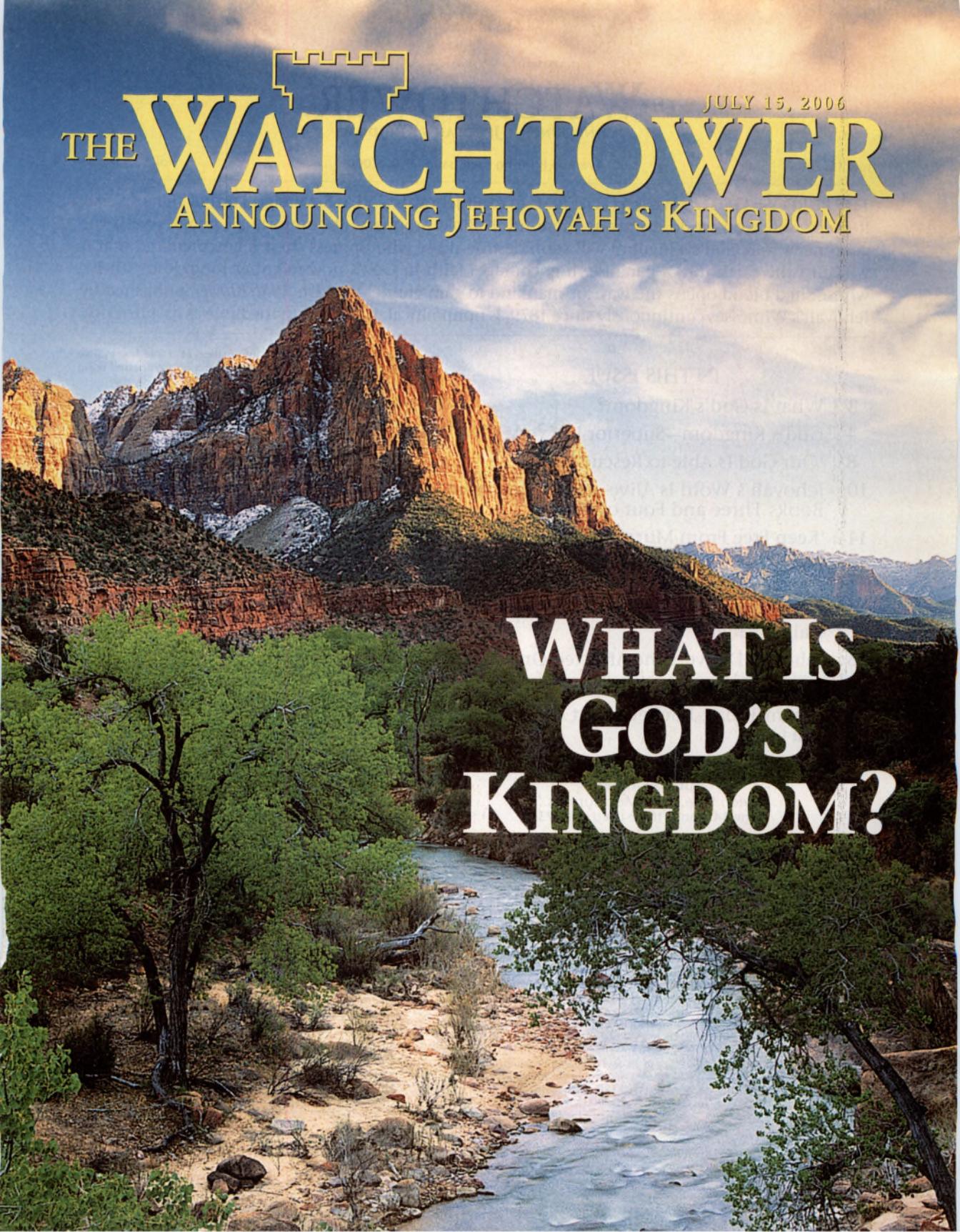


JULY 15, 2006

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



WHAT IS
GOD'S
KINGDOM?

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 What Is God's Kingdom?
- 4 God's Kingdom—Superior in Every Way
- 8 'Our God Is Able to Rescue Us'
- 10 Jehovah's Word Is Alive—Highlights From Books Three and Four of Psalms
- 14 'Keep Free From Murmurings'
- 19 Focus on the Goodness of Jehovah's Organization
- 24 A Non-Biblical Reference to a People Called Israel
- 25 Jehovah Delivers the Afflicted One
- 29 Questions From Readers
- 32 "From Today, I Believe That There Is a God"

WATCHTOWER STUDIES

AUGUST 14-20:

'Keep Free From Murmurings.'
Page 14. Songs to be used: 38, 173.

AUGUST 21-27:

Focus on the Goodness of Jehovah's Organization.
Page 19. Songs to be used: 115, 118.

AUGUST 28-SEPTEMBER 3:

Jehovah Delivers the Afflicted One.
Page 25. Songs to be used: 58, 89.

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WHAT IS GOD'S KINGDOM?

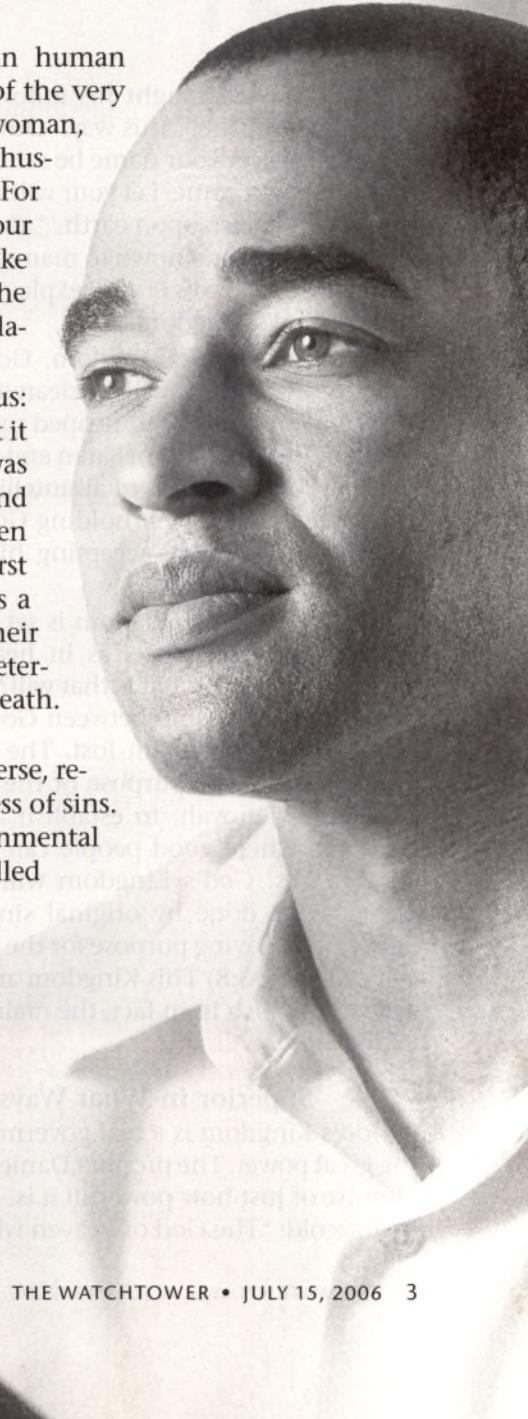
WHAT a terrible disaster struck mankind early in human history! An angel rebelled against the authority of the very One who had created him. This rebel enticed the first woman, Eve, to eat the forbidden fruit. Referring to her and her husband, Adam, the angel said: "You positively will not die. For God knows that in the very day of your eating from it your eyes are bound to be opened and you are bound to be like God, knowing good and bad." (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:1-5) The rebellious angel came to be called Devil and Satan.—Revelation 12:9.

Did Eve pay attention to Satan's words? The Bible tells us: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was something to be longed for to the eyes, yes, the tree was desirable to look upon. So she began taking of its fruit and eating it. Afterward she gave some also to her husband when with her and he began eating it." (Genesis 3:6) Yes, the first couple, Adam and Eve, joined Satan in his rebellion. As a consequence, they lost Paradise for themselves and for their descendants. Children who were to be born perfect with eternal life ahead of them would instead inherit sin and death.

—Romans 5:12.

How did Jehovah God, the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, respond? He purposed to make provision for the forgiveness of sins. (Romans 5:8) Jehovah God has also established a governmental arrangement to manage the crisis. This arrangement is called "the kingdom of God." (Luke 21:31) Set up as a subsidiary to God's universal rulership, this Kingdom has a specific purpose.

What is the purpose of God's Kingdom? What are some of its aspects, and how do they compare with human rulership? When was the Kingdom to begin ruling? These questions will be discussed in the following article.





GOD'S KINGDOM

Superior in Every Way

JESUS CHRIST taught his followers: “You must pray, then, this way: ‘Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.’” (Matthew 6: 9, 10) This prayer, known to many as the Our Father, or the Lord’s Prayer, explains the purpose of God’s Kingdom.

By means of the Kingdom, God’s name will be sanctified. It will be cleared of all the dishonor that has been heaped upon it as a result of the rebellion of Satan and man. This is vital. The happiness of all intelligent creatures depends on their holding God’s name sacred and willingly accepting his right to rule.—Revelation 4:11.

In addition, the Kingdom is set up to “let [God’s] will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth.” And what is that will? It is to restore the relationship between God and humankind, which Adam lost. The Kingdom will also serve the purpose of the Universal Sovereign, Jehovah, to establish a paradise on earth where good people can enjoy life forever. Yes, God’s Kingdom will undo all the damage done by original sin and will make God’s loving purpose for the earth a reality. (1 John 3:8) This Kingdom and what it will accomplish is, in fact, the main message of the Bible.

Superior in What Ways?

God’s Kingdom is a real government having great power. The prophet Daniel gave us a glimpse of just how powerful it is. Long ago, he foretold: “The God of heaven will set up a

kingdom that . . . will crush and put an end to all [human] kingdoms.” Moreover, in contrast with human governments, which come and go over the course of history, God’s Kingdom “will never be brought to ruin.” (Daniel 2:44) That is not all. In every respect, this Kingdom is far superior to any human government.

God’s Kingdom has a superior King. Consider who that King is. In “a dream and visions” given to him, Daniel beheld the Ruler of God’s Kingdom as “someone like a son of man” brought before Almighty God and given lasting “rulership and dignity and kingdom.” (Daniel 7:1, 13, 14) That Son of

Jehovah has designated Jesus Christ to be King of His Kingdom

man is none other than Jesus Christ—the Messiah. (Matthew 16:13-17) Jehovah God designated his own Son, Jesus, to be King of His Kingdom. When on earth, Jesus said to the wicked Pharisees: “The kingdom of God is in your midst,” meaning that he, the future King of that Kingdom, was among them.—Luke 17:21.

