

OCTOBER 1, 2005

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Do You
**RECOGNIZE
THE SIGN?**

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.

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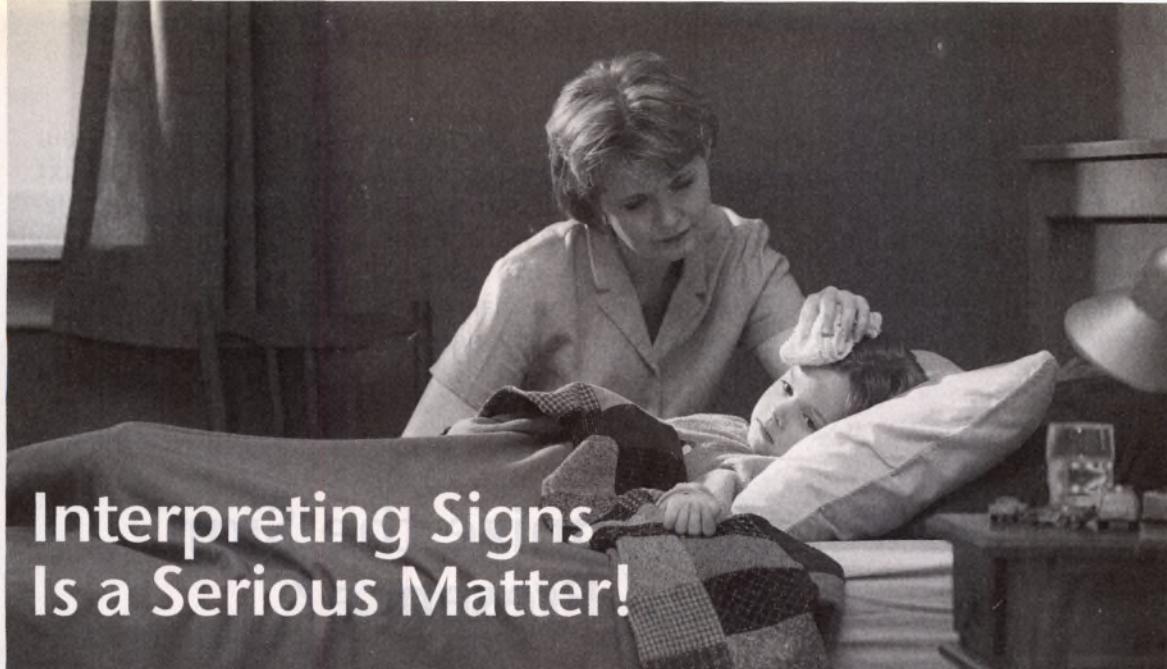
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Interpreting Signs Is a Serious Matter!

"At first I thought that our son Andreas just had a headache. But he lost his appetite and had a high fever. The headache got worse, and I became worried. When my husband came home, we took Andreas to the doctor. He checked the symptoms and sent Andreas straight to the hospital. The problem was more serious than a headache. Andreas had meningitis. He was treated and was soon well again."—Gertrud, a mother in Germany.

GERTRUD'S experience is probably familiar to many parents. They observe signs indicating that their child might be ill. Though not every illness is serious, parents cannot afford to ignore symptoms of ill health in their children. Observing the signs and taking appropriate action may make a big difference. It is a serious matter.

This is true in matters other than health. A case in point is the tsunami disaster in December 2004 in areas surrounding the Indian Ocean. Agencies in such places as Australia and Hawaii detected the massive earthquake in northern Sumatra and foresaw the potential danger of the aftereffect. Yet, there were no means in place for the people in the endangered areas to receive or

respond to any warning. As a result, more than 220,000 lives were lost.

Signs of Much Greater Importance

When Jesus Christ was on earth, he gave his listeners a lesson in observing signs and acting accordingly. He was talking about something of far-reaching importance. The Bible reports: "The Pharisees and Sadducees approached him and, to tempt him, they asked him to display to them a sign from heaven. In reply he said to them: 'When evening falls you are accustomed to say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is fire-red"; and at morning, "It will be wintry, rainy weather today, for the sky is fire-red, but gloomy-looking." You know how to

interpret the appearance of the sky, but the signs of the times you cannot interpret.’’—Matthew 16:1-3.

In mentioning “the signs of the times,” Jesus indicated that his first-century Jewish listeners should have been aware of the urgency of the times in which they were liv-

ing. The Jewish system of things was about to experience a cataclysm that would affect all of them. A few days before his death, Jesus spoke to his disciples about another sign—the sign of his presence. What he said on that occasion is of vital importance to everyone today.

Do You Recognize the Sign of Jesus' Presence?

NO ONE wants to be seriously ill or to be caught in a disaster. In order to avoid such calamities, a wise person takes note of the signs pointing to danger and acts accordingly. Jesus Christ described a particular sign that we need to recognize. What he was pointing to would have global impact and would affect all mankind. That includes you and your family.

Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God, which will remove wickedness and make the earth into a paradise. His disciples were curious about this and wanted to know when that Kingdom would come. They asked: “What will be the sign of your presence and of the conclusion of the system of things?”—Matthew 24:3.

Jesus knew that following his execution and resurrection, centuries would pass before he would be enthroned in heaven as the Messianic King to rule over mankind. Since his enthronement would be invisible

Jesus foretold a multitude of events that together would constitute a sign that would be identifiable from anywhere on earth

to humans, Jesus gave a sign that would enable his followers to recognize his “presence” as well as “the conclusion of the system of things.” This sign is composed of several facets, which together make up a composite identifying mark, or signal—the sign of Jesus’ presence.

Gospel writers Matthew, Mark, and Luke each carefully recorded Jesus’ answer. (Matthew, chapters 24 and 25; Mark, chapter 13; Luke, chapter 21) Other Bible writers added details to the sign. (2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 3:3, 4; Revelation 6:1-8; 11:18) Space does not permit a close look at all the details, but we will consider five key ele-

ments that make up the sign mentioned by Jesus. You will find that this is relevant and important to you personally.—See box on page 6.

“An Epoch-Making Breach”

“Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.” (Matthew 24:7) Ger-

man newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* reports that prior to 1914, people "believed in a golden future with more freedom, progress, and prosperity." Then everything changed. "The war that began in August 1914 and came to an end in November 1918 was a dramatic event. It made a historic break, separating the old from the new," states the magazine *GEO*. More than 60 million soldiers from five continents engaged in savage conflict. On average, some 6,000 soldiers were killed *each day*. Since then, historians of each generation and of all political persuasions have viewed "the years 1914 to 1918 as being an epoch-making breach."

World War I forced irreversible changes on human society and thrust mankind into the last days of this system of things. The rest of that century was characterized by more wars, armed conflicts, and terrorism. Things have not changed for the better in the early years of the present century. Besides war, other facets of the sign are visible.

Famine, Pestilence, and Earthquakes

"There will be food shortages." (Matthew 24:7) Hunger hit Europe during the first world war, and famine



has haunted mankind ever since. Historian Alan Bullock wrote that in Russia and Ukraine in 1933, "hordes of the starving wandered across the countryside . . . Corpses were piled by the sides of the roads." In 1943 journalist T. H. White witnessed famine in the Chinese province of Henan. He wrote: "In a famine, almost anything becomes edible and can be ground, consumed and converted to energy by the human body. But it requires the terror of death to provoke the imagination to eat what, hitherto, is unedible." Sad to say, famine in Africa has become almost commonplace during recent decades. Although the earth produces enough food for everyone, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 840 million people worldwide have too little to eat.

"In one place after another pestilences." (Luke 21:11) "The Spanish influenza is estimated to have killed between 20 million and 50 million people in 1918, more than the plague or the first world war," reports the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Since then, untold numbers have been stricken by such diseases as malaria, smallpox, tuberculosis, polio, and cholera. And the world looks on aghast as AIDS spreads unabated.

WWI soldiers: From the book *The World War—A Pictorial History*, 1919; poor family: AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi; polio victim: © WHO/P. Virot

We now have the baffling situation that persistent disease exists alongside astonishing medical progress. This paradox, hitherto unknown to mankind, helps identify our extraordinary times.

"Earthquakes." (Matthew 24:7) During the past 100 years, earthquakes have snuffed out the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. According to one source, earthquakes with the power to ruin buildings and split open the ground have averaged 18 per year since 1914. Deadlier quakes strong enough to level buildings have occurred about once a year. Despite advances in technology, the death toll remains high because many rapidly growing cities are located on earthquake fault lines.

Welcome News!

Most facets of the sign of the last days are distressing. But Jesus also told of welcome news.

Do you see a pattern, a composite sign of global importance?

"This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." (Matthew 24:14) The work that Jesus himself started—preaching the good news

of the Kingdom—would reach a climax during the last days. This has truly been the case. Jehovah's Witnesses are preaching the Bible's message and are teaching willing people to apply what they learn in everyday life. Currently, over six million Witnesses preach in 235 lands and in over 400 languages.

Note that Jesus did not say that life would come to a standstill because of the distressing world conditions. He also did not say that the whole world would be engulfed by one facet of the sign. But he did foretell a multitude of events that together would constitute a sign that would be identifiable from anywhere on earth.

