

THE WATCHTOWER

OCTOBER 15, 2007

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Should You Live
Only for Today?

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 fellow men 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.

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Should You Live Only for Today?

"I NEVER think of the future. It comes soon enough." Those oft-quoted words are attributed to the noted scientist Albert Einstein. Many people express similar sentiments. "Why worry about the future?" they may say. Or you may have heard people say such things as: "Just get on with life." "Live for today." "Forget tomorrow."

That overall approach, of course, is not new. "Eat, drink, enjoy yourself. The rest is nothing." This was the motto of the ancient Epicureans. Some contemporaries of the apostle Paul held a similar view. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to die" was their view. (1 Corinthians 15:32) They believed that this short life is all we will ever have, so they promoted the idea that we should make the most of that life.

For millions of earth's inhabitants, making the most of this life certainly does not mean a hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. The dire circumstances in which many find themselves make their life today nothing but a relentless, bitter struggle for survival. Why should they think about the future, a "tomorrow" that often seems unbearably bleak and hopeless?

Plan for Tomorrow?

Even people in less difficult circumstances often see little point in making plans for tomorrow. "Why bother?" they may ask. Some may reason that those who do make plans end up disillusioned and disappointed. Even the patriarch Job of ancient times



*"Eat, drink, enjoy yourself.
The rest is nothing"*

experienced great despair when he saw his plans simply "torn apart," ruining what should have made for a happy future for him and his family.—Job 17:11; Ecclesiastes 9:11.

Scottish poet Robert Burns likened our plight to that of a tiny field mouse whose nest Burns inadvertently destroyed with the blade of his plow. The mouse ran for its life after its world was turned upside down. 'Yes,' thought the poet, 'how often we find ourselves powerless in the face of events'



Would foresight and planning have minimized the effects of Hurricane Katrina?

So is it pointless to plan for the future? The fact is that lack of adequate planning can have devastating results when hurricanes or other natural disasters occur. Granted, no one could have stopped Hurricane Katrina, for example. But might not better foresight and planning have done much to minimize the effects on the city and its inhabitants?

What do you think? Does it really make sense to live *only* for today and to ignore tomorrow? Consider what the next article has to say on this subject.

Live With Tomorrow in View

DO NOT be anxious about tomorrow," said Jesus Christ in a famous discourse on a mountainside in Galilee. According to the rendering in *The New English Bible*, Jesus continued: "Tomorrow will look after itself."—Matthew 6:34.

What do you think is meant by those words, "tomorrow will look after itself"? Is it suggesting that you should live *only* for today and ignore tomorrow? Does that really fit in with what Jesus and his followers believed?

"Stop Being Anxious"

Read for yourself Jesus' words in their entirety as found at Matthew 6:25-32. In part he said: "Stop being anxious about your souls as to what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your bodies as to what you will wear.

... Observe intently the birds of heaven, because they do not sow seed or reap or gather into storehouses; still your heavenly Father feeds them. ... Who of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span? Also, on the matter of clothing, why are you anxious? Take a lesson from the lilies of the field, how they are growing; they do not toil, nor do they spin . . . So never be anxious and say, 'What are we to eat?' or, 'What are we to drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?' For all these are the things the nations are eagerly pursuing. For your heavenly Father knows you need all these things."

Jesus concludes this part of his discourse with two pieces of advice. The first: "Keep on, then, seeking first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you." The second: "So, never be



anxious about the next day, for the next day will have its own anxieties. Sufficient for each day is its own badness."—Matthew 6: 33, 34.

Your Father Knows What You Need

Do you think that Jesus was discouraging his disciples, including farmers, from 'sowing, reaping, or gathering their crops into storehouses'? Or from 'toiling and spinning' to get the clothes they needed? (Proverbs 21:5; 24:30-34; Ecclesiastes 11:4) Surely not. If they stopped working, they would almost inevitably end up "begging in reaping time," with nothing to eat or to wear.—Proverbs 20:4.

What about anxiety? Did Jesus mean that his audience could escape anxiety completely? That would be unrealistic. Jesus himself experienced deep emotional distress and anxiety on the night that he was arrested.—Luke 22:44.

Jesus was simply stating a fundamental truth. Undue anxiety will never help you to

solve whatever problems you face. It will not, for example, help you to live longer. It will not "add one cubit to [your] life span," said Jesus. (Matthew 6:27) Intense, prolonged anxiety is, in fact, more likely to shorten your life.

His advice was eminently practical. Many of the things we worry about never happen anyway. British statesman Winston Churchill realized this about the dark days of World War II. Regarding some of his anxieties at the time, he wrote: "When I look back on all these worries I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened." Truly, there is wisdom in taking each day as it comes, especially when the pressures and problems we face could easily create great anxiety in us.

'Keep On Seeking First God's Kingdom'

Actually, Jesus had much more in mind than his listeners' physical and emotional well-being. He knew that anxiety about

getting the necessities of life, as well as a consuming desire for possessions and pleasures, can crowd out the more important things. (Philippians 1:10) ‘What could be more important than getting the necessities of life?’ you may think. The answer is spiritual things having to do with our worship of God. The prime thing in our lives, Jesus stressed, should be to ‘keep on seeking first God’s kingdom and his righteousness.’—Matthew 6:33.

In Jesus’ day, many people were eagerly pursuing material things. Amassing wealth was their foremost priority. Jesus, however, urged his listeners to have a different outlook. As people dedicated to God, their “whole obligation” was to “fear the true God and keep his commandments.”—Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Preoccupation with material things—“the anxiety of this system of things and the deceptive power of riches”—could have destroyed his listeners spiritually. (Matthew 13: 22) “Those who are determined to be rich,” wrote the apostle Paul, “fall into temptation and a snare and many senseless and hurtful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin.” (1 Timothy 6:9) To help them avoid this “snare,” Jesus reminded his followers that their heavenly Father knew they needed all these things. God would provide for them just as he provides for “the birds of heaven.” (Matthew 6:26, 32) Instead of allowing anxiety to overwhelm them, they were to do all they could to care for matters and then confidently leave things in Jehovah’s hands.—Philippians 4:6, 7.

When Jesus said “tomorrow will look after itself,” he simply meant that we should not allow undue anxiety about what might happen tomorrow add to our problems today. Another Bible version renders his words: “Do not worry about tomorrow; it will have enough worries of its own. There is no need

to add to the troubles each day brings.”¹⁰
—Matthew 6:34, *Today’s English Version*.

“Let Your Kingdom Come”

There is a big difference, however, between not worrying unduly about tomorrow and ignoring it completely. Jesus never encouraged his disciples to ignore tomorrow. On the contrary, he urged them to be intensely interested in the future. They should rightly pray for present needs—their daily bread. But first they should pray for things that were yet future—for God’s Kingdom to come and God’s will to be done on earth.—Matthew 6: 9-11.

We should not be like the people of Noah’s day. They were so busy “eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage” that they “took no note” of what was about to happen. With what consequence? “The flood came and swept them all away.” (Matthew 24:36-42) The apostle Peter used that historical event to remind us of the need to live with tomorrow in view. “Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,” he wrote, “what sort of persons ought you to be in holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion, awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah!”
—2 Peter 3:5-7, 11, 12.

Store Up Treasures in Heaven

Yes, let us keep “close in mind” the day of Jehovah. Doing so will greatly affect how we use our time, energy, talents, resources, and abilities. We should not be so preoccupied with the pursuit of material things—either the necessities or the pleasures of life—that we have little time for deeds that reflect “godly devotion.” Focusing solely on today may seem to bring immediate results, but at best those will be short-term benefits. It is much wiser, said Jesus, to “store up for [ourselves] treasures in heaven” rather than upon the earth.—Matthew 6:19, 20.



*"Stop being anxious . . .
The next day will have
its own anxieties"*

Jesus emphasized that point in his illustration about a man who made grandiose plans for the future. They were plans that did not include God. The man's land was very productive. He decided to tear down his storehouses and build bigger ones so that he could live a life of ease, eat, drink, and enjoy himself. What was the problem with that? He died before he could enjoy the fruits of his labor. Even worse, though, he had not built a relationship with God. Jesus concluded: "So it goes with the man that lays up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God." —Luke 12:15-21; Proverbs 19:21.

What Can You Do?

Do not make a mistake like that of the man whom Jesus described. Find out what God has in store for tomorrow, and build your life around that. God has not left humans in the dark about what he will do. "The Sovereign Lord Jehovah," wrote the ancient prophet Amos, "will not do a thing unless he has revealed his confidential matter to his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7) What Jehovah has revealed through his prophets is now avail-

able to you in the pages of his inspired Word, the Bible.—2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

One thing that the Bible reveals is what the near future will bring that will affect the whole earth on an unprecedented scale. Jesus said: "There will be great tribulation such as has not occurred since the world's beginning until now." (Matthew 24:21) No human can avert that event. Indeed, there is no reason why true worshippers would want to avert it. Why? Because this event will rid the earth of all evil, and it will usher in "a new heaven and a new earth," meaning a new heavenly government and a new earthly society. In that new world, God "will wipe out every tear from [people's] eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore."—Revelation 21:1-4.

Does it not make sense, then, to take time now to examine what the Bible says about that development? Do you need help to do that? Ask Jehovah's Witnesses to assist you. Or write to the publishers of this magazine. By all means, be sure to live not only for today but also for a wonderful tomorrow.