Who from among mankind can match Jesus’ credentials as a Ruler? Jesus has already proved to be a thoroughly righteous, reliable, and compassionate Leader. The Gospels portray him as a man of action as well as one of tender warmth and deep feelings. (Matthew

4:23; Mark 1:40, 41; 6:31-34; Luke 7:11-17) Furthermore, the resurrected Jesus is not subject to death or other human limitations.—Isaiah 9:6, 7.

Jesus and his associates rule from a superior position. In his dream-vision, Daniel also saw that “the kingdom and the rulership . . . were given to the people who are the holy ones.” (Daniel 7:27) Jesus does not rule alone. He has others with him who are to rule as kings and serve as priests. (Revelation 5:9, 10; 20:6) Concerning them, the apostle John wrote: “I saw, and, look! the Lamb standing upon the Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand . . . who have been bought from the earth.”—Revelation 14:1-3.

The Lamb is Jesus Christ in his Kingdom position. (John 1:29; Revelation 22:3) This Mount Zion refers to heaven.* (Hebrews 12:22) Jesus and his 144,000 associates are ruling from heaven. What a lofty position from which to rule! Being in heaven, they have a broader perspective. Since heaven is its seat, “the kingdom of God” is also called “the kingdom of the heavens.” (Luke 8:10; Matthew 13:11) No weapons, not even nuclear attacks, can reach and topple that heavenly government. It is unconquerable and will fulfill Jehovah’s purpose for it.—Hebrews 12:28.

God’s Kingdom has trustworthy representatives on earth. How do we know this? Psalm 45:16 states: “You will appoint . . . princes in all the earth.” “You” in this prophecy is the Son of God. (Psalm 45:6, 7; Hebrews 1:7, 8) Hence, Jesus Christ himself will appoint the princely representatives. We can

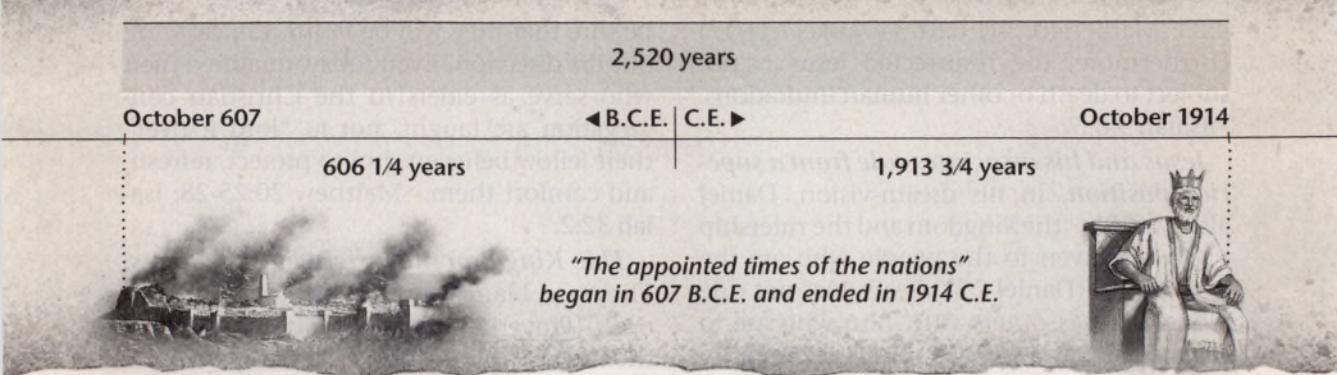
* King David of ancient Israel wrested the stronghold of the earthly Mount Zion from the Jebusites and made it his capital. (2 Samuel 5:6, 7, 9) He also transferred the sacred Ark to that location. (2 Samuel 6:17) Since the Ark was associated with Jehovah’s presence, Zion was referred to as the place of God’s dwelling, making it a fitting symbol for heaven.—Exodus 25:22; Leviticus 16:2; Psalm 9:11; Revelation 11:19.

be sure that they will be faithful in carrying out his direction. Even today, qualified men who serve as elders in the Christian congregation are taught, not to “lord it over” their fellow believers, but to protect, refresh, and comfort them.—Matthew 20:25-28; Isaiah 32:2.

The Kingdom has righteous subjects. They are blameless and upright in God’s eyes. (Proverbs 2:21, 22) “The meek ones themselves will possess the earth,” says the Bible, “and they will indeed find their exquisite delight in the abundance of peace.” (Psalm 37:11) The subjects of the Kingdom are meek—teachable and humble, mild and gentle. Their primary interests are spiritual matters. (Matthew 5:3) They want to do what is right and are responsive to divine direction.

God’s Kingdom is governed by superior laws. The laws and principles governing the Kingdom come from Jehovah God himself. Rather than unfairly restrict us, they benefit us. (Psalm 19:7-11) Many people are already benefiting from living by Jehovah’s righteous requirements. For example, heeding the Bible’s counsel to husbands, wives, and children improves our family life. (Ephesians 5:33-6:3) When we obey the command to ‘clothe ourselves with love,’ our relationship with others improves. (Colossians 3:13, 14) As we live by Scriptural principles, we also cultivate good work habits and a balanced view of money. (Proverbs 13:4; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10) Avoiding drunkenness, sexual immorality, tobacco, and addictive drugs helps us to safeguard our health.—Proverbs 7:21-23; 23:29, 30; 2 Corinthians 7:1.

The Kingdom of God is a government ordained by God. Its King—the Messiah, Jesus Christ—and all his associate rulers are responsible to God to uphold His just laws and loving principles. The subjects of the Kingdom, including its earthly representatives,



take delight in living by God's laws. God is thus at the center of the lives of the rulers and the subjects of the Kingdom. Therefore, the Kingdom is a true theocracy—rule by God. It is bound to succeed in accomplishing the purpose for which it has been set up. But when does God's Kingdom, also known as the Messianic Kingdom, begin its rule?

Kingdom Rule Begins

A key to understanding when Kingdom rule begins is found in the words of Jesus. "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the nations," he said, "until the appointed times of the nations are fulfilled." (Luke 21:24) Jerusalem was the only city in all the earth that was directly associated with God's name. (1 Kings 11:36; Matthew 5:35) It was the capital of a God-approved earthly kingdom. That city was to be trampled on by the nations in that the rule by God over his people was to be interrupted by worldly governments. When would this begin?

The last king to sit on Jehovah's throne in Jerusalem was told: "Remove the turban, and lift off the crown. . . . It will certainly become no one's until he comes who has the legal right, and I must give it to him." (Ezekiel 21:25-27) The crown was to be lifted off the head of that king, and God's rulership over His people was to be interrupted. This happened in 607 B.C.E. when the Babylonians

destroyed Jerusalem. During "the appointed times" that were to follow, God would not have a government on the earth to represent his rulership. Only at the end of those times would Jehovah give the power to rule to the one "who has the legal right"—Jesus Christ. How long would that period be?

A prophecy in the Bible book of Daniel states: "Chop the tree down, and ruin it. However, leave its rootstock itself in the earth, but with a banding of iron and of copper . . . until seven times themselves pass over it." (Daniel 4:23) As we will see, the "seven times" mentioned here are equal in length to "the appointed times of the nations."

In the Bible, individuals, rulers, and kingdoms are at times represented by trees. (Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:7, 8; Ezekiel, chapter 31) The symbolic tree "was visible to the extremity of the whole earth." (Daniel 4:11) Thus, the rulership represented by the tree that was to be chopped down and banded extended "to the extremity of the earth," involving the whole kingdom of mankind. (Daniel 4:17, 20, 22) The tree therefore represents the supreme rulership of God, particularly in its relationship to the earth. This rulership was expressed for a time through the kingdom that Jehovah set up over the nation of Israel. The symbolic tree was cut down, and bands of iron and copper were placed upon the stump in order to prevent its

growth. This indicated that God's representative rulership on earth was to cease its operation, as happened in 607 B.C.E.—but not indefinitely. The tree would remain banded until "seven times" had passed. At the end of that period, Jehovah would give rulership to the legal heir, Jesus Christ. Clearly, the "seven times" and "the appointed times of the nations" refer to the same time period.

The Bible helps us to determine the length of the "seven times." It equates 1,260 days with "a time [one time] and times [two times, plural] and half a time"—a total of three and a half "times." (Revelation 12:6, 14) This means that twice that number, or seven times, is 2,520 days.

When we count 2,520 literal days from 607 B.C.E., we come to 600 B.C.E. However, the seven times lasted much longer than that. They were still in progress when Jesus spoke of "the appointed times of the nations." The seven times, therefore, are prophetic. Hence, we must apply the Scriptural rule: "A day for a year." (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) In that case, the seven times of earth's domination by worldly powers without divine interference amount to 2,520 years. Counting 2,520 years from 607 B.C.E.

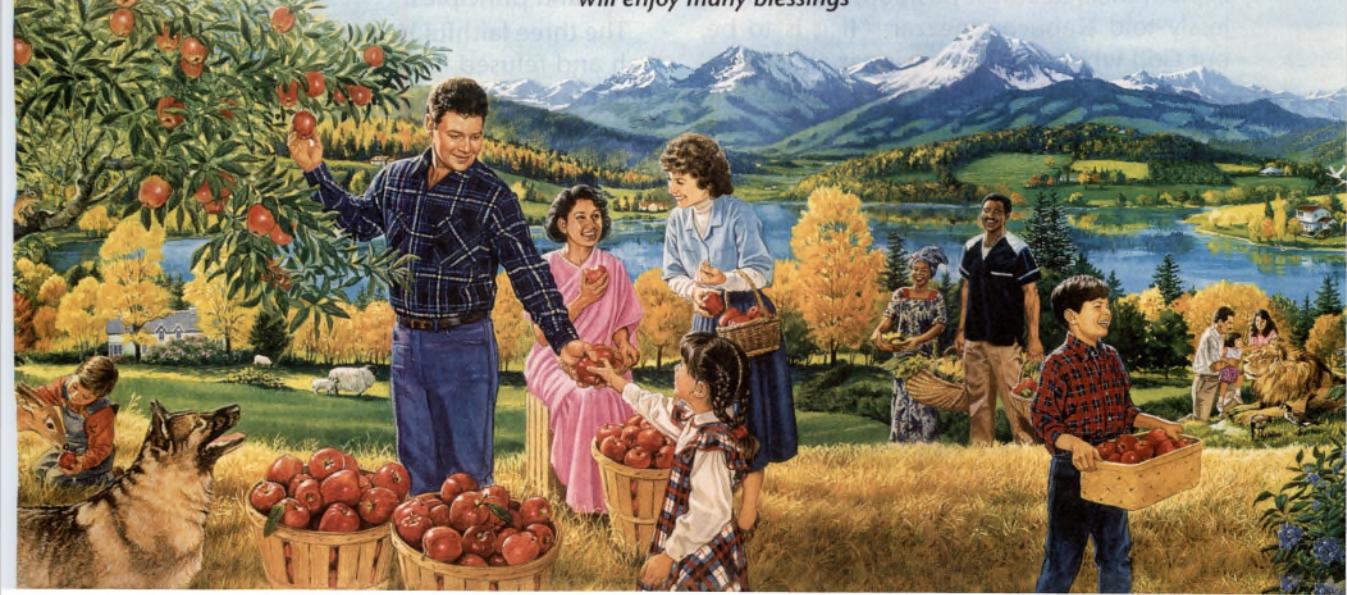
brings us to 1914 C.E. That is the year when "the appointed times of the nations," or seven times, ended. This means that Jesus Christ began to rule as King of God's Kingdom in 1914.