Looking beyond single events or isolated incidents, do you see a pattern, a composite

IDENTIFYING MARKS OF THE LAST DAYS

Unprecedented warfare.—Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:4

Famine.—Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5, 6, 8

Pestilences.—Luke 21:11; Revelation 6:8

Increasing lawlessness.—Matthew 24:12

Earthquakes.—Matthew 24:7

Critical times hard to deal with.—2 Timothy 3:1

Inordinate love of money.—2 Timothy 3:2

Disobedience to parents.—2 Timothy 3:2

A lack of natural affection.—2 Timothy 3:3

Loving pleasures rather than God.—2 Timothy 3:4

A lack of self-control.—2 Timothy 3:3

Without love of goodness.—2 Timothy 3:3

Taking no note of the impending danger.—Matthew 24:39

Ridiculers rejecting proof of the last days.—2 Peter 3:3, 4

Global preaching of God's Kingdom.—Matthew 24:14



sign of global importance? What is happening affects you and your family. But why, we might ask, do so few people take notice?

Own Interests Come First

"No Swimming," "High Voltage," "Reduce Speed." These are some of the signs and warnings that we see but that are often ignored. Why? We are easily swayed by what we consider to be in our own best interests. For example, we may feel the need to drive faster than the law permits, or we may have a strong desire to swim where it is forbidden. But ignoring signs is unwise.

For instance, avalanches in the Alpine mountains of Austria, France, Italy, and Switzerland sometimes claim the lives of tourists who ignore warnings that urge them to ski or snowboard only on secure routes. According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, many tourists who ignore such warnings live by the maxim, No risk, no fun. Sadly, ignoring warnings can have tragic results.

What reasons do people have for disregarding the sign described by Jesus? They may be blinded by avarice, numbed by apathy, paralyzed by indecision, bogged down by routine, or gripped by fear of losing prestige. Could

any of these be causing you to ignore the sign of Jesus' presence? Would it not be wiser to recognize the sign and act accordingly?

Life on a Paradise Earth

A growing number of people are heeding the sign of Jesus' presence. Kristian, a young married man in Germany, writes: "These are gloomy times. We are undoubtedly living in 'the last days.' " He and his wife spend much time talking to others about the Messianic Kingdom. Frank lives in the same country. He and his wife encourage others with good news from the Bible. Frank says: "Because of the situation in the world, many people today are anxious about the future. We try to encourage them with Bible prophecies of a paradise earth." Kristian and Frank thus help fulfill one facet of Jesus' sign—the preaching of the good news of the Kingdom.—Matthew 24:14.

As the last days reach their climax, Jesus will wipe out this old system and the people who support it. The Messianic Kingdom will then administer affairs on earth, which will be brought to its foretold Paradise condition. Mankind will be freed from sickness and death, and the dead will be resurrected to life on earth. These are the delightful prospects awaiting those who recognize the sign of the times. Would it not be the wise course to learn more about the sign and what one must do to survive the end of this system? Surely this ought to be a matter of great urgency for everyone.—John 17:3.



Jehovah's Word Is Alive

Highlights From the Book of First Chronicles

SOME 77 years have passed since the Jews returned to their homeland from Babylonian exile. The temple that was rebuilt by Governor Zerubbabel has now stood for 55 years. The prime reason for the Jews' return was the restoration of true worship in Jerusalem. However, the people lack zeal for Jehovah's worship. There is an urgent need for encouragement, and that is exactly what the Bible book of First Chronicles provides.

Aside from the genealogical records, First Chronicles covers a period of some 40 years, from the death of King Saul to the death of King David. The priest Ezra is credited with the writing of this book in the year 460 B.C.E. First Chronicles is of interest to us because it gives insight into worship at the temple and provides details about the lineage of the Messiah. As a part of the inspired Word of God, its message strengthens our faith and enhances our understanding of the Bible.—Hebrews 4:12.

A MEANINGFUL RECORD OF NAMES

(1 Chronicles 1:1–9:44)

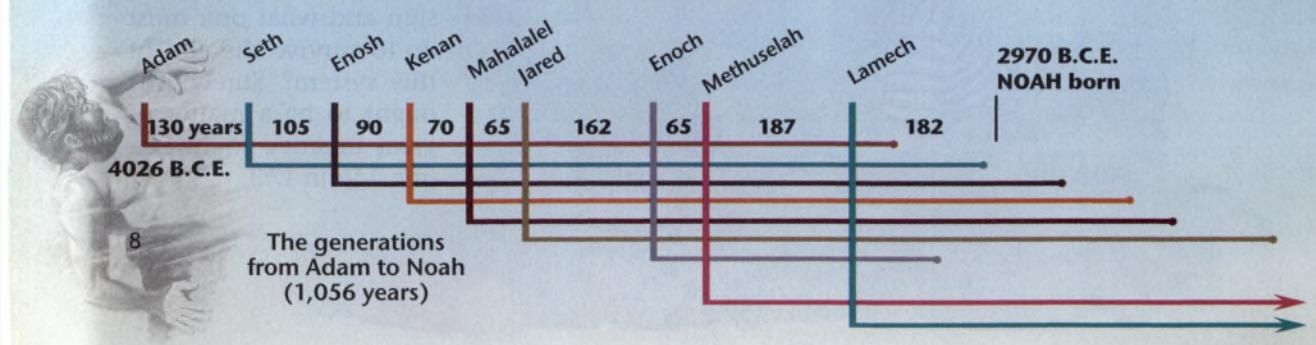
The detailed genealogical listing that Ezra compiles is necessary for at least three reasons: to ensure that only authorized men serve in the priesthood, to help determine tribal inheritance, and to preserve the record of the lineage leading up to the Messiah. The