Overcoming Challenges to Deliver Good News

OUR truck approaches a checkpoint manned by about 60 armed men, women, and teenagers. Some are in uniform; others are in civilian clothes. Many brandish automatic weapons. They appear to be waiting for us. There is civil unrest going on.

We have been traveling for four days, carrying ten tons of Bible literature. We wonder whether they will let us pass. Will they want money? How long might it take to convince them that our mission is peaceful?

One trigger-happy man fires into the air with his rifle to remind us who is in charge. He spots our mobile phones and demands that we give them to him. When we hesitate, he makes a menacing gesture to his throat that leaves no doubt about what will happen if we refuse to comply. We hand over the phones.

Suddenly a woman in uniform grabs her gun and approaches us. She is the "secre-

tary," and she wants us to give her something too. Life is hard, and a small "gift" will come in handy. Then another soldier opens our fuel tank to fill his jerrican. Ignoring our protests, he claims that he is just following orders. There is nothing we can do. We just hope that others will not get the same idea.

Finally, the barrier is opened, and we are on our way. My companion and I heave a sigh of relief. It was tense, but we have become used to these nerve-racking checkpoints. Between April 2002 and January 2004, we made 18 trips from the port of Douala, Cameroon, to Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. The 1,000-mile journey is always fraught with risks and surprises.*

"These trips have taught us many lessons," explain Joseph and Emmanuel, drivers who

* Since this time, much has been done to improve security on the route between Douala and Bangui.

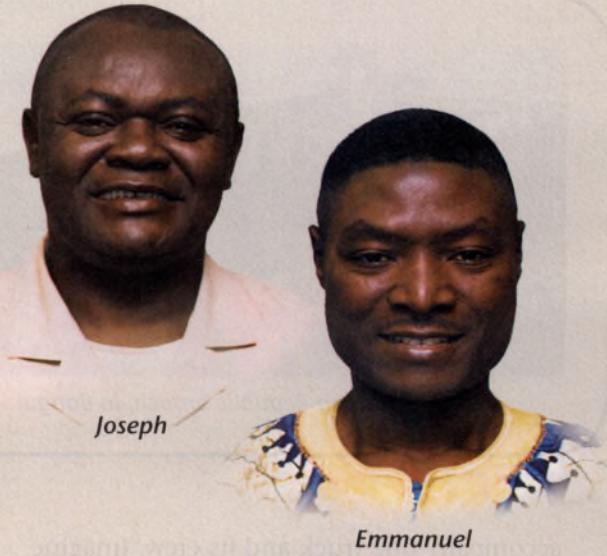
have regularly made this journey. "It is wise to say numerous silent prayers and then stay calm. 'In God I have put my trust. I shall not be afraid,' wrote the psalmist. 'What can earthling man do to me?' We try to have the same attitude. We feel sure that Jehovah is aware that our journey is to deliver a message of hope that is sorely needed."—Psalm 56:11.

An International Effort to Provide Spiritual Food

Many in this part of Africa love to hear the good news of God's Kingdom. The literature we transport is designed to help satisfy their spiritual need. (Matthew 5:3; 24:14) The Cameroon branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Douala regularly supplies literature to more than 30,000 Kingdom publishers and interested people living in Cameroon and four neighboring countries.

This literature has already traveled a long way. Most of it was printed in England, Finland, Germany, Italy, and Spain. It was then shipped by sea from France. Typically, a container of Bible literature arrives at the port of Douala every two weeks.

The container is hoisted onto a truck that moves it to the branch office. Workers in the Shipping Department sort the literature according to destination. Getting the pub-



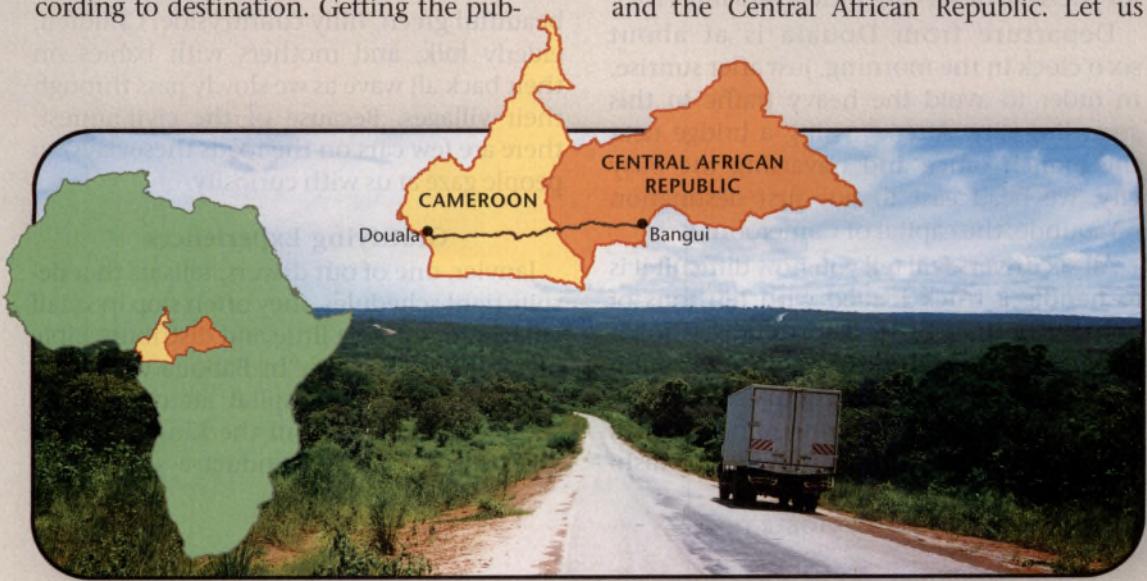
Joseph

Emmanuel

lications to remote sections of the interior is not easy. But this is part of taking the good news "to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) The branch counts on self-sacrificing volunteers who willingly make the hazardous truck journeys. A regular stream of Bible literature thus flows to millions of people in the central part of Africa.

A Typical Journey

Literature shipped by truck serves Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Central African Republic. Let us





Central African Republic branch, in Bangui



Unloading the truck in Bangui

accompany one truck and its crew. Imagine yourself sitting with the drivers, and be prepared for an adventuresome trip that will take ten or more days.

Six drivers handle this run. They must be strong, capable, patient, and well-dressed. They wear either African attire or a dress shirt and tie. In the past, customs officials have remarked: "Look at this clean truck and the well-groomed drivers, just as you see them in the photos in their publications." Even more important than the drivers' appearance is their willingness to go wherever necessary for the sake of serving others.—Psalm 110:3.

Departure from Douala is at about six o'clock in the morning, just after sunrise, in order to avoid the heavy traffic in this sprawling city. After crossing a bridge near the branch office and traversing the busy city, we head east to our first destination—Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon.

All six drivers will tell you how difficult it is to handle a truck loaded with ten tons of books. The first three days on paved roads present few problems, though full attention and concentration are necessary. Then, suddenly, we encounter pouring rain. The road from here on is unpaved. Visibility diminish-

es, the road is slippery, and we have to move slowly because of the uneven surface. Dusk approaches. It is time to stop, get some food, and try to sleep with our feet propped up on the dashboard. Such is life on these trips!

Early the next morning, our trip resumes. One of the drivers helps by keeping a careful eye on road conditions. He gives an immediate warning if we get too close to the roadside ditch. Drivers know all too well that if they slide into a ditch, it may take days to get out. The roads do not improve much as we cross the border into the Central African Republic. For the next 400 miles, we pass through beautiful green, hilly countryside. Children, elderly folk, and mothers with babies on their back all wave as we slowly pass through their villages. Because of the civil unrest, there are few cars on the roads these days, so people gaze at us with curiosity.

Gratifying Experiences

Janvier, one of our drivers, tells us that despite tight schedules, they often stop in small villages to rest up a little and distribute Bible literature. He recalls: "In Baboua we always tried to talk to a hospital attendant who showed great interest in the Kingdom message, and we would conduct a short Bible

study with him. One day we even showed him and his family the videotape about Noah. Friends and neighbors arrived, and his house was soon filled with excited spectators. Everyone had heard about Noah, and now they could follow his story on the screen. It was touching to see their appreciation. Afterward, they arranged for a special meal to show their thanks, and they urged us to stay overnight. We had to leave right away and continue our long journey, but we were happy that we had been able to share the good news with these humble people."

Another driver, Israel, recalls incidents on another trip to Bangui, our destination. "The closer we got to Bangui," he relates, "the more roadblocks we encountered. Fortunately, many soldiers were friendly and remembered the truck from previous trips. They invited us to sit with them, and they gladly accepted Bible literature. A book has great value to them, so they write their name in it and then the date and name of the person who gave it to them. Some soldiers had Witness relatives, and this was another reason for their friendliness."

Joseph, the most experienced driver, relates what he considers the highlight of such trips—arrival at the destination. Regarding one particular trip, he recalls: "Just a few miles from Bangui, we made a telephone call to tell our brothers that we would be arriving shortly. They escorted us through the city, helping us with the final formalities. On our arrival, all in the branch office came out to greet us with warm hugs. Helpers arrived from the nearby congregations, and within hours, hundreds of cartons of Bibles, books, booklets, and magazines were unloaded and stacked in the depot."