"Let Your Kingdom Come"

Since the Messianic Kingdom has already been established in heaven, should we continue to pray for it to come, as taught by Jesus in the model prayer? (Matthew 6:9, 10) Yes. That petition is proper and still full of meaning. God's Kingdom will yet assert its full power toward this earth.

What blessings faithful mankind will experience when that happens! "God himself will be with them," says the Bible, "and he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3, 4) At that time, "no resident will say: 'I am sick.'" (Isaiah 33:24) Everlasting life will be enjoyed by those who please God. (John 17:3) As we await the fulfillment of these and other wonderful Bible prophecies, let us "keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and [God's] righteousness."—Matthew 6:33.

*Earthly subjects of God's Kingdom
will enjoy many blessings*



'Our God Is Able to Rescue Us'

THE event was designed to be awe-inspiring. An immense image of gold had been erected on the plain of Dura, apparently near the city of Babylon. The image was to be inaugurated during a special ceremony attended by high officials who were expected to bow down before the image at the sounding of an array of musical instruments. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that any who failed to worship the image would die in a superheated furnace. Who would dare to disobey the order?

To the surprise of onlookers, three God-fearing worshippers of Jehovah—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—did not bow down. They knew that doing so would be a violation of their exclusive devotion to Jehovah God. (Deuteronomy 5:8-10) When challenged to explain their steadfast position, they fearlessly told Nebuchadnezzar: "If it is to be, our God whom we are serving is able to rescue us. Out of the burning fiery furnace and out of your hand, O king, he will rescue us. But if not, let it become known to you, O king, that your gods are not the ones we are serving, and the image of gold that you have set up we will not worship."—Daniel 3:17, 18.

When the three Hebrews were thrown into the burning fiery furnace, their lives were saved only by a miracle. God sent



an angel to protect His faithful servants. But they had already chosen to risk death rather than disobey Jehovah.* Their position was similar to that of Jesus Christ's apostles, who over six centuries later declared before the Jewish high court: "We must obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

Vital Lessons for Us

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are fine examples of faith, obedience, and loyalty. The three Hebrews exercised faith in Jehovah. Their Scripturally trained conscience did not allow them to participate in any act of false worship or nationalistic devotion. Present-day Christians similarly put implicit trust in the true God. They are guided by their Bible-trained conscience and refuse to participate in acts of false worship or ceremonies that violate God's laws and principles.

The three faithful Hebrews trusted in Jehovah and refused to trade their obedience to him for anything the Babylonian Empire offered in the way of recognition, status, or glory. Those young men were willing to suffer and die rather than ruin their relationship with God. Like Moses before them, they "continued steadfast as seeing the One who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27) Whether Jehovah chose to rescue them from death or not,

* See the 2006 Calendar of Jehovah's Witnesses, July/August.



DID YOU KNOW?

- The three Hebrews were in their late 20's when they faced this test of integrity.
- The furnace was evidently made as hot as possible.—Daniel 3:19.

the three were determined to maintain integrity to him rather than compromise to save their lives. Evidently alluding to their example, the apostle Paul mentions faithful ones who "stayed the force of fire." (Hebrews 11:34) Such faith and obedience are manifested by Jehovah's servants as they face tests of integrity in our day.

From the experience of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we also learn that God rewards loyalty to him. The psalmist sang: "Jehovah . . . will not leave his loyal

ones." (Psalm 37:28) Today, we cannot expect God to rescue us miraculously, as he did the three Hebrews. Yet, we can be confident that no matter what adversity we face, our heavenly Father will provide assistance. God may eliminate the problem, grant us the strength to endure it, or resurrect us if we maintain integrity to the point of death. (Psalm 37:10, 11, 29; John 5:28, 29) Faith, obedience, and loyalty triumph every time our integrity is tested and we choose to obey God rather than men.

Jehovah's Word Is Alive

Highlights From Books Three and Four of Psalms

IN A prayer to God, the psalmist asks: "Will your loving-kindness be declared in the burial place itself, your faithfulness in the place of destruction?" (Psalm 88:11) The answer, of course, is no. Without life, we cannot praise Jehovah. Praising Jehovah is a good reason for us to keep living, and having life is a good reason to praise him.

Books Three and Four of Psalms, consisting of Psalm 73 to 106, give us plenty of reasons for praising the Creator and blessing his name. Reflecting on these psalms ought to deepen our appreciation for "the word of God" and move us to enlarge and improve our expressions of praise to him. (Hebrews 4:12) With keen interest, let us first turn to Book Three of Psalms.

"THE DRAWING NEAR TO GOD IS GOOD FOR ME"

(Psalm 73:1–89:52)

The first 11 psalms of the third collection are compositions by Asaph or by members of the house of Asaph. The opening song explains what has saved Asaph from being led astray by erroneous thinking. He has reached the right conclusion. "As for me," he sings, "the drawing near to God is good for me." (Psalm 73:28) A lament over the destruction of Jerusalem follows in Psalm 74. Psalms 75, 76, and 77 portray Jehovah as the righteous Judge, the Savior of the meek, and the Hearer of prayer. Psalm 78 reviews Israel's past from the time of Moses to that of David. The 79th Psalm laments the destruction of the temple. Next comes a prayer for

the restoration of God's people. Psalm 81 is an exhortation to obey Jehovah. Psalms 82 and 83 are prayers for the execution of divine judgment upon corrupt judges and God's enemies respectively.

"My soul has yearned and also pined away for the courtyards of Jehovah," states a melody of the sons of Korah. (Psalm 84:2) Psalm 85 is a request for God's blessing upon the returnees from exile. This psalm emphasizes that spiritual blessings are far more valuable than physical blessings. In Psalm 86, David asks God to guard him and instruct him. In Psalm 87, a melody about Zion and those born there is followed by a prayer to Jehovah in Psalm 88. Jehovah's loving-kindness as expressed in the Davidic covenant is emphasized in Psalm 89, composed by Ethan, perhaps one of four wise men in the days of Solomon.—1 Kings 4:31.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

73:9—How is it that the wicked have "put their mouth in the very heavens,

*Like Asaph, we can cope
with wickedness by
"drawing near to God"*



and their tongue itself walks about in the earth"? Since the wicked have no regard for anyone in heaven or on earth, they do not hesitate to blaspheme God with their mouth. They also slander humans with their tongue.

74:13, 14—When did Jehovah 'break the heads of the sea monsters in the waters and crush to pieces the heads

of Leviathan'? "Pharaoh, king of Egypt," is called "the great sea monster lying stretched out in the midst of his Nile canals." (Ezekiel 29:3) Leviathan may represent "the strong ones of Pharaoh." (Psalm 74:14, footnote) The crushing of their heads likely refers to the crushing defeat of Pharaoh and his army when Jehovah delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

75:4, 5, 10—What is signified by the term "horn"? The horns of an animal are a powerful weapon. Hence, the term "horn" figuratively denotes power, or strength. Jehovah raises up the horns of his people, causing them to be exalted, whereas he 'cuts down the horns of the wicked ones.' We are warned against 'exalting our horn on high' in that we should not take on a proud or arrogant attitude. Since Jehovah does the exalting, assignments of responsibility in the congregation are to be viewed as coming from him.—Psalm 75:7.

76:10—How can "the very rage of man" laud Jehovah? When God allows humans to vent their rage against us because we are his servants, a positive outcome can follow. Any hardship we may experience can discipline us in some way. Jehovah permits suffering only to the extent that it provides such training. (1 Peter 5:10) 'The remainder of raging by man, God girds upon himself.' What if we



Pharaoh suffers defeat at the Red Sea

suffer to the point of death? This too can laud Jehovah because those who see us faithfully endure may also begin to glorify God.

78:24, 25; footnote—Why is manna called "the grain of heaven" and "the very bread of angels"? Neither expression means that manna was angels' food. It was "the grain of heaven" in that its source was heavenly.

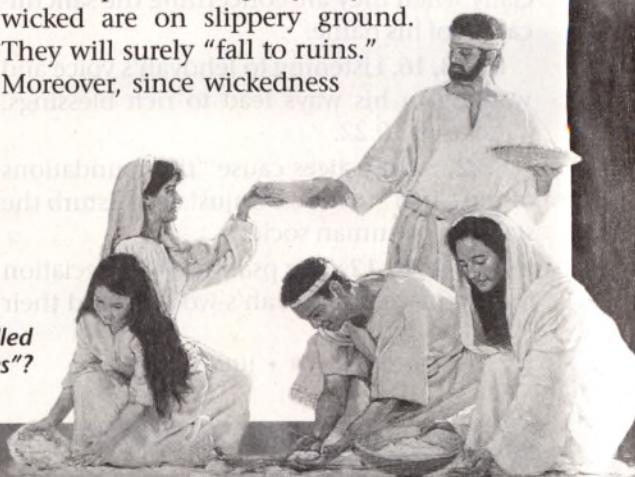
(Psalm 105:40) Since angels, or "powerful ones," dwell in heaven, the phrase "the very bread of angels" may simply mean that it was provided by God, who dwells in heaven. (Psalm 11:4) Jehovah may also have used angels to provide the manna for the Israelites.