record links the Jews with their past all the way back to the first man. Ten generations take us from Adam to Noah, and another ten take us to Abraham. After listing the sons of Ishmael, the sons of Abraham's concubine Keturah, and the sons of Esau, the account focuses on the line of descent of the 12 sons of Israel.—1 Chronicles 2:1.

The descendants of Judah are given extensive coverage because they provide the royal line of King David. There are 14 generations from Abraham to David and another 14 to the deportation to Babylon. (1 Chronicles 1:27, 34; 2:1–15; 3:1–17; Matthew 1:17) Ezra then lists descendants of the tribes on the east side of the Jordan, followed by the genealogy of the sons of Levi. (1 Chronicles 5:1–24; 6:1) Then comes a summary of some of the other tribes to the west of the Jordan River and of the line of Benjamin in detail. (1 Chronicles 8:1) The names of the first inhabitants of Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity are also listed.—1 Chronicles 9:1–16.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

1:18—Who was Shelah's father—Cainan or Arpachshad? (Luke 3:35, 36) Arpachshad was the father of Shelah. (Genesis 10:24; 11:12) The term "Cainan" at Luke 3:36 may well be a corruption of the term "Chal-



deans." If this is so, the original text may have read, "the son of Chaldean Arpachshad." Or it may be that the names Cainan and Arpachshad refer to one and the same person. Not to be overlooked is the fact that the expression "son of Cainan" is not found in some manuscripts.—Luke 3:36, footnote.

2:15—Was David the seventh son of Jesse? No. Jesse had eight sons, and David was the youngest. (1 Samuel 16:10, 11; 17:12) One of the sons of Jesse evidently died without having any children. Since that son would have no bearing on genealogical records, Ezra omitted his name.

3:17—Why does Luke 3:27 refer to Jecoeniah's son Shealtiel as the son of Neri? Jecoeniah was the father of Shealtiel. However, Neri apparently gave his daughter to Shealtiel as a wife. Luke referred to Neri's son-in-law as Neri's son just as he did in the case of Joseph, calling him the son of Mary's father, Heli.—Luke 3:23.

3:17-19—How were Zerubbabel, Pedaiah, and Shealtiel related? Zerubbabel was a son of Pedaiah, who was a brother of Shealtiel. Yet, the Bible at times calls Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel. (Matthew 1:12; Luke 3:27) This could be because Pedaiah died and Shealtiel raised Zerubbabel. Or perhaps since Shealtiel died without having a child, Pedaiah performed brother-in-law marriage, and Zerubbabel was the firstborn of that union.—Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

5:1, 2—What did receiving the right of the firstborn mean for Joseph? It meant

that Joseph received a double portion of the inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:17) He thus became the father of two tribes—Ephraim and Manasseh. The other sons of Israel fathered only one tribe each.

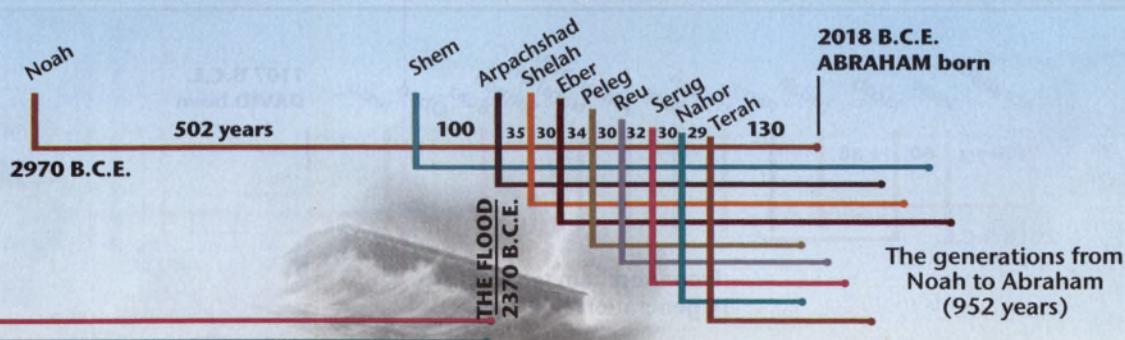
Lessons for Us:

1:1-9:44. The genealogies of real people prove that the entire arrangement of true worship is based, not on myth, but on fact.