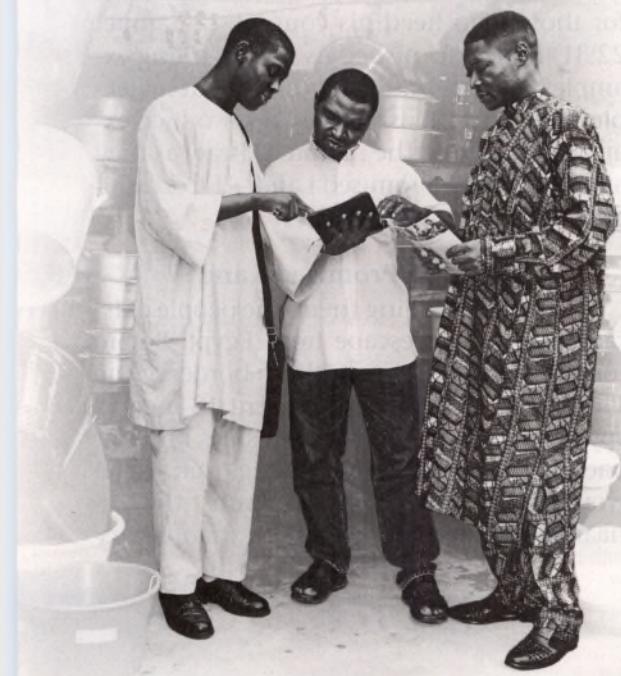
"Sometimes," adds Joseph, "our load included donated clothing, shoes, and children's things destined for the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. What a pleasure it was to see the smiles of grateful brothers!"

After a day's rest, we prepare our truck and return the way we came. Problems await us, but the gratifying experience we had more than compensates for any difficulties.

Long distances, torrential rains, appalling roads, flat tires, and breakdowns may prove frustrating. Unruly soldiers are a constant challenge. Yet, nothing brings these drivers more satisfaction than delivering the Kingdom good news to remote parts of Africa and seeing the effect it has on the lives of the people who receive it.

For example, thanks to these deliveries, a villager in a remote part of the Central African Republic near the border of Sudan now reads a modern translation of the Bible. His wife studies recent copies of *The Watchtower*, and their children benefit from the book *Learn From the Great Teacher*.^{*} They and many others in these rural communities receive spiritual food, as do their Christian brothers in many big cities. This is indeed cause for great satisfaction!

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



Move Toward the Light

LIGHTHOUSES have saved an untold number of lives. To a weary traveler, though, a light seen in the distance does more than warn of dangerous reefs. It also announces that his destination is near. Paralleling that, Christians today are nearing the end of a long journey, one that has led them through a bedarkened, spiritually dangerous world. In the Bible, mankind in general—the masses alienated from God—are likened to “the sea that is being tossed, when it is unable to calm down, the waters of which keep tossing up seaweed and mire.” (Isaiah 57:20) God’s people are surrounded by such an environment. Yet, they have a bright prospect of salvation, which is for them a figurative, reliable light. (Micah 7:8) Thanks to Jehovah and his written Word, “light itself has flashed up for the righteous one, and rejoicing even for the ones upright in heart.”—Psalm 97:11.*

Some Christians, though, have allowed distractions to lure them away from Jehovah’s light so that their faith has been shipwrecked on what we might liken to treacherous rocks—materialism, immorality, or even apostasy. Yes, as in the first century, some today “have experienced shipwreck concerning their faith.” (1 Timothy 1:19; 2 Peter 2:13-15, 20-22) The new world might be likened to the home port for which we are heading.

* The Scriptures use “light” in a number of symbolic or figurative ways. For example, the Bible associates God with light. (Psalm 104:1, 2; 1 John 1:5) Spiritual enlightenment from God’s Word is likened to light. (Isaiah 2:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:6) During his ministry on earth, Jesus was a light. (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35) And Jesus’ followers were commanded to let their light shine.—Matthew 5:14, 16.

With it so close now, what a tragedy it would be for one to lose Jehovah’s favor!

Avoid ‘Shipwreck of Your Faith’

In past centuries, a ship might navigate a wide sea safely only to be wrecked as it approached port. Often the most treacherous leg of the trip came as the ship neared land. Similarly, for many the most dangerous period in human history is “the last days” of this present system of things. The Bible accurately describes these as “hard to deal with,” especially for dedicated Christians.—2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Why are these last days so difficult? Well, Satan knows that he has only “a short period of time” left in which to war against God’s people. Hence, he has escalated his vicious campaign to wreck their faith. (Revelation 12:12, 17) Yet, we are not without help and guidance. Jehovah continues to be a refuge for those who heed his counsel. (2 Samuel 22:31) He has furnished us with warning examples that expose Satan’s clever but malevolent designs. Let us now review two such examples involving the nation of Israel as they approached the Promised Land.—1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Corinthians 2:11.

Near the Promised Land

With Moses leading them, the people of Israel were able to escape from Egypt. Before long, they neared the southern border of the Promised Land. Moses then sent 12 men to spy out the land. Ten faithless spies brought back a negative report, saying that Israel would be unable to succeed against the Canaanites because they were of “extraordinary

size" and were militarily strong. How did that affect the Israelites? The account tells us that they began to murmur against Moses and Aaron, saying: "Why is Jehovah bringing us to this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder. . . . Let us appoint a head, and let us return to Egypt!"—Numbers 13:1, 2, 28-32; 14:1-4.

Imagine! These very same people had seen Jehovah bring mighty Egypt—the world power of the day—to its knees by ten destructive plagues and an awe-inspiring miracle at the Red Sea. And the Promised Land was right before them, so they had just to move toward it as a ship moves toward a light marking its destination. Yet, they believed that Jehovah was incapable of overthrowing the petty, divided city-kingdoms of Canaan. How this

faithless reaction must have disappointed God and the two courageous spies, Joshua and Caleb, who felt that Canaan was like "bread to [Israel]"! Those two had firsthand information, having walked throughout Canaan. When the people did not enter into the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb also had to continue in the wilderness for decades, but they did not die there along with the faithless ones. Indeed, Joshua and Caleb helped lead the next generation out of the wilderness and toward the Promised Land. (Numbers 14:9, 30) On this second approach, Israel would face a different test. How would they fare?



Moabite King Balak tried to curse Israel by means of the false prophet Balaam. However, Jehovah foiled this plot by making Balaam utter blessings instead of curses. (Numbers 22:1-7; 24:10) Undeterred, Balaam embarked on another sinister scheme, one designed to disqualify God's people from receiving the land. How? By luring them into immorality and Baal worship. While overall this strategy also failed, it did result in the seducing of 24,000 Israelites. They had immoral relations with Moabite women and attached themselves to Baal of Peor.—Numbers 25:1-9.

Think of that! Many of those same Israelites had seen Jehovah lead them safely through "that great and fear-inspiring wilderness." (Deuteronomy 1:19) Yet, on the threshold of their inheritance, 24,000 of God's people caved in to fleshly desires and died at Jehovah's hand. What a warning this is to God's servants today as they approach a vastly superior inheritance!

In his last-ditch attempt to prevent Jehovah's modern-day servants from attaining their reward, Satan does not need new strategies. In a strategy that reminds us of what happened on Israel's first approach to the Promised Land, Satan often tries to inspire fear and doubt, whether by means of threats, persecution, or ridicule. Some Christians have given in to such intimidation. (Matthew 13:20, 21) Another time-tested machination is that of corrupting individuals morally. On occasion, some who have crept into the Christian congregation have tried to corrupt those who are spiritually weak and who are not walking confidently in divine light.—Jude 8, 12-16.

To spiritually mature and alert individuals, the world's rapid descent into moral decadence is powerful evidence of Satan's desperation. Yes, Satan knows that soon God's loyal servants will be beyond his reach. So this cer-

tainly is a time for us to remain spiritually alert to Satan's efforts.

Aids to Staying Spiritually Alert

The apostle Peter described God's prophetic word as "a lamp shining in a dark place," for it helps Christians to see with understanding the outworking of the divine purpose. (2 Peter 1:19-21) Those who develop a love for God's Word and continue to be guided by it find that Jehovah will make their paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5, 6) Filled with hope, such appreciative ones "cry out joyfully because of the good condition of the heart," whereas those who do not know Jehovah or who leave his way ultimately feel "pain of heart" and "breakdown of spirit." (Isaiah 65:13, 14) Hence, through diligent Bible study and the application of what we learn, we can keep our eyes focused on our sure hope rather than on the fleeting pleasures of the present system of things.

Prayer is also vital to our remaining spiritually awake. When speaking about the end of the present system, Jesus said: "Keep awake, then, all the time making supplication that you may succeed in escaping all these things that are destined to occur, and in standing before the Son of man." (Luke 21:34-36) Note Jesus' use of the word "supplication," which is a very earnest form of prayer. Jesus knew that eternal life would be at stake at this critical time. Do your prayers reflect your burning desire to remain wide awake spiritually?

Let us not forget that the most dangerous part of the voyage to our inheritance may be the final leg of the trip. Thus, how important it is that we do not lose sight of the light that can lead to our survival.

Be Alert to False Lights

Back in the days of sailing ships, a particular danger was posed by wicked men who preferred moonless nights when sailors found it difficult to see the shore. These men

might place lights along dangerous stretches of coast so as to trick ship captains into changing course. Those deceived might find their ships wrecked, their cargo plundered, and lives lost.