82:1, 6—Who are called "gods" and "sons of the Most High"? Both expressions refer to human judges in Israel. This is appropriate, since they were to serve as God's spokesmen and representatives.—John 10:33-36.

83:2—What does the 'raising of one's head' denote? The gesture signifies readiness to exercise power or to take action, usually to oppose, fight, or oppress.

Lessons for Us:

73:2-5, 18-20, 25, 28. We should not become envious of the prosperity of the wicked and adopt their ungodly ways. The wicked are on slippery ground. They will surely "fall to ruins." Moreover, since wickedness



Do you know why manna is called "the very bread of powerful ones"?

cannot be removed under imperfect human rule, our putting forth effort to eradicate it would be futile. Like Asaph, we are wise if we cope with wickedness by “drawing near to God” and by taking delight in a close relationship with Him.

73:3, 6, 8, 27. We must guard against boasting, haughtiness, scoffing, and defrauding. This is the case even though adopting such traits may seem advantageous.

73:15-17. When we are confused in our thinking, we should hold back from making our perplexing thoughts public. Telling “a story like that” would only discourage others. We ought to meditate peacefully about our concerns and resolve them in association with fellow believers.—Proverbs 18:1.

73:21-24. Becoming ‘sour at heart’ because of the seeming well-being of the wicked is likened to reacting like unreasoning animals. This reaction is impulsive, based strictly on the senses. Rather, we should be led by Jehovah’s counsel, fully confident that he will ‘hold us by the right hand’ and support us. Additionally, Jehovah ‘will take us to glory,’ that is, into a close relationship with him.

77:6. Showing heartfelt concern for spiritual truths and carefully searching for them requires time for study and meditation. How vital that we make room for a measure of solitude in our lives!

79:9. Jehovah listens to our prayers, especially when they are concerning the sanctification of his name.

81:13, 16. Listening to Jehovah’s voice and walking in his ways lead to rich blessings.—Proverbs 10:22.

82:2, 5. Injustices cause “the foundations of the earth” to totter. Unjust acts disturb the stability of human society.

84:1-4, 10-12. The psalmists’ appreciation for the place of Jehovah’s worship and their

feeling of contentment with their service privileges furnish examples for us.

86:5. How grateful we can be that Jehovah is “ready to forgive”! He is on the lookout for any evidence that would provide a basis for him to show mercy to a repentant wrongdoer.

87:5, 6. Will those who receive life in the earthly Paradise ever know the names of those resurrected to heavenly life? These verses indicate that this is a likely possibility.

88:13, 14. A delay in receiving an answer to our prayers about a certain problem may well mean that Jehovah wants us to demonstrate the genuineness of our devotion to him.

“GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BLESS HIS NAME” **(Psalm 90:1-106:48)**

Consider the various reasons for extolling Jehovah that are set out in the fourth collection of psalms. In Psalm 90, Moses contrasts the existence of “the King of eternity” with the fleeting life of man. (1 Timothy 1:17) According to Psalm 91:2, Moses refers to Jehovah as ‘his refuge and his stronghold’ —his Source of security. The next few psalms speak of God’s beautiful qualities, superior thoughts, and wonderful works. Three songs open with the expression “Jehovah himself has become king.” (Psalm 93:1; 97:1; 99:1) Speaking of Jehovah as our Maker, the psalmist invites us to “give thanks to him, bless his name.”—Psalm 100:4.

How should a ruler who fears Jehovah administer his affairs? Psalm 101, composed by King David, provides the answer. The next psalm tells us that Jehovah “will certainly turn to the prayer of those stripped of everything, and not despise their prayer.” (Psalm 102:17) The 103rd Psalm calls attention to Jehovah’s loving-kindness and mercy. Referring to God’s many productions on earth, the psalmist exclaims: “How many

your works are, O Jehovah! All of them in wisdom you have made." (Psalm 104:24) The final two songs of Book Four laud Jehovah for his wonderful works.—Psalm 105:2, 5; 106:7, 22.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

91:1, 2—What is “the secret place of the Most High,” and how may we ‘dwell’ there? This is a figurative place of spiritual safety and security—a condition or state of protection from being harmed spiritually. The place is secret because it is unknown to those who do not trust in God. We make Jehovah our dwelling by looking to him as our refuge and stronghold, by lauding him as the Sovereign Ruler of the universe, and by preaching the good news of the Kingdom. We feel spiritually secure because we know that Jehovah is always ready to help us. —Psalm 90:1.

92:12—In what way do the righteous “blossom forth as a palm tree does”? The palm tree is noted for its productivity. A righteous person is like a palm tree in that he is upright in Jehovah's eyes and keeps bearing “fine fruit,” which includes good works. —Matthew 7:17-20.

Lessons for Us:

90:7, 8, 13, 14. Our wrongdoing always damages our relationship with the true God. And hidden sins cannot be concealed from him. However, if we truly repent and abandon our wrong course, Jehovah will restore us to his favor, ‘satisfying us with his loving-kindness.’

90:10, 12. Since life is short, we should “count our days.” How? By bringing “a heart of wisdom in,” or by exercising wisdom so that our remaining days are not wasted but are spent in a way that pleases Jehovah. This requires that we set spiritual priorities and use our time wisely.—Ephesians 5:15, 16; Philippians 1:10.

90:17. It is proper to pray that Jehovah “firmly establish . . . the work of our hands” and bless our efforts in the ministry.

92:14, 15. By being diligent students of God’s Word and by regularly associating with Jehovah’s people, elderly ones continue to be “fat and fresh”—spiritually vigorous—and prove to be valuable assets to the congregation.

94:19. Whatever the cause of our “disquieting thoughts” may be, reading and meditating on the “consolations” found in the Bible will comfort us.

95:7, 8. Listening to Scriptural counsel, paying attention to it, and readily obeying it will prevent us from becoming hard-hearted.—Hebrews 3:7, 8.

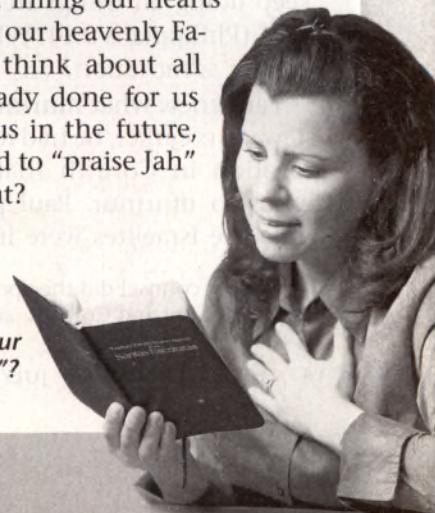
106:36, 37. These verses associate idol worship with sacrifices to demons. This indicates that a person who uses idols may come under demon influence. The Bible urges us: “Guard yourselves from idols.”—1 John 5:21.

“Praise Jah, You People!”

The last three songs of Book Four of Psalms close with the admonition: “Praise Jah, you people!” The last psalm also opens with it. (Psalm 104:35; 105:45; 106:1, 48) In fact, the expression “Praise Jah, you people!” occurs frequently in Book Four of the psalms.

We certainly have reason to praise Jehovah. Psalms 73 through 106 have given us much to ponder, filling our hearts with gratitude to our heavenly Father. When we think about all that he has already done for us and will do for us in the future, are we not moved to “praise Jah” with all our might?

What helps to dispel our “disquieting thoughts”?





'KEEP FREE FROM MURMURINGS'

"Keep doing all things free from murmurings." —PHILIPPIANS 2:14.

IN HIS divinely inspired letter to the first-century Christian congregation in Philippi, the apostle Paul gave much commendation. He commended his fellow believers in that city for their generous and zealous spirit, and he expressed joy over their good works. Nevertheless, Paul reminded them to "keep doing all things free from murmurings." (Philippians 2:14) Why did the apostle give this admonition?

² Paul knew what murmuring can lead to. A few years earlier, he had reminded the congregation in Corinth that it can be dangerous to murmur. Paul pointed out that while the Israelites were in the wilderness,

they had repeatedly aroused Jehovah's anger. How? By desiring injurious things, by practicing idolatry and fornication, by putting Jehovah to the test, and by *murmuring*. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to learn from these examples. He wrote: "Neither be murmurers, just as some of them murmured, only to perish by the destroyer." —1 Corinthians 10:6-11.

³ As Jehovah's present-day servants, we manifest a spirit similar to that of the congregation in Philippi. We are zealous for fine works, and we have love among ourselves. (John 13:34, 35) In view of the injury that murmuring caused among God's people in

1, 2. What counsel did the apostle Paul give Christians in Philippi and Corinth, and why?

3. Why is the subject of murmuring of interest today?

◀ The Israelites actually murmured against Jehovah!

the past, however, we have good reason to take to heart the counsel: "Keep doing all things free from murmurings." Let us first consider examples of murmuring mentioned in the Scriptures. Then we will discuss some things we can do to prevent murmuring from causing injury today.

An Evil Assembly Murmurs Against Jehovah

⁴ The Hebrew word meaning 'to murmur, grumble, complain, or growl' is used in the Bible in connection with events during Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. On occasion, the Israelites were discontented with their lot in life and expressed this by murmuring. For example, just a few weeks after their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, "the entire assembly of the sons of Israel began to murmur against Moses and Aaron." The Israelites complained about food, saying: "If only we had died by Jehovah's hand in the land of Egypt while we were sitting by the pots of meat, while we were eating bread to satisfaction, because you have brought us out into this wilderness to put this whole congregation to death by famine."—Exodus 16:1-3.

⁵ Actually, Jehovah sustained the Israelites with what they needed in the wilderness, lovingly providing them with food and water. There was never a threat that the people of Israel would die of famine in the wilderness. In a spirit of discontent, though, they exaggerated their plight and began to murmur. Although their complaints were directed against Moses and Aaron, in Jehovah's eyes the real target of their discontent was

4. In what way did the Israelites murmur in the wilderness?

5. When the Israelites complained, against whom was their murmuring really directed?

God himself. Moses told the Israelites: "Jehovah has heard your murmurings that you are murmuring against him. And what are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against Jehovah."—Exodus 16:4-8.

⁶ Not long thereafter, the Israelites murmured once again. Moses sent 12 men to spy out the Promised Land. Ten of them returned with a bad report. The result? "All the sons of Israel began to murmur against Moses and Aaron, and all the assembly began to say against them: 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! And why is Jehovah bringing us to this land [Canaan] to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder. Is it not better for us to return to Egypt?'"—Numbers 14:1-3.