4:9, 10. Jehovah answered the fervent prayer of Jabez for a peaceful enlargement of his territory so that it might accommodate more God-fearing people. We too need to offer heartfelt prayers for an increase as we zealously share in the disciple-making work.

5:10, 18-22. In the days of King Saul, the tribes east of the Jordan defeated the Hagrites even though these tribes were outnumbered more than 2 to 1. This was because the valiant men of these tribes trusted in Jehovah and looked to him for help. Let us have complete confidence in Jehovah as we carry on our spiritual warfare against formidable odds.—Ephesians 6:10-17.

9:26, 27. The Levite gatekeepers occupied an office of great trust. They were given the key to the entrance to the holy areas of the temple. They proved to be reliable in opening the gates each day. We have been entrusted with the responsibility of reaching out to the people in our territory and helping them to come to worship Jehovah. Should we not prove to be just as dependable and trustworthy as the Levite gatekeepers?



DAVID RULES AS KING

(1 Chronicles 10:1–29:30)

The narrative opens with the account of King Saul and his three sons dying in battle against the Philistines at Mount Gilboa. David, the son of Jesse, is made king over the tribe of Judah. Men from all tribes come to Hebron and make him king over all Israel. (1 Chronicles 11:1–3) Soon thereafter, he captures Jerusalem. Later, the Israelites bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem “with joyful shouting and with the sounding of the horn and with . . . playing aloud on stringed instruments and harps.”—1 Chronicles 15:28.

David expresses a desire to build a house for the true God. Reserving that privilege for Solomon, Jehovah makes a covenant with David for a Kingdom. As David carries on his campaign against Israel’s enemies, Jehovah gives him one victory after another. An illegal census results in 70,000 deaths. After receiving angelic direction to erect an altar to Jehovah, David purchases a place from Ornan the Jebusite. David begins making “preparation in great quantities” for building a “surpassingly magnificent” house to Jehovah at that site. (1 Chronicles 22:5) David organizes Levitical services, described here in greater detail than anywhere else in the Scriptures. The king and the people make generous contributions for the temple. After a 40-year reign, David dies “satisfied with days, riches and glory; and Solomon his son [begins] to reign in place of him.”—1 Chronicles 29:28.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

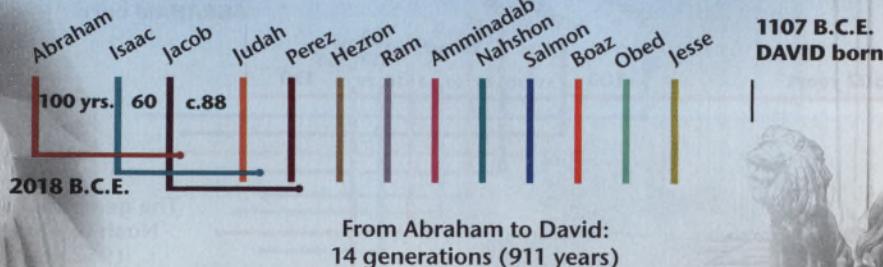
11:11—Why is the number of slain 300 and not 800 as in the parallel account at 2 Samuel 23:8? The head of David’s three most valiant men was Jashobeam, or Josheb-basshebeth. The other two mighty men were Eleazar and Shammah. (2 Samuel 23:8–11) The reason for the difference in the two accounts may well be that they refer to different deeds performed by the same man.

11:20, 21—What was Abishai’s standing with respect to the three principal mighty men of David? Abishai was not one of the three mightiest men who served David. However, as stated at 2 Samuel 23:18, 19, he was the head of 30 warriors and was more distinguished than any of them. Abishai’s reputation rivaled that of the three principal mighty ones because he performed a mighty act similar to that of Jashobeam.

12:8—In what way were the faces of the Gadite warriors like “the faces of lions”? These valiant men were at David’s side in the wilderness. Their hair had grown long. Having a hairy mane gave them a fierce, lionlike appearance.

13:5—What is “the river of Egypt”? Some have thought that this expression refers to a branch of the Nile River. However, it is generally understood that the reference is to “the torrent valley of Egypt”—a long ravine marking the southwest boundary of the Promised Land.—Numbers 34:2, 5; Genesis 15:18.

16:30—What is the meaning of “severe pains” on account of Jehovah? The expression “pains” is here used figuratively to de-



note reverential fear of and high regard for Jehovah.

16:1, 37-40; 21:29, 30; 22:19—What arrangement for worship remained operative in Israel from the time the Ark was brought to Jerusalem until the temple was built? When David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and placed it inside the tent he had made, the Ark had not been in the tabernacle for many years. After the move, the Ark remained in that tent in Jerusalem. The tabernacle was in Gibeon, where High Priest Zadok and his brothers carried out sacrifices prescribed in the Law. This arrangement continued until the completion of the temple in Jerusalem. When the temple was ready, the tabernacle was brought from Gibeon to Jerusalem, and the Ark was housed in the Most Holy of the temple.—1 Kings 8:4, 6.