In a similar fashion, Satan, the deceptive "angel of light," wants to rob God's people of their relationship with Him. The Devil may use "false apostles" and apostate "ministers of righteousness" to deceive the unwary. (2 Corinthians 11:13-15) But just as an alert, experienced captain and crew were less likely to be fooled by deceptive lights, Christians "who through use have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong" are not misled by those who promote false teachings and hurtful philosophies.—Hebrews 5:14; Revelation 2:2.

Mariners carried a list of the lighthouses they would encounter en route. The list set out the characteristics of each lighthouse, including its unique signal. *The World Book Encyclopedia* notes: "Mariners determine which

lighthouse they are seeing—and therefore their location—by observing the characteristic of a lighthouse and consulting a light list." Similarly, God's Word helps honest-hearted people to discern true worship and those pursuing it, especially during these last days when Jehovah has elevated it high above false religion. (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Malachi 3:18) Drawing a sharp contrast between true and false worship, Isaiah 60:2, 3 says: "Darkness itself will cover the earth, and thick gloom the national groups; but upon you Jehovah will shine forth, and upon you his own glory will be seen. And nations will certainly go to your light, and kings to the brightness of your shining forth."

As millions out of all the nations continue to be guided by Jehovah's light, they will not see their faith come to grief during this final leg of their journey. Rather, they will navigate safely through the remaining days of the present system of things and on into the peaceful haven of the new world.

Like mariners, Christians are careful not to be deceived by false lights



“SHIPS OF KITTIM”

Ply the Seas

THE eastern Mediterranean has witnessed numerous naval battles. Try to picture one encounter five centuries before Christ. A highly maneuverable ship called a trireme sails at full power. About 170 oarsmen in three banks are straining their powerful muscles as they row, sliding back and forth on leather cushions strapped to their buttocks.

At a speed of seven to nine knots, the ship cuts through the waves toward an enemy vessel. The target ship tries to get away. At the critical moment, it flounders, and its flank is exposed. The bronze-clad ram of the trireme plows into the other ship's light hull. The crash of splintering planks and the sound of

seawater gushing through the gaping hole terrify the enemy oarsmen. On the trireme, a small band of heavily armed warriors race along the center gangway to storm the stricken vessel. Yes, some ancient ships were indeed formidable!

Bible students have been intrigued by references, some prophetic, to “Kittim” and “the ships of Kittim.” (Numbers 24:24; Daniel 11:30; Isaiah 23:1) Just where was Kittim? What do we know about its ships? And why should the answers interest you?

The Jewish historian Josephus referred to Kittim as “Chethimos,” associating it with the island of Cyprus. The city of Kition (or, Citium) on the southeastern part of

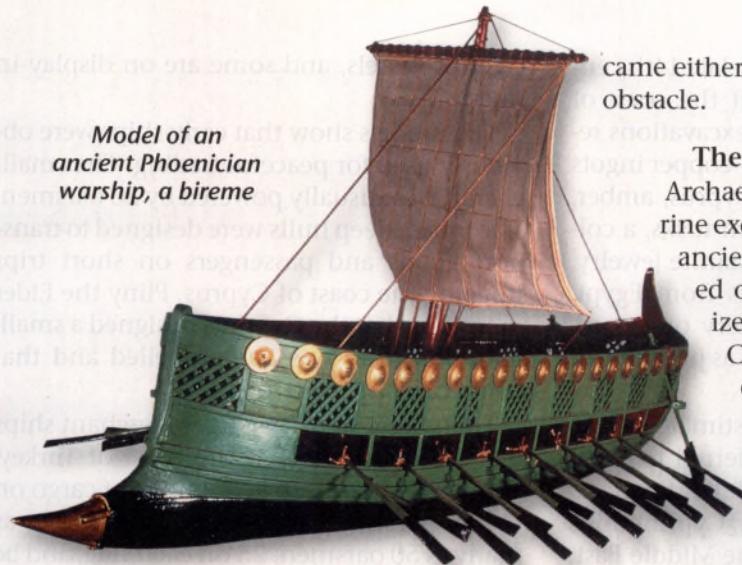
Model of a Greek warship, a trireme



Pictorial Archive (Near Eastern History) Est.



Model of an ancient Phoenician warship, a bireme



the island further links Kittim to Cyprus. Geographically located at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, Cyprus was ideally positioned to benefit from its proximity to maritime centers of the eastern Mediterranean. Forced by its geopolitical status to take sides between warring nations, Cyprus also be-

came either a potent ally or a bothersome obstacle.

The Cypriots and the Sea

Archaeological evidence from marine excavations and tombs, as well as ancient writings and designs painted on pottery, helps us to visualize ships from Cyprus. The early Cypriots were skilled shipbuilders. Their island was thickly forested, and protective bays provided natural harbors. Trees were felled not only for building ships but also for use in smelting copper—a natural resource that made Cyprus famous in the ancient world.

The vigorous export trade of Cyprus did not escape the attention of the Phoenicians, who established colonies at locations along their trade routes. One such settlement was Kition, in Cyprus.—Isaiah 23:10-12.

After the fall of Tyre, some of its people evidently took refuge in Kition. Likely, Phoenician colonizers with seafaring experience contributed greatly to the Cypriots' naval technology. Kition's strategic location also afforded excellent protection for Phoenician ships.

Involved in Brisk International Trade

Ancient trade activity in the eastern Mediterranean during this period was complex. Valuable commodities from Cyprus were transported by ship to Crete, Sardinia, and Sicily as well as to the islands of the Aegean. Jars and vases from Cyprus have been discovered in such locations, and fine Mycenaean (Grecian) pottery has been found in great quantities in Cyprus. Analyzing copper ingots discovered in Sardinia, some scholars believe that they came from Cyprus.



A vase depicting a Cypriot ship

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In 1982 a shipwreck from the late 14th century B.C.E. was found just off the coast of southern Turkey. Underwater excavations revealed a diverse treasure trove—copper ingots that are believed to be from Cyprus, amber, Canaanite jars, ebony, elephant tusks, a collection of gold and silver Canaanite jewelry, and scarabs and other objects from Egypt. Analyzing the clay from pottery on board, some sources identify the ship as probably of Cypriot origin.

Interestingly, about the estimated time of this shipwreck, Balaam referred to ships from Kittim in his “proverbial utterance.” (Numbers 24:15, 24) Evidently, Cypriot ships had become well-known in the Middle East. What were these ships like?

Merchant Ships

Many clay models of ships and boats have been discovered in burial chambers at the ancient city of Amathus in Cyprus. These give valuable indications as to the types of

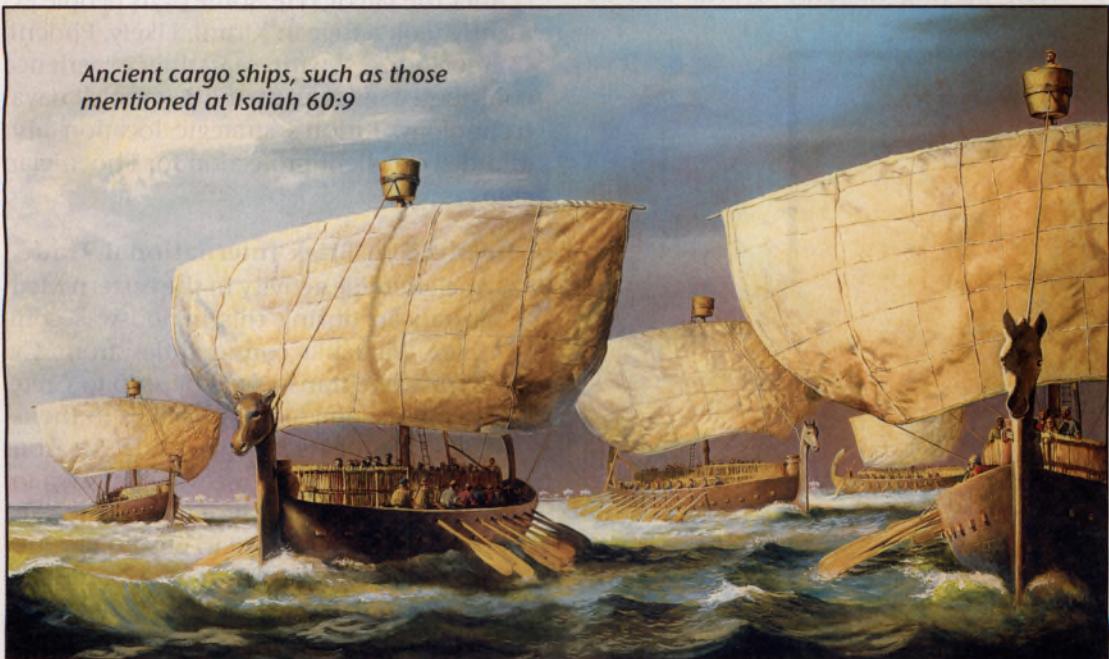
Cypriot vessels, and some are on display in museums.

The models show that early ships were obviously used for peaceful trading. The smaller craft were usually powered by 20 oarsmen. The broad, deep hulls were designed to transport goods and passengers on short trips hugging the coast of Cyprus. Pliny the Elder mentions that the Cypriots designed a small, light ship that was oar propelled and that could carry up to 90 tons.