⁷ How Israel's spirit had changed! Initial gratitude for their release from Egypt and deliverance through the Red Sea had moved them to sing praises to Jehovah. (Exodus 15:1-21) Faced with the discomforts of the wilderness and fearful of the Canaanites, however, the gratitude of God's people was replaced by a spirit of discontent. Instead of thanking God for their freedom, they blamed him for what they wrongly viewed as deprivation. Murmuring was thus an expression of lack of proper appreciation for Jehovah's provisions. No wonder he said: "How long will this evil assembly have this murmuring that they are carrying on against me?"—Numbers 14:27; 21:5.

Murmuring in the First Century

⁸ The foregoing examples of murmuring involved groups of people apparently expressing their discontent out loud. When Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem for the Festival

6, 7. As shown at Numbers 14:1-3, how had the attitude of the Israelites changed?

8, 9. Cite examples of murmuring recorded in the Christian Greek Scriptures.

of Booths in 32 C.E., however, "there was a lot of *subdued talk* about him among the crowds." (John 7:12, 13, 32) They were whispering about him, some saying that he was a good man, others saying that he was not.

⁹ On another occasion, Jesus and his disciples were guests at the home of Levi, or Matthew, the tax collector. "The Pharisees and their scribes began murmuring to his disciples, saying: 'Why is it you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?'" (Luke 5: 27-30) In Galilee some time later, "the Jews began to murmur at [Jesus] because he said: 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.'" Even some of Jesus' followers took offense at what he said and began to murmur.—John 6:41, 60, 61.

¹⁰ The outcome was more positive in a case of murmuring that occurred shortly after Pentecost 33 C.E. Many newly converted disciples from outside Israel were then enjoying the hospitality of fellow believers in Judaea, but problems arose in connection with sharing what was available. The account states: "A murmuring arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrew-speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution."—Acts 6:1.

¹¹ These murmurers were not like the Israelites in the wilderness. The Greek-speaking Jews did not selfishly express discontent about their own lot in life. They drew attention to a failure to meet the needs of some of the widows. Moreover, the murmurers did not act as troublemakers and raise their voices against Jehovah. They directed their complaint to the apostles, who arranged for prompt action to be taken because the complaint was justified. What a good example

10, 11. Why did the Greek-speaking Jews murmur, and how can Christian elders benefit from the way that the complaint was handled?

the apostles set for Christian elders today! These spiritual shepherds are careful not to 'stop up their ears from the complaining cry of the lowly one.'—Proverbs 21:13; Acts 6: 2-6.

Beware of the Corrosive Influence of Murmuring

¹² Most of the Scriptural examples we have considered show that murmuring caused much damage among God's people in the past. Therefore, we do well to think seriously about the corrosive influence it could have today. An illustration might help. Many types of metal have a natural tendency to rust. If early signs of rust are ignored, metal can rust to the point that it can no longer serve its purpose. Countless automobiles are scrapped, not because of mechanical failure, but because the metal is so rusted that the vehicles are unsafe. How can we apply this illustration to murmuring?

¹³ Just as certain metals tend to rust, imperfect humans have a tendency to complain. We should be on guard to detect any sign of this. Even as moisture and salty air accelerate rusting, adversity makes us more inclined to murmur. Stress can turn a minor irritation into a major grievance. As conditions in the last days of this system deteriorate, potential causes of complaint will likely increase. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Hence, one servant of Jehovah might begin to murmur against another. The cause could be a small issue, such as discontent with someone's weaknesses, abilities, or privileges of service.

¹⁴ Whatever the reason for our displeasure, if we were to allow a tendency to complain to go unchecked, it could promote in

12, 13. (a) Illustrate the effects of murmuring.
(b) What might prompt an individual to murmur?
14, 15. Why should we not allow a tendency to complain to go unchecked?

us a spirit of discontent and make us habitual murmurers. Yes, the spiritually corrosive effect of murmuring could corrupt us completely. When the Israelites murmured about life in the wilderness, they went so far as to blame Jehovah. (Exodus 16:8) May that never happen to us!

¹⁵ The tendency of metal to rust can be reduced by coating it with rustproof paint and quickly treating isolated spots of corrosion. In a similar fashion, if we detect in ourselves a tendency to complain, this can be kept under control if we give the matter prompt, prayerful attention. How?

Look at Things From Jehovah's Point of View

¹⁶ Murmuring focuses our mind on ourselves and our troubles and pushes into the background the blessings we enjoy as Witnesses of Jehovah. To overcome a tendency to complain, we need to keep these blessings uppermost in our mind. For instance, each of us has the wonderful privilege of bearing the personal name of Jehovah. (Isaiah 43:10) We can cultivate a close relationship with him, and we are able to speak to the "Hearer of prayer" at any time. (Psalm 65:2; James 4:8) Our life has real meaning because we understand the issue of universal sovereignty and remember that it is our privilege to maintain integrity to God. (Proverbs 27:11) We can have a regular share in preaching the good news of the Kingdom. (Matthew 24:14) Faith in the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ enables us to have a clean conscience. (John 3:16) These are blessings we enjoy no matter what we have to endure.

¹⁷ Let us try to see things from Jehovah's

16. How can a tendency to complain be overcome?
17. Why should we try to view matters from Jehovah's point of view, even if we have a valid reason for complaint?



Do you try to look at things as Jehovah does?

point of view, not just our own. "Make me know your own ways, O Jehovah; teach me your own paths," sang the psalmist David. (Psalm 25:4) If we have a valid reason for complaint, this has not escaped Jehovah's notice. He could correct the matter immediately. So why does he at times allow adversity to continue? This could be in order to help us develop fine qualities, such as patience, endurance, faith, and long-suffering.
—James 1:2-4.

¹⁸ Our putting up with inconveniences without complaining not only helps us to improve our personality but may also impress those observing our conduct. In 2003 a group of Jehovah's Witnesses traveled by bus from Germany to attend a convention in Hungary. The bus driver was not a Witness, and he had reservations about being with the Witnesses for ten days. By the end of the trip, however, he had changed his mind completely. Why?

¹⁹ During the trip, several things went wrong. But the Witnesses never complained. The driver said that this was

- 18, 19. Illustrate the possible effects of our putting up with inconveniences without complaining.

Forgiveness promotes Christian unity



the best group of passengers he had ever had! In fact, he promised that the next time the Witnesses called at his home, he would invite them in and carefully listen to them. What a fine impression the passengers made by "doing all things free from murmurings"!

Forgiveness Promotes Unity

²⁰ What if we have a complaint against a fellow believer? If the matter is serious, we should apply the principles found in what Jesus said as recorded at Matthew 18:15-17.

20. Why should we forgive one another?

Do You Recall?

- What is involved in murmuring?
- How might the effects of murmuring be illustrated?
- What can help us overcome a tendency to murmur?
- How can willingness to forgive help us to refrain from murmuring?

This will not always be necessary, though, since most grievances are minor. Why not see the situation as a chance to practice forgiveness? Paul wrote: "Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint against another. Even as Jehovah freely forgave you, so do you also. But, besides all these things, clothe yourselves with love, for it is a perfect bond of union." (Colossians 3:13, 14) Can we find room in our heart to forgive? Does not Jehovah have reason to complain about us? Yet, he repeatedly shows compassion and forgiveness.

²¹ Whatever the grievance may be, murmuring will not resolve matters. The Hebrew term meaning "to murmur" can also mean "to growl." Very likely, we feel uncomfortable around a constant murmur and try to distance ourselves from him. If we were to murmur, or growl, those listening might feel the same way. Why, they may be so uncomfortable that they want to distance themselves from us! Growling might capture someone's attention, but it will certainly not win anyone's heart.

21. How might those listening to murmuring be affected?

²² A forgiving attitude promotes unity—something cherished by Jehovah's people. (Psalm 133:1-3) In one European land, a 17-year-old Catholic girl wrote to the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses to express her admiration for them. She said: "It is the only organization I know where the members are not divided by hatred, greed, intolerance, selfishness, or disunity."

22. What did one girl say about Jehovah's Witnesses?

²³ Appreciation for all the spiritual blessings we receive as worshippers of the true God, Jehovah, will help us to promote unity and avoid murmuring against others in personal matters. The next article will show how godly qualities will prevent us from engaging in an even more dangerous form of murmuring—that is, murmuring against the earthly part of Jehovah's organization.

23. What will we discuss in the next article?

FOCUS ON THE GOODNESS OF JEHOVAH'S ORGANIZATION

"We will certainly be satisfied with the goodness of your house."—PSALM 65:4.

DAVID of ancient Israel is one of the most outstanding people discussed in the Hebrew Scriptures. This shepherd, musician, prophet, and king placed implicit trust in Jehovah God. David's deep personal attachment to Jehovah aroused in him a desire to build a house for God. Such a house, or temple, would become the center of true worship in Israel. David knew that the arrangements in connection with the temple would bring joy and blessings to God's people. David therefore sang: "Happy is the one you [Jehovah] choose and cause to approach, that he may reside in your courtyards. We will certainly be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holy place of your temple."—Psalm 65:4.

² David was not permitted to supervise

- 1, 2. (a) The arrangements in connection with the temple would have what effect on God's people? (b) What provisions did David make for the temple's construction?

the construction of Jehovah's house. Instead, that privilege was reserved for his son Solomon. David did not murmur because someone else was granted the privilege that he himself so earnestly desired. What was most important to him was that the temple be built. He wholeheartedly supported the project by passing on to Solomon the architectural plans that he had received from Jehovah. Moreover, David organized thousands of Levites into divisions of service and donated a large amount of gold and silver for temple construction.—1 Chronicles 17:1, 4, 11, 12; 23:3-6; 28:11, 12; 29:1-5.

³ Faithful Israelites supported the arrangements made for true worship at the house of God. As present-day servants of Jehovah, we similarly support provisions for worship within the earthly part of Jehovah's

3. What attitude do God's servants have toward arrangements for true worship?



organization. We thereby demonstrate that we have the same frame of mind that David had. Ours is not a spirit of complaint. Instead, we focus on the goodness of God's organization. Have you thought about the many good things for which we can truly be grateful? Let us consider some of them.

Grateful for Those Taking the Lead

⁴ We have sound reasons to be grateful for "the faithful and discreet slave" appointed by Jesus Christ over his belongings on earth. The slave class of spirit-anointed Christians takes the lead in preaching the good news, arranges meetings for worship, and publishes Bible-based literature in over 400 languages. Millions of people earth wide gratefully partake of this spiritual "food at the proper time." (Matthew 24:45-47) There certainly is no reason to murmur about it.