Lessons for Us:

13:11. Rather than becoming angry and blaming Jehovah when our efforts fail, we must analyze the situation and try to see what caused the failure. Undoubtedly, David did that. He learned from his mistake and later successfully brought the Ark to Jerusalem, using the proper method.*

14:10, 13-16; 22:17-19. We should always approach Jehovah in prayer and seek his direction before undertaking any endeavor that will affect us spiritually.

16:23-29. Jehovah's worship should be our first concern in life.

18:3. Jehovah is the Fulfiller of his promises. Through David, he carried out his promise to give Abraham's seed the entire land of Canaan, extending "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates."—Genesis 15:18; 1 Chronicles 13:5.

21:13-15. Jehovah commanded the angel

* For other lessons from David's attempt to transport the Ark to Jerusalem, see *The Watchtower*, May 15, 2005, pages 16-19.

to halt the plague because He is sensitive to the suffering of His people. Indeed, "very many are his mercies."*

22:5, 9; 29:3-5, 14-16. Although he was not commissioned to build Jehovah's temple, David exhibited a generous spirit. Why? Because he appreciated that all he had acquired was due to Jehovah's goodness. Similar feelings of gratitude should move us to have a spirit of generosity.

24:7-18. The arrangement of 24 priestly divisions that David instituted was in effect when Jehovah's angel appeared to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, and announced the coming birth of John. As a member of "the division of Abijah," Zechariah was then serving his turn at the temple. (Luke 1:5, 8, 9) True worship revolves around historical—not mythological—figures. Blessings result from our loyal cooperation with "the faithful and discreet slave" in connection with the well-organized worship of Jehovah today.—Matthew 24:45.

Serve Jehovah "With a Delightful Soul"

First Chronicles is not all about genealogies. It is also a narrative of David's bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, of his great victories, of the preparation for building the temple, and of the setting up of the Levitical priestly divisions of service. All that Ezra relates in First Chronicles must surely have benefited the Israelites, helping them to renew their zeal for Jehovah's worship at the temple.

What an example David set in keeping Jehovah's worship foremost in his life! Instead of seeking special privileges for himself, David sought to do God's will. We are encouraged to apply his advice to serve Jehovah "with a complete heart and with a delightful soul."—1 Chronicles 28:9.

* For other lessons related to David's illegal census, see *The Watchtower*, May 15, 2005, pages 16-19.

IS YOUR Conscience WELL TRAINED?

HAVE you ever said, "I know in my heart that it is not right," or, "I cannot do what you ask me to do. Something inside tells me it is wrong"? That was the "voice" of your conscience, that inward recognition, or sense, of right and wrong, which excuses or accuses a person. Yes, conscience is inherent in us.

Even in his state of alienation from God, man still has the general ability to distinguish right from wrong. This is because he was made in God's image, so that he to some degree reflects the godly qualities of wisdom and righteousness. (Genesis 1:26, 27) Regarding this, the apostle Paul wrote under divine inspiration: "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.

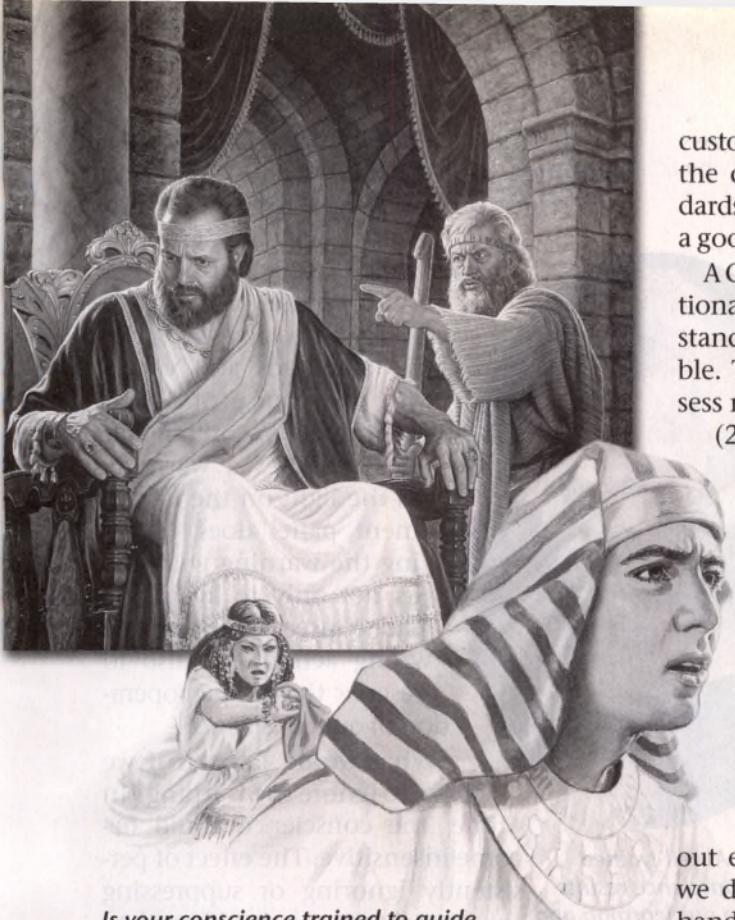
This moral nature, inherited from the first man, Adam, works as a "law," or a rule of conduct, in people of all races and nationalities. It is the ability to look at ourselves and