Then there were the larger merchant ships like the one found off the coast of Turkey. Some could carry up to 450 tons of cargo on the open seas. Large ships might have as many as 50 oarsmen, 25 on each side, and be 100 feet long with a mast over 30 feet high.

“Kittim” Warships in Bible Prophecy

The spirit of Jehovah was responsible for this pronouncement: “There will be ships from the coast of Kittim, and they will certainly afflict Assyria.” (Numbers 24:2, 24)



Did this prediction come true? How were vessels from Cyprus involved in the fulfillment? Those "ships from the coast of Kittim" were not peaceful trading vessels that plied the Mediterranean Sea. They were warships bringing affliction.

As the needs of war changed, the basic designs were adapted to produce swifter and more powerful vessels. The earliest Cypriot warships were probably represented in a painting discovered in Amathus. It depicts a long slender ship with the stern curving upward and inward, similar to a Phoenician warship. It has a ram and circular shields on either side near the stern and toward the bow.

The eighth century B.C.E. saw the first biremes (ships with two tiers of oars) in Greece. These ships were about 80 feet long and 10 feet wide. At first, the ships were used to transport warriors, the actual fighting taking place on land. Before long, the advantage of adding a third tier of oars was recognized, and a bronze-clad ram was fitted to the bow. The new ship became known as a trireme, as mentioned at the beginning of this article. This type of ship gained prominence during the battle of Salamis (480 B.C.E.) when the Greeks defeated the Persian navy.

Later, Alexander the Great, in his quest for domination, mobilized his fleet of triremes eastward. Such ships were designed for battle, not for long voyages on the high seas, since there was limited room for storing supplies. This called for stops at Aegean islands for provisions and refits. Alexander's aim was to destroy the Persian fleet. To succeed, however, he first had to overcome the formidable island fortress of Tyre. Cyprus was a stopover on the way.

The Cypriots rallied to Alexander the Great during the siege of Tyre (332 B.C.E.), providing a fleet of 120 ships. Three kings of Cyprus

led fleets to join Alexander. They shared in a siege of Tyre that lasted seven months. Tyre fell, and Bible prophecy was fulfilled. (Ezekiel 26:3, 4; Zechariah 9:3, 4) To express his gratitude, Alexander granted special authority to the Cypriot kings.

A Remarkable Fulfillment

First-century historian Strabo relates that Alexander commissioned ships from Cyprus and Phoenicia for his campaign into Arabia. These ships were light and easy to dismantle, so they reached Thapsacus (Tiphsah) in northern Syria within just seven days. (1 Kings 4:24) From there it was possible to travel downriver to Babylon.

Hence, a seemingly obscure statement in the Bible had a remarkable fulfillment some ten centuries later! In line with the words of Numbers 24:24, the military machine of Alexander the Great advanced relentlessly eastward from Macedonia and conquered the land of Assyria, finally defeating the mighty Medo-Persian Empire.

Even the limited information we have on "the ships of Kittim" unmistakably points to a fascinating fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Such historical testimony strengthens our conviction that predictions found in the Bible can be trusted. Many such prophecies involve our very future, so we do well to take them seriously.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The Challenge of Humility

"The Silver Is Mine,
and the Gold Is Mine"

Searching Into "the Deep
Things of God"

HEAR THE VOICE FROM WITHIN

"People of the nations that do not have [God's] law do by nature the things of the law." —ROMANS 2:14.

A 20-YEAR-OLD man on the subway platform had a seizure and fell onto the tracks. Seeing this, a bystander let go of his daughters and jumped down. He pulled the epileptic man into a trench between the tracks, shielding him from the train screeching to a stop overhead. Some would call the rescuer a hero, but he said: "You should do the right thing. I did it out of kindness. Not for recognition or glory."

² You may know someone who took a risk to help others. Many did so during World War II, hiding strangers. Recall, too, the experience of the apostle Paul and 275 others shipwrecked at Malta, near Sicily. Local people came to the aid of those strangers, showing "extraordinary human kindness." (Acts 27:27–28:2) Or what of the Israelite girl who, while maybe not risking her life, showed kind concern for the welfare of one of her Syrian captors? (2 Kings 5:1-4) And think of Jesus' well-known parable of the neighborly Samaritan. A priest and a Levite ignored a half-dead fellow Jew, yet a Samaritan went out of his way to help him. This parable has struck a responsive chord in people of many cultures over the centuries.—Luke 10:29-37.

³ True, we are living in "critical times hard to deal with"; many individuals are "fierce" and "without love of goodness." (2 Timothy

1, 2. (a) How have many acted out of interest in others? (b) What Scriptural examples illustrate interest in others?

3, 4. How does the prevalence of altruistic feelings relate to the theory of evolution?

3:1-3) Still, have we not observed acts of benevolence, perhaps benefiting from such? The tendency to help others, even at personal cost, is so common that some term it "humanness."

⁴ Such willingness to help even if at personal cost is seen in all races and cultures, and it argues against the claim that man evolved by the law of the jungle, "the survival of the fittest." Francis S. Collins, a geneticist who led the U.S. government's effort to decipher the human genome (DNA), said: "Selfless altruism presents a major challenge for the evolutionist. . . . It cannot be accounted for by the drive of individual selfish genes to perpetuate themselves." He also said: "Some people sacrificially give of themselves to those who are outside their group and with whom they have absolutely nothing in common. . . . That doesn't seem like it can be explained by a Darwinian model."

"The Voice of Conscience"

⁵ Dr. Collins points to one aspect of our altruism: "The voice of conscience calling us to help others even if nothing is received in return."⁶ His mentioning "conscience" may call to mind a fact that the apostle Paul

⁶ Similarly, Owen Gingerich, research professor of astronomy at Harvard University, wrote: "Altruism may well pose a question without . . . a scientific answer derived from observation of the animal kingdom. It just might be that the more convincing answer lies in another arena and has to do with those God-given qualities of humanness which include conscience."

5. What has often been observed in people?

stressed: "Whenever people of the nations that do not have law do by nature the things of the law, these people, although not having law, are a law to themselves. They are the very ones who demonstrate the matter of the law to be written in their hearts, while their conscience is bearing witness with them and, between their own thoughts, they are being accused or even excused."—Romans 2:14, 15.

⁶ In his letter to the Romans, Paul showed that humans are accountable to God because His existence and qualities are evident from what is seen. That has been so "from the world's creation onward." (Romans 1:18-20; Psalm 19:1-4) Admittedly, many ignore their Creator and pursue a debauched course. Yet, God's will is that humans acknowledge his righteousness and repent of bad practices. (Romans 1:22-2:6) The Jews had an undeniable reason for doing so—they were given God's Law through Moses. But even peoples who did not have "the sacred pronouncements of God" should have recognized that God existed.—Romans 2:8-13; 3:2.

⁷ A strong reason why all should acknowledge God and act accordingly is their inner sense of right and wrong. Our sense of fairness is an indication of our having a conscience. Picture this: Some young children are waiting in line to use a swing. Then one child goes to the front, ignoring those waiting. Many respond, 'That's not fair!' Now ask yourself, 'How is it that even many children spontaneously show that they have a sense of fairness?' Their doing that reflects their inner moral sense. Paul wrote: "Whenever people of the nations that do not have law do by nature the things of the law." He

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6. Why are all people accountable to the Creator?
 - 7, 8. How common is the sense of fairness, and to what does this point?

did not say, "If ever," as if it were something that rarely occurred. He said "whenever," or "when," suggesting what frequently occurs. That is, people "do by nature the things of the law," meaning that they are moved by their inner moral sense to act in harmony with what we read in God's written law.

⁸ This moral inclination has surfaced in many lands. A Cambridge professor noted that the standards of Babylonians, Egyptians, and Greeks as well as of Australian Aborigines and Native Americans included "denunciations of oppression, murder, treachery and falsehood, the same injunctions of kindness to the aged, the young, and the weak." And Dr. Collins wrote: "The concept of right and wrong appears to be universal among all members of the human species." Does that not remind you of Romans 2:14?

Your Conscience—How Does It Work?

⁹ The Bible shows that the conscience is an inner capacity to look at and evaluate your actions. It is as if a voice within you comments on whether a course is right or not. Paul mentioned this voice within him: "My conscience bears witness with me in holy spirit." (Romans 9:1) For example, this voice may speak *beforehand* as you consider whether to do something that has moral implications. Your conscience may help you to assess a future act and suggest how you would feel if you performed it.

¹⁰ More commonly, your conscience comes into play *after* you do something. When he was a fugitive from King Saul, David was in a position to do something disrespectful toward God's anointed king, and he did. Afterward, "David's heart kept striking him." (1 Samuel 24:1-5; Psalm 32:3, 5)

9. What is the conscience, and how can it help you before you act?
10. Conscience often comes into play in what way?

The word "conscience" is not used in that account; yet that is what David felt—the reaction of his conscience. All of us have similarly felt pangs of conscience. We did something, and then we were troubled, disturbed about how we acted. Some people who did not pay their taxes were so tormented by their conscience that they later paid their debt. Others have been moved to confess their sin of adultery to their mate. (Hebrews 13:4) Yet, when one acts in accord with the conscience, a sense of satisfaction and peace can result.