⁵ For many years, an elderly Witness of Jehovah named Elfi has experienced comfort and support by taking to heart the Scriptural counsel found in publications of the slave class. Deep appreciation moved Elfi to write: "What would I do without Jehovah's organi-

4, 5. (a) How does "the faithful and discreet slave" fulfill its commission? (b) How have some Witnesses felt about the spiritual food they receive?

zation?" Peter and Irmgard have also been God's servants for decades. Irmgard expresses gratitude for all the provisions made by "Jehovah's loving and caring organization." These publications include those designed for people with special needs, such as individuals with impaired vision or hearing.

⁶ The 'faithful slave' is represented by the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, a small group of spirit-anointed men serving at the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York. The Governing Body appoints experienced servants of Jehovah to serve at branch offices that supervise the activities of over 98,000 congregations earth wide. Men who meet the Biblical requirements are appointed as elders and ministerial servants in these congregations. (1 Timothy 3:1-9, 12, 13) The elders take the lead and lovingly shepherd the flock of God in their care. What a blessing it is to be part of that flock and to experience the love and unity that exist among "the whole association of brothers"!—1 Peter 2:17; 5:2, 3.

⁷ Far from registering complaints, individuals often express appreciation for the lov-

6, 7. (a) How are the activities of congregations earth wide supervised? (b) What has been said about the earthly part of Jehovah's organization?

ing spiritual guidance they receive from the elders. For example, consider Birgit, a Christian wife in her 30's. As a teenager, she got into bad company and almost slipped into wrongdoing. But the clear Biblical counsel of the elders and the support of fellow believers helped her out of a potentially harmful situation. How does Birgit feel now? She says: "I am deeply grateful that I still belong to Jehovah's wonderful organization." A 17-year-old named Andreas states: "This is really Jehovah's organization, the best organization in the world." Should we not be grateful for the goodness of the earthly part of Jehovah's organization?

Those Taking the Lead Are Imperfect

⁸ Of course, those appointed to take the lead in true worship are imperfect. All of them make mistakes, and some have persistent weaknesses that they are working hard to control. Need we be upset because of this? No. Even individuals entrusted with much responsibility in ancient Israel made grave errors. While David was still a young person, for instance, he was called upon to serve as musician to calm troubled King Saul. Later, Saul tried to kill David, who ultimately had to flee for his life.—1 Samuel 16:14-23; 18:10-12; 19:18; 20:32, 33; 22:1-5.

⁹ Other Israelites behaved treacherously. For instance, David's military commander Joab murdered Saul's relative Abner. Absalom conspired against his father, David, for the kingship. And David's trusted adviser Ahithophel betrayed him. (2 Samuel 3:22-30; 15:1-17, 31; 16:15, 21) Yet, David did not become a bitter complainer; nor did he turn his back on true worship. In fact, the opposite was true. Adversity moved David to cling

8, 9. How did some of David's contemporaries act, and how did David react to such behavior?

to Jehovah and maintain the fine attitude he had when he ran away because of Saul. At that time, David sang: "Show me favor, O God, show me favor, for in you my soul has taken refuge; and in the shadow of your wings I take refuge until the adversities pass over."—Psalm 57:1.

¹⁰ We have no reason to complain of treachery within God's organization today. Neither Jehovah nor his angels nor the spiritual shepherds tolerate the presence of treacherous, wicked ones in the Christian congregation. Nevertheless, all of us are confronted with human imperfection—our own and that of other servants of God.

¹¹ When Gertrud, a longtime worshipper of Jehovah, was a young woman, she was falsely accused of being a fraud and not a full-time Kingdom proclaimer. How did she react? Did Gertrud murmur about such treatment? No. Shortly before her death in 2003 at the age of 91, she looked back on her life and explained: "These and later experiences taught me that despite mistakes made by individuals, Jehovah directs his great work, in which he uses us imperfect humans." When confronted with the imperfections of other servants of God, Gertrud turned to Jehovah in heartfelt prayer.

¹² Since even the most loyal and devoted Christians are imperfect, when an appointed servant makes a mistake, let us continue to do "all things free from murmurings." (Philippians 2:14) How sad it would be if we were to follow the poor example of a few in the first-century Christian congregation! According to the disciple Jude,

10, 11. What did a Christian named Gertrud experience as a young person, and what did she say about the failings of fellow believers?

12. (a) What poor example did some first-century Christians set? (b) On what should we fix our thoughts?

false teachers of that day were “disregarding lordship and speaking abusively of glorious ones.” Moreover, those wrongdoers were “murmurers, complainers about their lot in life.” (Jude 8, 16) May we reject the path followed by murmuring complainers and fix our thoughts on the fine things that come to us through the ‘faithful slave.’ Let us appreciate the goodness of Jehovah’s organization and “keep doing all things free from murmurings.”

“This Speech Is Shocking”

¹³ Whereas some in the first century murmured against appointed servants, others were murmurers against Jesus’ teachings. As recorded at John 6:48-69, Jesus stated: “He that feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has everlasting life.” Upon hearing these words, “many of his disciples . . . said: ‘This speech is shocking; who can listen to it?’” Jesus was aware that “his disciples were murmuring about this.” Moreover, “owing to this many of [them] went off to the things behind and would no longer walk with him.” But not every disciple murmured. Note what happened when Jesus asked the 12 apostles: “You do not want to go also, do you?” The apostle Peter answered: “Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life; and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

¹⁴ In modern times, a very small number among God’s people have become disgruntled with some aspect of Christian teaching and have murmured against the earthly part of Jehovah’s organization. Why does this happen? Such murmuring is often caused

13. How did some react to certain teachings of Jesus Christ?

14, 15. (a) Why do a few become disgruntled with some aspect of Christian teachings? (b) What can we learn from the case of a man named Emanuel?

by a lack of understanding of God’s way of doing things. The Creator progressively reveals the truth to his people. Hence, our understanding of the Scriptures is bound to be refined from time to time. The vast majority of Jehovah’s people rejoice over such refinements. A few become “righteous overmuch” and resent the changes. (Ecclesiastes 7:16) Pride may play a role, and some fall into the trap of independent thinking. Whatever the reason, such murmuring is hazardous, since it can draw us back into the world and its ways.

¹⁵ Emanuel, for instance, was a Witness who found fault with some things he read in publications of “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matthew 24:45) He stopped reading our Christian literature and eventually told the elders of the local congregation that he no longer wished to be one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Within a short time, however, Emanuel came to realize that the teachings of Jehovah’s organization were correct after all. He contacted the Witnesses, admitted his mistake, and was reinstated as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. As a result, he again became a happy man.

¹⁶ What if we are tempted to murmur because of having doubts about certain teachings that Jehovah’s people hold in common? Then let us not be impatient. The ‘faithful slave’ may eventually publish something that answers our questions and clears up our doubts. It is wise to seek the help of Christian elders. (Jude 22, 23) Prayer, personal study, and association with spiritually-minded fellow believers can also help to remove doubts and can deepen our appreciation for the faith-strengthening Bible truths we have learned through Jehovah’s channel of communication.

16. What can help us to overcome doubts about certain Christian teachings?

Maintain a Positive Spirit

¹⁷ Admittedly, imperfect humans have an inherent tendency to sin, and some may have a strong inclination to voice unwarranted complaints. (Genesis 8:21; Romans 5:12) But if we were to become habitual murmurers, we would be putting at risk our relationship with Jehovah God. Hence, we need to control any possible inclination to murmur.

¹⁸ Instead of murmuring about things in the congregation, we do well to maintain a positive attitude and follow a routine that keeps us busy, joyful, reverent, balanced, and healthy in faith. (1 Corinthians 15:58; Titus 2:1-5) Jehovah is in control of everything within his organization, and Jesus is aware of developments in each congregation, just as he was in the first century. (Revelation 1:10, 11) Patiently wait on God and Christ, the Head of the congregation. Responsible shepherds may be used to correct matters that may need to be re-adjusted.—Psalm 43:5; Colossians 1:18; Titus 1:5.

¹⁹ Soon this wicked system of things will end, and the Messianic Kingdom will take full control of mankind's affairs. Until then, how important it is that each of us maintain a positive spirit! This will help us to recognize the virtues of our fellow believers, instead of focusing on their faults. Focusing on the good aspects of their personality will make us happy. Rather than being emotionally drained by murmuring, we will thus be encouraged and built up spiritually.

²⁰ A positive spirit will also enable us to

17, 18. Instead of murmuring, what attitude should we have, and why?

19. Until the Kingdom is in full control of mankind's affairs, on what should we focus our attention?

20. A positive attitude will enable us to enjoy what blessings?



Christian elders gladly provide spiritual assistance

bear in mind the many blessings we enjoy because of being associated with the earthly part of Jehovah's organization. This is the only organization in the world that is loyal to the Sovereign of the universe. How do you feel about that reality and the privilege of engaging in the worship of the only true God, Jehovah? May your attitude be like that of David, who sang: "O Hearer of prayer, even to you people of all flesh will come. Happy is the one you choose and cause to approach, that he may reside in your courtyards. We will certainly be satisfied with the goodness of your house." —Psalm 65:2, 4.

Do You Recall?

- Why should we be grateful for those taking the lead in the congregation?
- What should be our reaction when responsible brothers make mistakes?
- How should we view refinements in the understanding of the Scriptures?
- What can help a Christian to overcome doubts?

A Non-Biblical Reference to a People Called

ISRAEL

IN THE Cairo Museum in Egypt, a granite stela commemorates victories of Pharaoh Merneptah. According to scholars' estimates, this 13th son of Ramses II ruled between about 1212 and 1202 B.C.E.—toward the latter part of the period of the Judges in ancient Israel. The last two lines of Merneptah's stela read: "The Canaan is plundered with every hardship. Ashkelon is taken, Gezer captured, [and] Yano'am reduced to nothing. Israel is laid waste, his seed is no more."

What is meant by the word "Israel" in this context? In hieroglyphic writing, some unpronounced signs, called determinatives, were added to the spelling to indicate the category to which the words belonged. The publication *The Rise of Ancient Israel* explains: "Attached to three of the four entities—Ashkelon, Gezer and Yanoam—is a determinative that tells us that they are *cities*. . . . The determinative attached to Israel, however, is for a *people*."—Italics ours.