* The Greek word for conscience here used means "the inward faculty of moral judgment" (*The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*, by Harold K. Moulton); "distinguishing between what is morally good and bad."—*Greek-English Lexicon*, by J. H. Thayer.

render judgment about ourselves. (Romans 9:1) Adam and Eve manifested this faculty as soon as they broke God's law—they hid themselves. (Genesis 3:7, 8) Another example of how the conscience operates is the way King David reacted when he discerned that he had sinned by taking a census. The Bible says that "David's heart began to beat him."—2 Samuel 24:1-10.

The ability to look back and judge one's moral conduct can produce the very important effect of godly repentance. David wrote: "When I kept silent my bones wore out through my groaning all day long. My sin I finally confessed to you, and my error I did not cover. I said: 'I shall make confession over my transgressions to Jehovah.' And you yourself pardoned the error of my sins." (Psalm 32:3, 5) Thus, a functioning conscience can bring the sinner back to God, helping him to recognize the need to have God's forgiveness and to follow His ways.—Psalm 51:1-4, 9, 13-15.

The conscience also provides warnings or gives guidance when we have to make a choice or a moral decision. It was this aspect of conscience that may have helped Joseph to sense beforehand that adultery was wrong and bad—a sin against God. A specific law against adultery was later included in the Ten Commandments given to Israel. (Genesis 39:1-9; Exodus 20:14) Clearly, we stand to benefit far more when our con-



Is your conscience trained to guide you rather than just judge you?

science is trained to guide us rather than just judge us. Does your conscience work in such a manner?

Training the Conscience to Make Right Decisions

Although we inherit the faculty of conscience, that endowment is unfortunately flawed. Though mankind was given a perfect start, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Because we are marred by sin and imperfection, our conscience may be warped and may no longer function fully in the ways originally intended. (Romans 7:18-23) In addition, external factors can affect our conscience. It can be influenced by our upbringing or by local

customs, beliefs, and environment. Surely the degraded morals and the falling standards of the world cannot be the standard of a good conscience.

A Christian, therefore, must have the additional assistance of the firm and righteous standards found in God's Word, the Bible. These can guide our conscience to assess matters correctly and set them straight.

(2 Timothy 3:16) When our conscience is enlightened according to God's standards, it can better serve as a moral safety device, enabling us "to distinguish both right and wrong." (Hebrews 5:14) Without God's standards, our conscience may give us no warning when we stray into a bad course. "There exists a way that is upright before a man," says the Bible, "but the ways of death are the end of it afterward."—Proverbs 16:25; 17:20.

In some areas of life, God's Word sets out explicit guidelines and directions, and we do well to follow them. On the other hand, there are many situations for which there are no specific instructions in the Bible. These may involve choices in employment, health matters, recreation, dress and grooming, and other areas. It is not easy to know what to do in each case and make the right decision. For that reason we should have the attitude of David, who prayed: "Make me know your own ways, O Jehovah; teach me your own paths. Make me walk in your truth and teach me, for you are my God of salvation." (Psalm 25:4, 5) The better we understand God's views and ways, the more we will be able to evaluate our circumstances accurately and make decisions with a clean conscience.

Hence, when faced with a question or a decision, we should first reflect on Bible principles that may apply. Some of these may be: respect for headship (Colossians

3:18, 20); honesty in all things (Hebrews 13:18); hatred of what is bad (Psalm 97: 10); pursuing peace (Romans 14:19); obedience to established authorities (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13: 1-7); exclusive devotion to God (Matthew 4:10); being no part of the world (John 17: 14); avoiding bad associations (1 Corinthians 15:33); modesty in dress and grooming (1 Timothy 2:9, 10); and not causing others to stumble (Philippians 1:10). Identifying the relevant Bible principle can thus strengthen our conscience and help us make the right decision.

Listen to Your Conscience

In order for our conscience to help us, we must heed it. Only when we respond promptly to the proddings of our Bible-trained conscience do we benefit from it. We can compare the trained conscience to the warning lights on an automobile's instrument panel. Suppose a light comes on warning us that the oil pressure is low. What would happen if we did not

give prompt attention to the matter and continued to drive the vehicle? We could cause serious damage to the motor. In a similar way, our conscience, or inner voice, can alert us that a certain course of action is wrong. Comparing our Scriptural standards and values with the course of action being taken or contemplated, it flashes a warning, as the light on the instrument panel does. Heeding the warning will help us not only to avoid the bad consequences of the wrong action but also to preserve the proper operation of our conscience.