¹¹ So can we just 'let our conscience be our guide'? Well, it is good to listen to our conscience, but its message may seriously mislead us. Yes, the voice of "the man we are inside" may fail us. (2 Corinthians 4:16) Consider an example. The Bible tells of Stephen, a devout follower of Christ "full of graciousness and power." Some Jews threw Stephen outside Jerusalem and stoned him to death. Saul (who later became the apostle Paul) stood nearby and "was approving of the murder of" Stephen. It seems that those Jews were so convinced that they acted properly that their conscience did not trouble them. That must have been the case with Saul too, for thereafter he was "still breathing threat and murder against the disciples of the Lord." Clearly, his conscience was not then speaking with an accurate voice.—Acts 6:8; 7:57–8:1; 9:1.

¹² What could have affected Saul's conscience? One thing may have been his close contact with others. Many of us have spoken on the telephone with a man whose voice sounds very similar to that of his father. To an extent, the timbre of the son's voice may

11. Why might it be dangerous just to 'let your conscience be your guide'? Illustrate.

12. What is one way our conscience may have been influenced?

have been inherited, but he may also have been influenced by his father's speech patterns. Similarly, Saul may have been affected by close contact with Jews who hated Jesus and opposed his teachings. (John 11:47–50; 18:14; Acts 5:27, 28, 33) Yes, Saul's associates may have influenced the voice he heard from within, his conscience.

¹³ The conscience can also be shaped by the general culture or environment in which one lives, just as one's environment may lead someone to speak with an accent or in a dialect. (Matthew 26:73) That must have happened with the ancient Assyrians. They were known for militarism, and their carved reliefs depict them torturing captives. (Nahum 2:11, 12; 3:1) The Ninevites of Jonah's day are described as not knowing "the difference between their right hand and their left." That is, they did not have a correct standard for judging what was proper or improper from God's standpoint. Imagine how that environment could have affected the conscience of someone growing up in Nineveh! (Jonah 3:4, 5; 4:11) In like manner today, a person's conscience can be affected by the attitude of those around him.

Improving the Voice Within

¹⁴ Jehovah provided Adam and Eve with the gift of conscience, and we inherited our conscience from them. Genesis 1:27 tells us that humans are made in God's image. That does not mean in God's physical form, for he is a spirit and we are of flesh. We are in God's image in that we have within us his qualities, including a moral sense with a functioning conscience. This reality provides a clue to one way that we can strengthen our conscience, making it more reliable.

13. How might one's environment affect the conscience?

14. How does our conscience reflect what Genesis 1:27 says?



David had pangs of conscience . . .

That is, learn more about the Creator, and draw closer to him.

¹⁵ The Bible shows that in a sense Jehovah is a Father to all of us. (Isaiah 64:8) Faithful Christians, whether their hope is to be in heaven or to live in an earthly paradise, may address God as Father. (Matthew 6:9) We should desire to draw ever closer to our Father and thus absorb his views and standards. (James 4:8) Many have no interest in doing so. They are like the Jews to whom Jesus said: "You have neither heard his voice at any time nor seen his figure; and you do not have his word remaining in you." (John 5:37, 38) We have not heard the actual voice of God, yet we can have his word in us and thus come to be like him and feel as he does.

¹⁶ The account about Joseph in Potiphar's house shows that. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph. Though he lived at a time when no Bible book had yet been written and the Ten Commandments had not been given, Joseph reacted by saying: "How could I commit this

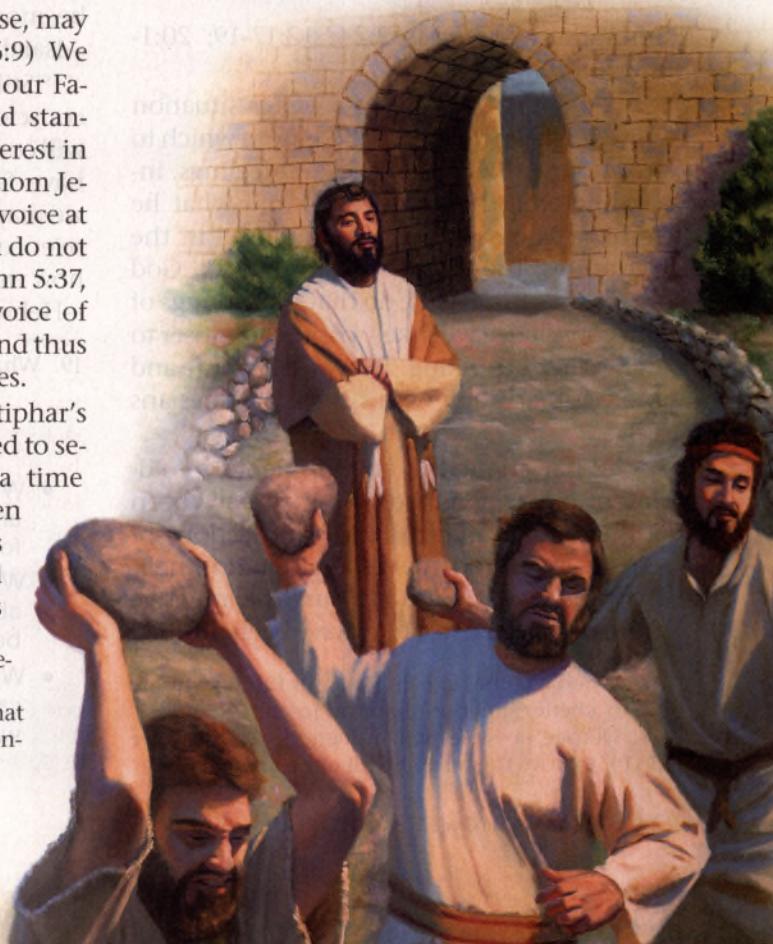
15. What is one way in which we can benefit from coming to know our Father?

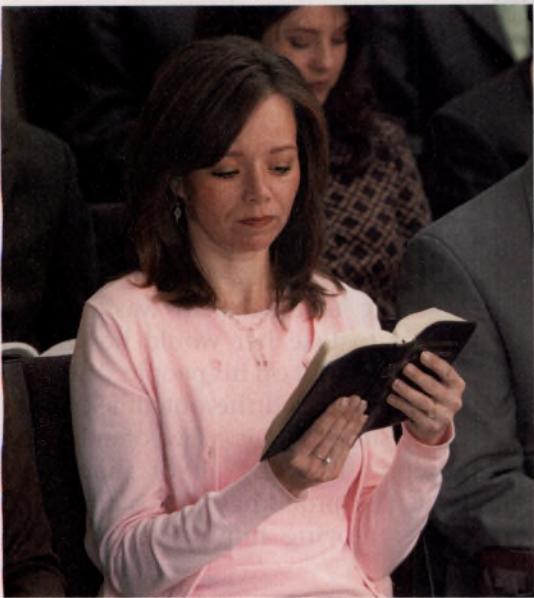
16. The account of Joseph illustrates what about training and responding to our conscience?

great badness and actually sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) He was not responding that way simply to please his family; they lived far away. He principally wanted to please God. Joseph knew God's standard for marriage—one man for one woman, the two being "one flesh." And he had likely heard of how Abimelech felt on learning that Rebekah was married—that to take her would be wrong, bringing guilt on his people. And, yes, Jehovah blessed the outcome in that case, showing his view of adultery.

Joseph's knowing all of that likely reinforced the proddings of his inherited conscience, moving him to reject sexual

but that was not true of Saul of Tarsus





We can train our conscience

immorality.—Genesis 2:24; 12:17-19; 20:1-18; 26:7-14.

¹⁷ Of course, we are in a better situation now. We have the entire Bible from which to learn our Father's thinking and feelings, including what he approves of and what he forbids. The more we are immersed in the Scriptures, the closer we can draw to God and be like him. As we do that, the urgings of our conscience will likely come ever closer to our Father's thinking. They will be more and more in harmony with his will.—Ephesians 5:1-5.

¹⁸ What about the environmental molding of our conscience? We may have been influenced by the thinking and actions of our relatives and the general environment in which we grew up. Thus, the message from our conscience may have been muffled

17. When it comes to being like our Father, why are we in a better situation than was Joseph?

18. Despite possible past influences, what can we do to improve the reliability of our conscience?

or distorted. It spoke with the "accent" of others around us. Granted, we cannot change our past; however, we can be resolved to choose associates and an environment that will affect our conscience in a good way. A key step is regularly being with devoted Christians who have long tried to be like their Father. Congregation meetings, including association before and after them, provide excellent opportunities for that. We can note the Bible-based thinking and reactions of fellow Christians, including their readiness to listen as their conscience echoes God's outlook and ways. Over time, this can help us to harmonize our own conscience with Bible principles, bringing us closer to God's image. When we attune our inner voice to our Father's principles and yield to the good influence of fellow Christians, our conscience will be more reliable and we will be more inclined to listen to what it says.—Isaiah 30:21.

¹⁹ Still, some struggle to respond to their conscience day by day. The next article will consider some situations that Christians have faced. By examining such situations, we may see more clearly the role of the conscience, why consciences may differ, and how we can increasingly respond to its voice.—Hebrews 6:11, 12.

19. What aspects of conscience yet merit attention?

What Did You Learn?

- Why is it that a sense of right and wrong, or conscience, has been found in all cultures?
- Why do we need to be cautious about simply letting our conscience be our guide?
- What are some ways in which we can improve the voice we hear from within?