What is the significance of this text? Hershel Shanks, editor and author, answers: "The Merneptah Stele shows that a people called Israel existed in 1212 B.C.E. and that the pharaoh of Egypt not only knew about



Merneptah stela

Egyptian National Museum, Cairo,
Egypt/Giraudon/The Bridgeman Art Library



The combination of the last three signs—a throw stick and a seated man and woman—identifies Israel as a foreign people

them, but also felt it was worth boasting about having defeated them in battle." William G. Dever, professor of Near Eastern archaeology, comments: "The Merneptah stele tells us unequivocally: There does exist in Canaan a people calling themselves 'Israel,' and thus called 'Israel' by the Egyptians—who, after all, are hardly biblically biased, and they cannot have invented such a specific and unique people as 'Israel' for their own propaganda purposes."

In the Bible, Israel is first mentioned as a name given to the patriarch Jacob. The descendants of Jacob's 12 sons became known as "the sons of Israel." (Genesis 32:22–28, 32; 35:9, 10) Years later, both the prophet Moses and the Pharaoh of Egypt used the word "Israel" when referring to these descendants of Jacob. (Exodus 5:1, 2) The Merneptah stela is the earliest known non-Biblical reference to a people called Israel.

JEHOVAH DELIVERS THE AFFLICTED ONE

"Many are the calamities of the righteous one, but out of them all Jehovah delivers him."—PSALM 34:19.

A YOUNG woman named Keiko* has been one of Jehovah's Witnesses for more than 20 years. For a time, she served as a regular pioneer, or full-time Kingdom proclaimers. She deeply cherished that privilege. Not long ago, however, Keiko became overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness and isolation. "All I could do was cry," she says. To combat her negative thinking, Keiko devoted more time to personal study. "Still, I could not turn my condition around," she says. "It got to the point that I wanted to die."

2 Have you struggled with similar feelings of despair? As one of Jehovah's Witnesses, you have abundant reason to rejoice because godly devotion "holds promise of the life now and that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8) Right now you dwell in a spiritual paradise! However, does that mean that you are shielded from all affliction? Hardly! The Bible says: "Many are the calamities of the righteous one." (Psalm 34:19) This is not surprising, for "the whole world is lying in

the power of the wicked one," Satan the Devil. (1 John 5:19) To one degree or another, all of us experience the effects of that reality. —Ephesians 6:12.

The Effects of Affliction

3 Prolonged distress can darken our entire outlook. (Proverbs 15:15) Consider the upright man Job. In the midst of a terrible ordeal, Job said: "Man, born of woman, is short-lived and glutted with agitation." (Job 14:1) Job's joy had vanished. For a time, he even thought that Jehovah had abandoned him. (Job 29:1-5) Job was not the only servant of God to experience intense anguish. The Bible tells us that Hannah was "bitter of soul" because of her childless state. (1 Samuel 1:9-11) Tormented over a family situation, Rebekah said: "I have come to abhor this life of mine." (Genesis 27:46) When reflecting on his errors, David said: "All day long I have walked about sad." (Psalm 38:6) These few examples make it clear that God-fearing men and women of

* Name has been changed.

- 1, 2. What problem did one faithful Christian face, and why may we be subject to similar feelings?



*Despite trials,
Jehovah's people
have reason
to rejoice*

the pre-Christian era endured periods of deep distress.

⁴ What about Christians? The apostle Paul found it necessary to tell the Thessalonians to “speak consolingly to the depressed souls.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14) One reference work notes that the Greek word translated “depressed souls” can refer to those “who are temporarily overwhelmed by the stress of life.” Paul’s words indicate that some spirit-anointed ones in that congregation at Thessalonica were downhearted. There are depressed souls among Christians today too. But why are they despondent? Let us consider three common causes.

Our Sinful Nature Can Distress Us

⁵ Unlike corrupt individuals who are “past all moral sense,” true Christians are pained by their sinful state. (Ephesians 4:19) They may feel as did Paul, who wrote: “I really delight in the law of God according to the man I am within, but I behold in my members another law warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive to sin’s law that is in my members.” Then Paul exclaimed: “Miserable man that I am!”—Romans 7:22-24.

⁶ Have you ever felt as Paul did? It is not wrong for you to be keenly aware of your imperfections, for this can impress upon you the gravity of sin and can strengthen your resolve to shun badness. But you do not need to be in a constant state of misery over your shortcomings. To his words of distress just quoted, Paul added: “Thanks to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25) Yes, Paul had confidence that Jesus’ shed blood could redeem him from inherited sin.—Romans 5:18.

4. Why is it not surprising that there are “depressed souls” among Christians today?

5, 6. What comfort can be drawn from Romans 7:22-25?

⁷ If you feel overwhelmed by your sinful nature, take comfort in the words of the apostle John, who wrote: “If anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one. And he is a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins, yet not for ours only but also for the whole world’s.” (1 John 2:1, 2) If you are distressed because of your sinful tendencies, always remember that Jesus died for sinners, not for perfect people. Really, “*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”—Romans 3:23.

⁸ Suppose, however, that you sinned seriously in the past. No doubt, you have taken the matter to Jehovah in prayer, perhaps quite often. You have received spiritual help from Christian elders. (James 5:14, 15) You were truly repentant and therefore remained a part of the congregation. Or perhaps you left God’s organization for a while, but you later repented and regained a clean standing. In either situation, your past sin may come to mind and distress you. If that happens, remember that Jehovah forgives truly repentant ones “in a large way.” (Isaiah 55:7) Furthermore, he does not want you to feel hopelessly condemned. That would serve Satan’s purpose. (2 Corinthians 2:7, 10, 11) The Devil will be destroyed because that is what he deserves, but he would like to have you feel that you deserve the same judgment. (Revelation 20:10) Do not let Satan succeed in this scheme to destroy your faith. (Ephesians 6:11) Instead, “take your stand against him” in this regard, even as you do in other ways.—1 Peter 5:9.

⁹ At Revelation 12:10, Satan is called “the accuser of our brothers”—anointed Christians. He “accuses them day and night” before God. Reflecting on that verse may help

7. What can help a person not to be distressed because of his sinful tendencies?

8, 9. Why should we reject self-condemning thoughts?

you to see that Satan, the false accuser, would be pleased if you were to accuse and condemn yourself, although Jehovah does not do so. (1 John 3:19-22) Why keep on agonizing over your failings to such an extent that you feel like giving up? Do not let Satan destroy your relationship with God. Never let the Devil blind you to the fact that Jehovah is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.”—Exodus 34:6.

Our Limitations Can Discourage Us

¹⁰ Some Christians are discouraged because of the way their limitations affect their service to God. Is that true of you? It may be that a serious illness, advanced years, or other circumstances prevent you from devoting as much time to the ministry as you did in the past. Granted, Christians are encouraged to buy out time for God’s service. (Ephesians 5:15, 16) But what if genuine limitations prevent you from doing more in the ministry and this is a source of discouragement to you?

¹¹ The Bible urges us not to be sluggish but to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (Hebrews 6:12) We can do this only if we examine their fine example and seek to imitate their faith. However, we will not benefit if we compare ourselves unfavorably with others and conclude that nothing we do is good enough. Therefore, we do well to apply Paul’s counsel: “Let each one prove what his own work is, and then he will have cause for exultation in regard to himself alone, and not in comparison with the other person.”—Galatians 6:4.

10. In what ways might our limitations discourage us?

11. How can Paul’s counsel recorded at Galatians 6:4 benefit us?

¹² Christians have good reason to exult, even when they are limited by severe health problems. The Bible assures us: “God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name.” (Hebrews 6:10) It may be that circumstances beyond your control have made it difficult for you to maintain the level of activity that you once enjoyed. With Jehovah’s help, however, you may be able to engage more fully in certain aspects of the Christian ministry, such as telephone witnessing and letter writing. You can be sure that Jehovah God will bless you for your whole-souled service and the love you show for him and for fellow humans.—Matthew 22:36-40.

“Critical Times” Can Wear Us Down

¹³ Although we look forward to life in God’s righteous new world, right now we live in “critical times hard to deal with.” (2 Timothy 3:1) We take comfort in the knowledge that distressing events point to the nearness of our deliverance. Yet, we are affected by the conditions that surround us. For example, what if you are unemployed? Jobs may be scarce, and as the months pass, you could wonder if Jehovah sees your plight or hears your prayers. Or perhaps you have become the victim of discrimination or some other form of injustice. Even scanning newspaper headlines can make you feel as did the righteous man Lot, who was “greatly distressed” (“worn down,” *Young’s Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*) by the loose conduct of those around him.—2 Peter 2:7.

¹⁴ There is one particular aspect of the last days that we cannot overlook. The Bible foretold that many would have “no natural affection.” (2 Timothy 3:3) Family affection is

12. Why can we exult in the service we render to Jehovah?

13, 14. (a) In what ways may these “critical times” cause us affliction? (b) How is a lack of natural affection evident today?



sorely lacking in many households. Indeed, "evidence suggests that people are more likely to be killed, physically assaulted, or emotionally or sexually abused by other family members than by anyone else," says the book *Family Violence*. "The place where people should be loved and feel safe is, for some adults and children, the most dangerous place of all." Those who have been exposed to an unwholesome home environment may in later years experience bouts of anxiety and despair. What if this is true of you?

¹⁵ The psalmist David sang: "In case my own father and my own mother did leave me, even Jehovah himself would take me up." (Psalm 27:10) How comforting to know that Jehovah's love exceeds that of any human parent! As painful as rejection, mistreat-

15. How is Jehovah's love superior to that of any human?

Do You Recall?

- Why does affliction affect even servants of Jehovah?
- What are some factors that can cause some of God's people to feel despondent?
- How does Jehovah help us to cope with our anxieties?
- In what way are we "under the mighty hand of God"?

Telephone witnessing is one way to give Jehovah your best

ment, or abandonment by a parent may be, it has no bearing on how much Jehovah cares for you. (Romans 8:38, 39) Remember that God draws those whom he loves. (John 3:16; 6:44) Regardless of how you have been treated by humans, you are loved by your heavenly Father!

Practical Steps to Relieve Despondency

¹⁶ You can take practical steps to cope with despondency. For instance, follow a healthy program of Christian activity. Meditate on God's Word, especially when discouragement seems overwhelming. The psalmist sang: "When I said: 'My foot will certainly move unsteadily,' your own loving-kindness, O Jehovah, kept sustaining me. When my disquieting thoughts became many inside of me, your own consolations began to fondle my soul." (Psalm 94:18, 19) Regular Bible reading will help to fill your mind with consoling words and sustaining thoughts.

