was over 900 miles from home with Paul in Rome, where the letter to Philemon was written about 61 C.E. But Paul told Philemon: "If [Onesimus] did you any wrong or owes you anything, keep this charged to my account." (Philemon 18) These words make it clear that Onesimus was in trouble with his master, Philemon. Paul's letter was written with the aim of reconciling the two men.

It has been suggested that Onesimus became a fugitive after robbing Philemon in order to finance his flight to Rome. There he intended to lose himself in the thronging masses.* In the Graeco-Roman world, runaways constituted a major problem not only for slave owners but also for the public administration. Rome itself is said to have been "notorious as a customary refuge" for runaway slaves.

How did Paul encounter Onesimus? The Bible does not tell us. When the novelty of freedom wore off, however, likely Onesimus realized that he had placed himself in an extremely precarious situation. In the city of Rome, a special police corps hunted down fugitive slaves, whose offense was one of the most serious known to ancient law. According to Gerhard Friedrich, "runaway slaves who were caught used to be branded in their foreheads. They were often tortured . . . , thrown to the beasts in the circus, or crucified to dissuade other slaves from imitating their example." Probably, suggests Friedrich, after Onesimus ran out of the stolen money and in vain sought a hiding place or a job, he asked for the protection and mediation of Paul, about whom he had heard in Philemon's home.

Others believe that Onesimus purposely ran to one of his master's friends, hoping that through that one's influence, he might

* Roman law defined a *servus fugitivus* (fugitive slave) as 'one who left his master, with the intention of not returning.'

SLAVES UNDER ROMAN LAW

Under Roman legislation in force in the first century C.E., a slave was entirely at the mercy of his master's whims, lusts, and temper. According to commentator Gerhard Friedrich, "fundamentally and juridically, the slave was not a person, but an object that his owner could use freely. . . . [He] was placed on the same level as domestic animals and tools and was not afforded any consideration by civil law." A slave could not seek any legal redress for injustices suffered. Basically, he just had to carry out his master's orders. There was no limit to the punishments an angry master might impose. Even for a slight offense, he wielded the power of life and death.*

While the rich might have had several hun-

*On slavery among God's people of ancient times, see *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Volume 2, pages 977-9.

dred slaves, even a comparatively modest household may have included two or three. "The tasks performed by domestic slaves were extremely varied," says scholar John Barclay. "We find slaves as janitors, cooks, waiters, cleaners, couriers, child-minders, wet-nurses and all-purpose personal attendants, not to mention the various professionals one might find in the larger and wealthier houses. . . . In practical terms, the quality of life of a domestic slave depended very much on the disposition of the master and that could cut both ways: proximity to a cruel master could result in suffering an unlimited range of evils, but a kind and generous master could make life both tolerable and hopeful. There are famous examples of cruel treatment recorded in classical literature, but also plenty of inscriptions witnessing to the warmth of feeling between some owners and their slaves."

be restored to good relations with a master justly angry with him for some other reason. Historical sources indicate that such was "a common and widespread resort of slaves in trouble." If so, then Onesimus' theft was "more probably committed to facilitate his arrival before the mediator Paul than part of a plan to flee," says scholar Brian Rapske.

Paul Lends a Hand

Whatever was the reason for flight, Onesimus evidently sought Paul's help to become reconciled with his irate master. That presented Paul with a problem. Here was a former unbelieving slave who was a criminal fugitive. Should the apostle try to help him by prevailing on a Christian friend not to exercise his legal right to mete out severe punishment? What was Paul to do?

By the time Paul wrote to Philemon, the runaway had evidently been with the apostle for a while. It had been long enough for Paul to say that Onesimus had become a "beloved

brother." (Colossians 4:9) "I am exhorting you concerning my child, to whom I became a father while in my prison bonds," said Paul of his own spiritual relationship with Onesimus. Of all the possible outcomes, this must have been the one that Philemon least expected. The apostle said that the slave who had formerly been "useless" was returning as a Christian brother. Onesimus would now be "profitable," or "useful," thus living up to the meaning of his name.—Philemon 1, 10-12.

Onesimus had become very useful to the imprisoned apostle. In fact, Paul would have kept him there, but apart from being against the law, this would have been an infringement on the rights of Philemon. (Philemon 13, 14) In another letter, written about the same time to the congregation that met in Philemon's home, Paul referred to Onesimus as "my faithful and beloved brother, who is from among you."

This indicates that Onesimus had already given proof of his trustworthiness.—Colossians 4:7-9.*

Paul encouraged Philemon to receive Onesimus kindly but did not use apostolic authority to command him to do so or to free his slave. Because of their friendship and mutual love, Paul was sure that Philemon would “even do more” than he was asked. (Philemon 21) What ‘even more’ may have meant is left vague because only Philemon could rightly decide what to do about Onesimus. Some have read into Paul’s words a tacit request for the runaway to be ‘sent back so that he could go on helping Paul as he had already begun to do.’

Did Philemon accept Paul’s pleas for Onesimus? There seems to be little doubt that he did, though this may have displeased other Colossian slave owners who might have preferred to see Onesimus get exemplary punishment to dissuade their own slaves from imitating his example.

Onesimus—A Changed Man

In any case, Onesimus returned to Colossae with a new personality. His thinking transformed by the power of the good news, he undoubtedly became a faithful member of the Christian congregation in that city. Whether Onesimus was even-

* On this journey back to Colossae, apparently Onesimus and Tychicus were entrusted with three of Paul’s letters, now included in the Bible canon. In addition to this letter to Philemon, these were Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.



tually emancipated by Philemon is not disclosed in the Scriptures. From a spiritual standpoint, however, the former runaway had become a free man. (Compare 1 Corinthians 7:22.) Similar transformations occur today. When people apply Bible principles in their lives, situations and personalities change. Those who were previously considered useless to society are helped to become model citizens.*

What a difference conversion to the true faith made! Whereas the former Onesimus may have been “useless” to Philemon, the new Onesimus doubtless lived up to his name as a “profitable” individual. And surely it was a blessing that Philemon and Onesimus became united in Christian brotherhood.

* For examples, please see *Awake!*, June 22, 1996, pages 18-23; March 8, 1997, pages 11-13; *The Watchtower*, August 1, 1989, pages 30-1; February 15, 1997, pages 21-4.

...and who has
seen such a thing?
...and how fair seem
the works of God!
...and his kingdom
is forever.

THEY SILENTLY PRAISE THEIR CREATOR

SUNSETS are spectacular by nature. But the sight of the sun descending behind this particular mountain in the Apuan Alps of Tuscany, Italy, is truly like no other.

Viewed from a distance, the sun appears to drop into the mountain rather than descend behind it. Why? Because the peak of the mountain has a natural arch that seems as if it were gouged out of the mountain. Indeed, this promontory has earned its name, Monte Forato—the Pierced Mountain. Because of the earth's rotation around the sun, on only two occasions each year can those looking through the arch



see the sun appear to drop into Monte Forato.

Like other features of creation, the inanimate heavens praise their Creator. How? In the same way that a beautiful painting may bring praise to the artist who produced it. In effect, the heavenly bodies speak of Jehovah's power, wisdom, and majesty. As the psalmist put it, "the heavens are declaring the glory of God; and of the work of his hands the expanse is telling." (Psalm 19:1; 69:34) Since the sun and other inanimate bodies praise their Creator, how much more should we!—Psalm 148:1, 3, 12, 13.