RESPONDING TO YOUR CONSCIENCE

*"All things are clean to clean persons.
But to persons defiled and
faithless nothing is clean."*

—TITUS 1:15.

AFTER the apostle Paul had completed three missionary tours, he was arrested and eventually sent to Rome, where he was held for two years. What did he do when he was released? At some point, he visited the island of Crete with Titus, to whom Paul wrote: "I left you in Crete, that you might correct the things that were defective and might make appointments of older men." (Titus 1:5) Titus' carrying out that assignment involved consciences.

² Paul advised Titus about the qualifications of congregation elders and then pointed out that there were "many unruly men, profitless talkers, and deceivers of the mind." These were "subverting entire households by teaching things they ought not." Titus was to "keep on reproofing them." (Titus 1:10-14; 1 Timothy 4:7) Paul said that their minds and consciences were "defiled," using a word with the sense of being stained, as a fine garment might be stained with dye. (Titus 1:15) Some of those men could have been of Jewish background, for they 'adhered to the circumcision.' Congregations today are not being undermined by men with that particular outlook; still we can

1. How was Paul involved with the congregations on Crete?
2. Titus had to deal with what problem on the island of Crete?



learn much about the conscience from the counsel that Paul gave to Titus.

Those With a Defiled Conscience

³ Note the setting in which Paul mentioned conscience. "All things are clean to clean persons. But to persons defiled and faithless nothing is clean, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They publicly declare they know God, but they disown him by their works." Clearly, some back then needed to make changes in order to "be healthy in the faith." (Titus 1:13, 15, 16) They were having a problem distinguishing between what was clean and what was unclean, and this involved their conscience.

⁴ Over ten years earlier, the Christian governing body concluded that circumcision was no longer required to become a true worshipper, and they informed the congregations accordingly. (Acts 15:1, 2, 19-29) Yet, some on Crete were still 'adhering to the circumcision.' They openly disagreed with

3. What did Paul write to Titus about the conscience?
- 4, 5. What defect did some in the congregations have, and how did this affect them?



the governing body, "teaching things they ought not." (Titus 1:10, 11) With distorted thinking, they may have been advocating regulations from the Law about foods and ritual cleanliness. They may even have been embellishing what the Law said, as did their predecessors in Jesus' day, as well as advocating Jewish fables and human commandments.—Mark 7:2, 3, 5, 15; 1 Timothy 4:3.

⁵ Such thinking had a negative impact on their judgment and moral sense, their conscience. Paul wrote: "To persons defiled and faithless nothing is clean." Their conscience became so distorted that it no longer was a reliable guide for their actions and evaluations. Moreover, they judged fellow Christians on things that were personal, matters in which one Christian might decide one way but another might choose differently. In this respect these Cretans were viewing as unclean what really was not. (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:16) While declaring that they knew God, they proved otherwise by their works.—Titus 1:16.

"Clean to Clean Persons"

⁶ How can we benefit from what Paul wrote to Titus? Well, observe the contrast found in this statement: "All things are clean to clean persons. But to persons defiled and faithless nothing is clean, but both

6. Paul mentioned what two types of people?

their minds and their consciences are defiled." (Titus 1:15) Paul certainly was not saying that for a morally clean Christian, absolutely everything is clean and permissible. We can be sure of that because Paul had made clear in another letter that one practicing fornication, idolatry, spiritism, and so on "will not inherit God's kingdom." (Galatians 5:19-21) So we must conclude that Paul was stating a general truth about two types of people, those who are morally and spiritually clean and those who are not.

⁷ The things that a sincere Christian needs to avoid are not limited to what the Bible specifically prohibits. As an example, consider this forthright statement: "Let marriage be honorable among all, and the marriage bed be without defilement, for God will judge fornicators and adulterers." (Hebrews 13:4) Even non-Christians and ones who know nothing of the Bible would rightly conclude that this verse rules out committing adultery. It is plain from this and other Bible passages that God condemns sexual intercourse between a married man or woman and someone other than the lawful husband or wife. What, though, about two unmarried persons engaging in oral sex? Many teenagers claim that this practice is harmless because it is not sexual inter-

7. Hebrews 13:4 rules out what, but what question might arise?

course. Could a Christian view oral sex as clean?

⁸ Hebrews 13:4 and 1 Corinthians 6:9 establish that God disapproves of both adultery and fornication (Greek, *por-nei'a*). What does the latter include? The Greek term involves the use of the genital organs in either a natural or a perverted way with lewd intent. It includes all forms of illicit sexual relations outside of Scriptural marriage. So it includes oral sex, despite the fact that many teenagers around the world have been told or have come to the conclusion that oral sex is acceptable. True Christians do not guide their thinking and actions by the opinions of "profitless talkers, and deceivers of the mind." (Titus 1:10) They hold to the higher standard of the Holy Scriptures. Rather than try to make excuses for oral sex, they understand that Scripturally it is fornication, *por-nei'a*, and they train their conscience accordingly.*—Acts 21:25; 1 Corinthians 6:18; Ephesians 5:3.

Different Voices, Different Decisions

⁹ But what did Paul mean when he said that "all things are clean to clean persons"? Paul was referring to Christians who had brought their thinking and moral sense into line with God's standards, which we find in his inspired Word. Such Christians recognize that on many matters not directly condemned, there is room for variation among believers. Rather than being judgmental, they recognize as "clean" things that God does not condemn. They do not expect that all others will think exactly as they do about

* The Watchtower of March 15, 1983, pages 30-1, offers comments for consideration regarding married couples.

8. As to oral sex, how do Christians differ from many people of the world?
9. If "all things are clean," what is the role of the conscience?

aspects of life on which the Bible does not give specific direction. Let us consider how this might be the case.

¹⁰ There are many families in which one mate has become a Christian but the other mate has not. (1 Peter 3:1; 4:3) This may present various challenges, such as when there is a wedding or a funeral of a relative. Imagine the case of a Christian wife whose husband does not yet share her faith. One of his relatives is getting married, and the ceremony will be in a church of Christendom. (Or a relative, maybe a parent, has died, and the funeral will be in a church.) The couple are invited, and he wants his wife to accompany him. What does her conscience say about attending? What will she do? Imagine these two possibilities.

¹¹ Lois reflects on the serious Bible command, 'Get out of Babylon the Great,' the world empire of false religion. (Revelation 18:2, 4) She once belonged to the church where the wedding is to take place and knows that during the ceremony all present will be asked to share in religious acts, such as prayer, singing, or religious gestures. She is determined to have no part in that and does not want even to be there and be under pressure to break her integrity. Lois respects her husband and wants to cooperate with him, her Scriptural head; yet, she does not want to compromise her Scriptural principles. (Acts 5:29) Hence, she tactfully explains to her mate that even if he chooses to be there, she personally cannot. She may mention that if she attended and refused to share in some act, it might cause him embarrassment, so in that sense her not

10. How might a wedding (or a funeral) present a challenge?
11. Describe how one Christian wife might reason on whether to attend a church wedding, leading to what conclusion?



Two Christians facing a similar situation might make different decisions

attending might be best for him. Her decision leaves her with a clear conscience.

¹² Ruth faces virtually the same dilemma. She respects her husband, is resolved to be loyal to God, and is responsive to her Bible-trained conscience. After thinking about points such as the ones Lois considered, Ruth prayerfully consults "Questions From Readers" in *The Watchtower* of May 15, 2002. She remembers that the three Hebrews complied with a command to be where idolatry would occur, yet they kept their integrity by not sharing in an idolatrous act. (Daniel 3:15-18) She decides to accompany her husband but not to share in any religious deeds, and she is acting in har-

12. How might someone reason on and react to an invitation to a wedding in a church?

mony with her conscience. She tactfully but clearly explains to her husband what her conscience will permit her to do and what she cannot do. Ruth hopes that he will see the difference between true worship and false.—Acts 24:16.

¹³ Does the fact that two Christians might reach different conclusions suggest that it makes no difference what a person does or that one of these two must have a weak conscience? No. In view of her past experience with the music and trappings of church ceremonies, Lois may sense that being present would be particularly dangerous *for her*. And her past interactions with her husband on religious issues may affect her conscience. So she is convinced that her decision is best *for her*.

¹⁴ But would Ruth's decision be bad? That is not for others to say. They should not judge or criticize her for choosing to attend the event but not perform any religious act. Bear in mind Paul's counsel on personal decisions about eating or not eating certain foods: "Let the one eating not look down on the one not eating, and let the one not eating not judge the one eating . . . To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for Jehovah can make him stand." (Romans 14:3, 4) Certainly no genuine Christian would want to urge anyone to ignore the guidance of a trained conscience, for to do that would be like tuning out a voice that may well convey a lifesaving message.

¹⁵ Continuing this scenario, both Christians should consider additional factors, one being the impact on others. Paul coun-

13. Why need it not be disturbing that two Christians reach different conclusions?
14. Christians should bear what in mind about issues for personal decision?
15. Why should the conscience and feelings of others be seriously considered?

seled us: "Make this your decision, not to put before a brother a stumbling block or a cause for tripping." (Romans 14:13) Lois may know that similar situations have caused much upset in the congregation or in her family, and what she does may significantly impact her children. In contrast, Ruth may be aware that similar choices have not caused disturbance in the congregation or in the community. Both women—and all of us—should recognize that a properly trained conscience is sensitive to the impact on others. Jesus said: "Whoever stumbles one of these little ones who put faith in me, it is more beneficial for him to have hung around his neck a millstone such as is turned by an ass and to be sunk in the wide, open sea." (Matthew 18:6) If a person ignores the issue of stumbling others, he might come to have a defiled conscience, as did some Christians on Crete.