¹⁷ Prayer too is vital. Even if you cannot fully express the depth of your feelings in words, Jehovah knows what you are trying to say. (Romans 8:26, 27) The psalmist gave this assurance: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself, and he himself will sustain you. Never will he allow the righteous one to totter."—Psalm 55:22.

¹⁸ Some experience despair because of clinical depression.* If this is true of you, try to focus some of your attention on God's new world and the time when "no resident will

* More than discouragement, clinical depression is a diagnosed condition in which sadness is intense and ongoing. For additional information, see *The Watchtower* of October 15, 1988, pages 25-9; November 15, 1988, pages 21-4; and September 1, 1996, pages 30-1.

16, 17. When faced with despondency, what can a person do to preserve his spiritual strength?

18. What practical steps might a depressed one take?

say: 'I am sick.'" (Isaiah 33:24) If your negative feelings seem to be much more than an occasional case of the blues, it might be wise to seek professional help. (Matthew 9:12) It is also important to take care of yourself physically. A healthful diet and some exercise may be helpful. Make sure that you are getting needed rest. Do not stay up late watching television, and avoid forms of recreation that will leave you physically and emotionally depleted. Above all, continue to engage in godly works! Although it is not yet the time when Jehovah will "wipe out every tear," he will help you to endure.—Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Living "Under the Mighty Hand of God"

¹⁹ The Bible assures us that although the calamities of the righteous one are many, "out of them all Jehovah delivers him." (Psalm 34:19) How does God do this? When the apostle Paul repeatedly prayed for deliv-

19. What does Jehovah promise those who are afflicted?

erance from his "thorn in the flesh," Jehovah told him: "My power is being made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9) What did Jehovah promise Paul, and what does he promise you? Not a present-day cure, but the power to endure.

²⁰ The apostle Peter wrote: "Humble yourselves . . . under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; while you throw all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6, 7) Because Jehovah cares for you, he will not abandon you. He will support you despite the trials you experience. Bear in mind that faithful Christians are "under the mighty hand of God." As we serve Jehovah, he gives us strength to endure. If we are faithful to him, nothing can do us permanent spiritual harm. May we, therefore, maintain integrity to Jehovah so that we can enjoy everlasting life in his promised new world and see the day when he will indeed have delivered the afflicted one permanently!

20. Despite our trials, we are assured of what at 1 Peter 5:6, 7?

Questions From Readers

Can a person be disfellowshipped from the Christian congregation for engaging in uncleanness as he can be for fornication or loose conduct?

Yes, an individual can be expelled from the congregation if he unrepentantly practices either fornication, some forms of uncleanness, or loose conduct. The apostle Paul cites all three of these sins along with other disfellowshipping offenses when he writes: "The works of the flesh are manifest, and they are

fornication, uncleanness, loose conduct . . . I am forewarning you . . . that those who practice such things will not inherit God's kingdom."—Galatians 5:19-21.

Fornication (Greek, *por-ne'i'a*) applies to illicit sexual relations outside Scriptural marriage. It includes adultery, prostitution, and sex relations between unmarried individuals as well as oral and anal sex and the sexual manipulation of the genitals of an individual to whom one is not married. A person

who unrepentantly practices fornication does not belong in the Christian congregation.

Loose conduct (Greek, *a·sel'gei·a*) denotes "licentiousness; wantonness; shameless conduct; lewdness of conduct." *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* defines the Greek term as "unbridled lust, . . . outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence." According to another lexicon, loose conduct is a form of behavior that "violates all bounds of what is socially acceptable."

As the foregoing definitions show, "loose conduct" involves two elements: (1) The conduct itself is a serious violation of God's laws, and (2) the attitude of the wrongdoer is disrespectful, insolent.

Therefore, "loose conduct" does not refer to bad conduct of a minor nature. It pertains to acts that are serious violations of God's laws and that reflect a brazen or boldly contemptuous attitude—a spirit that betrays disrespect or even contempt for authority, laws, and standards. Paul links loose conduct with illicit intercourse. (Romans 13:13, 14) Since Galatians 5:19-21 lists loose conduct among a number of sinful practices that would disqualify one from inheriting God's Kingdom, loose conduct is grounds for reproof and possible disfellowshipping from the Christian congregation.

Uncleanness (Greek, *a·ka·thar·si'a*) is the broadest of the three terms rendered "fornication," "uncleanness," and "loose conduct." It embraces impurity of any kind—in sexual matters, in speech, in action, and in spiritual relationships. "Uncleanness" covers a wide range of serious sins.

As recorded at 2 Corinthians 12:21, Paul refers to those who "formerly sinned but have not repented over their uncleanness and fornication and loose conduct that they have practiced." Since "uncleanness" is listed with "fornication and loose conduct," some forms of uncleanness warrant judicial action. But uncleanness is a broad term that includes

things that are not of a judicial nature. Just as a house may be somewhat dirty or completely filthy, uncleanness has degrees.

Paul said, according to Ephesians 4:19, that some individuals had "come to be past all moral sense" and that "they gave themselves over to loose conduct to work uncleanness of every sort with greediness." Paul thus puts "uncleanness . . . with greediness" in the same category as loose conduct. If a baptized person unrepentantly practices "uncleanness . . . with greediness," he can be expelled from the congregation on the grounds of gross uncleanness.

Suppose an engaged couple indulged in passion-arousing heavy petting on numerous occasions. The elders might determine that even though these individuals did not manifest a brazen attitude characterizing loose conduct, there was a measure of greediness in their conduct. So the elders might take judicial action because *gross uncleanness* was involved. Gross uncleanness might also be appropriate grounds for handling a case involving a person who repeatedly makes sexually explicit telephone calls to another person, especially if he was previously counseled about the matter.

The elders need discernment in making such judgments. To determine whether judicial action is warranted, they must carefully look at what happened and the extent to which it was done. It is not a matter of charging with loose conduct anyone who does not accept Scriptural counsel; nor is it a case of deciding mathematically how many times a person can commit a certain sinful act before judicial action is required. Elders should carefully and prayerfully weigh each situation and find out what occurred and how often, the nature and extent of the misconduct, and the intent and motive of the wrongdoer.

Gross uncleanness entails more than sexual sins. For instance, a baptized boy might smoke a few cigarettes in a short period of

time and confess this to his parents. He is determined not to smoke again. This is uncleanness, but it has not escalated to the point of being gross uncleanness or "uncleanness . . . with greediness." Scriptural counsel from an elder or two along with support from the boy's parents should suffice. But if the boy is a frequent user of tobacco, this would be a deliberate defilement of the flesh, and a judicial committee would be convened to consider this case of gross uncleanness. (2 Corinthians 7:1) If the boy is not repentant, he would be disfellowshipped.

Some Christians have become involved in the viewing of pornography. This is offensive to God, and the elders may be shocked that a fellow believer has done this. But not all viewing of pornography calls for a hearing before a judicial committee. For example, suppose a brother viewed so-called soft-core pornography on several occasions. He is ashamed, confesses to an elder, and is determined not to repeat this sin. The elder might well conclude that the brother's conduct did not escalate to the point that he engaged in "uncleanness . . . with greediness"; nor did he display a brazen attitude, indicating loose conduct. Although no judicial action would be warranted, this type of uncleanness would call for strong Scriptural counsel and perhaps follow-up help from the elders.

However, suppose a Christian has secretly viewed abhorrent, sexually degrading pornography for years and has done everything possible to conceal this sin. Such pornography might feature gang rape, bondage, sadistic torture, the brutalizing of women, or even child pornography. When others become aware of his conduct, he is deeply ashamed. He has not been brazen, but the elders may determine that he has 'given himself over' to this filthy habit and has practiced 'uncleanness with greediness,' that is, gross uncleanness. A judicial committee would be formed because gross uncleanness

is involved. The wrongdoer would be disfellowshipped if he did not display godly repentance and the determination never to view pornography again. If he invited others to his home to view pornography—in effect, promoting it—he would give evidence of a brazen attitude characterizing loose conduct.

The Scriptural term "loose conduct" always involves serious sin, often sexual in nature. When trying to identify loose conduct, elders should look for brazenness, wantonness, filthiness, shamelessness, and what is shocking to public decency. On the other hand, serious transgressions of Jehovah's law that are committed by a person who does not manifest a brazen attitude may involve "greediness." These cases have to be handled on the basis of the gross uncleanness that they involve.

Determining whether someone has gone far enough to be guilty of gross uncleanness or loose conduct is a serious responsibility, for lives are involved. Those judging such cases should do so prayerfully, asking God for his holy spirit, discernment, and understanding. Elders need to maintain the purity of the congregation and must base their judgment on God's Word as well as on the direction of "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 18:18; 24:45) And in these evil days, more than ever before, elders need to bear in mind the words: "See what you are doing, because it is not for man that you judge but it is for Jehovah." —2 Chronicles 19:6.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Human Dignity—Possible for All

You Cannot Save It, so Use It Well

Fear Jehovah—Be Happy!

"From Today, I Believe That There Is a God"

A UKRAINIAN woman named Alexandra, living in Prague, Czech Republic, was on her way home from work. At a streetcar stop, she noticed a small case on the ground, being kicked around by passersby. When she picked the case up and looked inside, she could not believe her eyes. There was a stack of 5,000-koruna notes! No one around her seemed to be looking for the case. As a foreigner living in Czech Republic, Alexandra had a hard time making a living. What would she do?

After returning home, Alexandra showed the case to her daughter, Victoria. They searched the case for the name and address of the owner but to no avail. However, the case contained a piece of paper with some numbers written on it. On one side of the paper was inscribed an account number, and on the other side, more numbers. The case also contained directions to a local bank and a note stating "330,000 koruny" (about \$10,000, U.S.). That was exactly the amount of money in the case.

Using what seemed to be a phone number, Alexandra failed in her efforts to telephone the bank. So she and her daughter went to the bank and explained what had happened.

They asked about the account number that they had found in the case. However, the bank had no record of that account. The following day, Alexandra returned with the other number that was in the case. Indeed, the bank had a customer, a woman, with that account number. Alexandra and Victoria contacted the woman, and she verified the loss. When they all finally met, the woman thanked them warmly and asked, "What are the conditions for returning the money?"

Victoria replied: "There are no conditions. If we had wanted the money, we would have kept it." In her limited Czech, she explained: "We are returning the money to you because we are Jehovah's Witnesses. Our Bible-trained conscience does not allow us to keep what does not belong to us." (Hebrews 13:18) The woman joyfully said, "From today, I believe that there is a God."