¹⁶ A Christian's spiritual development should be ongoing, as should his progress in hearing and responding to his conscience. Let us imagine Mark, recently baptized. His conscience tells him to shun unscriptural practices that he formerly engaged in, perhaps involving idols or blood. (Acts 21:25) In fact, he now scrupulously avoids things even vaguely similar to what God forbids. On the other hand, he is puzzled about why some reject certain things that he finds acceptable, such as certain television programs.

¹⁷ Over time, Mark grows in knowledge and draws closer to God. (Colossians 1:9, 10) With what effect? The voice within him receives considerable training. Now Mark is more inclined to listen to his conscience

16. We can expect what changes in a Christian over time?

17. Illustrate how time and spiritual development might affect a Christian's conscience and decisions.

and to weigh Scriptural principles. In fact, he realizes that some of the things "vaguely similar" that he shunned are actually not contrary to God's thinking. Furthermore, being more attuned to Bible principles and willing to respond to his well-trained conscience, Mark is now moved by his conscience to avoid programs that he earlier felt were acceptable. Yes, his conscience has been refined.—Psalm 37:31.

¹⁸ In most congregations, there are individuals at all stages of Christian development. Some of them are new in the faith. Maybe their conscience is almost silent on certain issues, yet the voice from within speaks loudly about others. Such ones may need time and help to become attuned to Jehovah's guidance and responsive to their own trained conscience. (Ephesians 4:14, 15) Happily, in the same congregations, there likely are many who have deep knowledge, experience in applying Bible principles, and a conscience very much in harmony with God's thinking. What a joy it is to be around such "clean persons" who see as morally and spiritually "clean" the things that are acceptable to the Lord! (Ephesians 5:10) May we all have as our goal developing to that point and maintaining such a conscience in line with the accurate knowledge of the truth and godly devotion.—Titus 1:1.

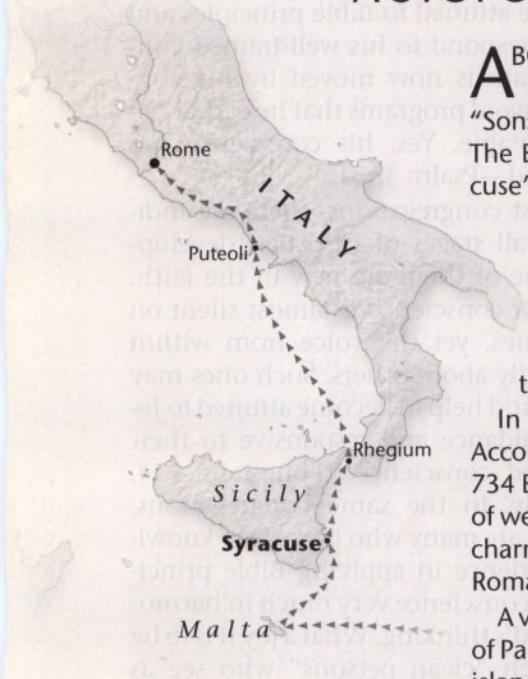
18. What cause for joy do we have?

How Would You Answer?

- Why did some Christians on Crete have consciences that were defiled?
- How is it that two Christians with sensitive consciences might make different decisions?
- Over time, what should happen to our conscience?

SYRACUSE

A STOPOVER ON PAUL'S VOYAGE



ABOUT the year 59 C.E., a ship sailed from the Mediterranean island of Malta bound for Italy. The vessel bore the figurehead "Sons of Zeus," the deities regarded as the protectors of mariners. The Bible writer Luke relates that the ship put "into port at Syracuse" on the southeastern coast of Sicily and "remained three days." (Acts 28:11, 12) On board with Luke were Aristarchus and the apostle Paul, who was being taken to Rome for trial.—Acts 27:2.

We do not know if Paul was allowed to disembark at Syracuse. If he or his traveling companions did, what might they have seen?

In Greek and Roman times, Syracuse rivaled Athens and Rome. According to tradition, it was founded by the Corinthians in 734 B.C.E. Syracuse had moments of glory and was the birthplace of well-known figures of ancient times, such as the playwright Epicharmus and the mathematician Archimedes. In 212 B.C.E., the Romans conquered Syracuse.

A visit to the modern city may give you some idea of the Syracuse of Paul's day. The city was divided into two parts—one on the small island of Ortygia, where Paul's ship probably landed, and the other on the mainland.

Today, you can find on the island the remains of the oldest Doric-style temple in Sicily—the temple of Apollo, dating to the sixth century B.C.E. There are also columns of a temple dedicated to Athena, dating to the fifth century B.C.E., but it was incorporated into the cathedral.

The modern city center is found on the mainland, where you can visit the Neapolis archaeological park. Close by its entrance stands the Greek theater. It represents one of the grandest surviving expressions of Greek theater architecture. Facing the sea, it offered a spectacular setting for the performances. In the southernmost part of the park is the third-century C.E. Roman amphitheater. It is elliptical in shape, 460 feet long and 390 feet wide, and is the third largest in Italy.

If you have the opportunity to visit Syracuse, you can sit on a sea-front bench at Ortygia, open your Bible to Acts 28:12, and imagine the apostle Paul aboard the ship as it glided into port here.



*Ruins of a Greek theater
in Syracuse*

Rejoicing Over “VICTORY WITH THE LAMB”

IN A letter he wrote in 1971, Carey W. Barber reflected on his first 50 years of service to the true God: “The years in Jehovah’s service have been unusually good. The association with his people; the protection from the evildoers of Satan’s world; the prospect of victory with the Lamb, Jesus Christ; and the evidence of Jehovah’s love combine to bring about that sweet peace and inner satisfaction that guard the heart and give sure hope of the final triumph.”

Six years later, Brother Barber, a spirit-anointed Christian, began serving as a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. In that capacity during the following 30 years, he continued to look forward to “victory with the Lamb.” He achieved that by proving faithful until his death at the age of 101 on Sunday, April 8, 2007.—1 Corinthians 15:57.

Born in England in 1905, Carey Barber was baptized in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1921. Two years later he and his twin brother, Norman, transferred to Brooklyn, New York, to help with a new project. At that time, Jehovah’s people were about to begin producing their own books for spreading the good news of the Kingdom “in all the inhabited earth.” (Matthew 24:14) One of Brother Barber’s early assignments was that of running a small press. Among the items printed were law briefs for legal cases being taken to the United States Supreme Court. In time, Broth-

er Barber worked in the Service Department, focusing on congregation matters and the preaching work around the country.

A black and white portrait photograph of Carey W. Barber. He is an elderly man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression.

Having that background, Brother Barber was well-qualified when in 1948 he was assigned as a traveling minister, visiting assemblies and congregations all over the western part of the United States. He said that he particularly enjoyed being out in the fresh air in the public preaching activity. This assignment brought many brothers and sisters into contact with Brother Barber. His quick mind and zeal for the ministry proved very useful when he later attended the 26th class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. During the school term, he became acquainted with a fellow student from Canada, Sydney Lee Brewer. After graduation they married and had their honeymoon on the short trip to serve the congregations in the area of Chicago, Illinois. Sister Barber proved to be a valuable companion and a constant source of support to her husband during their two decades in the traveling ministry.

Those who got to meet Brother Barber and to know him during his decades as a district or circuit overseer or during the 30 years he spent working and traveling as a member of the Governing Body will long remember his talks and lively comments. We have every reason to rejoice over his “victory with the Lamb.”

"I ADMIRED HIS INCREDIBLE DETERMINATION"

GÜNTER GRASS, German author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1999, published his autobiography in 2006. In it he describes the time when he was drafted into the German civil defense. In the same book, he tells of a man who made such an impression on him that it has stayed with him for over 60 years. That was a solitary figure who stood up for his faith under persecution.

In an interview published in the daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Grass recalled this extraordinary per-

son, who refused to take up arms. Grass said that the man "did not subscribe to any of the prevailing ideologies, being neither a Nazi, a Communist, nor a Socialist. He was one of Jehovah's Witnesses." Grass does not remember the name of the Witness, whom he dubbed We-don't-do-such-things. Researchers of Jehovah's Witnesses identify the man as Joachim Alfermann. He was repeatedly beaten and humiliated, and then he was placed in solitary confinement. But Alfermann remained steadfast and refused to bear arms.

"I admired his incredible determination," Grass noted. "I asked myself: How can he put up with it all? How does he do it?" After enduring prolonged efforts to break his integrity to God, Alfermann was finally sent to the Stutthof concentration camp in February 1944. Liberated in April 1945, he survived the war and remained a loyal Witness of Jehovah until his death in 1998.

Alfermann was one of some 13,400 Witnesses—in Germany and in countries occupied by the Nazis—who suffered reprisals because of their faith. They followed the direction of the Bible, remaining politically neutral and refusing to take up arms. (Matthew 26:52; John 18:36) Some 4,200 Witnesses were interned in concentration camps, and 1,490 lost their lives. Even today, the stand they took impresses many who do not share their faith but admire their steadfastness.



Joachim Alfermann