What would happen if we

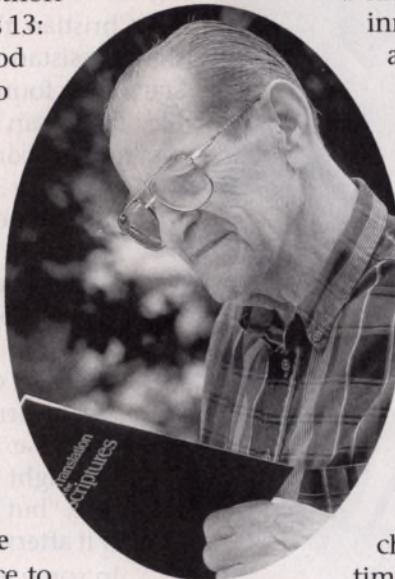
chose to ignore the warning? In time, the conscience could become insensitive. The effect of persistently ignoring or suppressing the conscience can be likened to that of searing the flesh with a branding iron. The scar tissue, devoid of nerve endings, has no more sense of feeling. (1 Timothy 4:2) Such a conscience no longer reacts to the commission of sin, nor does it give warnings to prevent a repetition of the sin. A scarred conscience ignores Bible standards of right and wrong and thus is a bad conscience. It is a defiled conscience, its possessor being "past all moral sense" and alienated from God. (Ephesians 4:17-19; Titus 1:15) What a tragic outcome!

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Benefit From the Best Education Available!

Jehovah's Word Soars in "the Land of the Eagle"

Cultivate Genuine Humility



A well-trained conscience results from our learning and applying Bible principles

"Hold a Good Conscience"

To maintain a good conscience requires constant effort. The apostle Paul stated: "I am exercising myself continually to have a consciousness of committing no offense against God and men." (Acts 24:16) As a



Do not ignore the warnings of your conscience

Christian, Paul continually checked and corrected his course of action to make sure that he committed no offense against God. Paul knew that in the final analysis, it is God who will determine the rightness or wrongness of what we do. (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 4:4) Paul said: "All things are naked and openly exposed to the eyes of him with whom we have an accounting."—Hebrews 4:13.

Paul also made mention of committing no offense against men. A case in point is his counsel to the Corinthian Christians concerning "the eating of foods offered to idols." His point was that even when a certain course may not be objectionable in itself from the standpoint of God's Word, it is vital to take into account the conscience of others. Failing to do so can cause spiritual 'ruin to our brothers for whose sake Christ died.' We could also ruin our own relation-

ship with God.—1 Corinthians 8:4, 11-13; 10:23, 24.

Thus, continue to train your conscience and to keep a good conscience. When making decisions, seek God's guidance. (James 1:5) Study God's Word, and allow its principles to mold your mind and heart. (Proverbs 2:3-5) When serious issues arise, consult with mature Christians to be sure that you have the correct understanding of the Bible principles involved. (Proverbs 12:15; Romans 14:1; Galatians 6:5) Consider how your decision will affect your conscience, how it will affect others and, above all, how it will affect your relationship with Jehovah.—1 Timothy 1:5, 18, 19.

Our conscience is a marvelous gift from our loving heavenly Father, Jehovah God. By using it in harmony with the will of its Giver, we will draw closer to our Creator. As we endeavor to "hold a good conscience" in all that we do, we come that much closer to showing that we are made in God's image.—1 Peter 3:16; Colossians 3:10.



MY PARENTS' EXAMPLE STRENGTHENED ME

AS TOLD BY
JANEZ REKELJ

The year was 1958. My wife, Stanka, and I were high in the Karawanken Alps on the Yugoslav-Austrian border, attempting to flee to Austria. This was dangerous, as armed Yugoslav border patrols were determined to prevent anyone from crossing. As we moved on, we were confronted by a sheer cliff dropping away beneath us. Stanka and I had never seen the Austrian side of the mountains before. We headed east until we came to a rough slope of rock and gravel. Tying ourselves to a tarpaulin we were carrying, we slid down the mountainside to an uncertain future.

LET me relate how we came to be in this situation and how my parents' faithful example motivated me to remain loyal to Jehovah in times of difficulty.

I grew up in Slovenia, which today is a small Central European country. It is nestled in the European Alps, with Austria to the north, Italy to the west, Croatia to the south, and Hungary to the east. However, when my

parents, Franc and Rozalija Rekelj, were born, Slovenia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the end of World War I, Slovenia became part of a new state called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. In 1929 the name of the country was changed to Yugoslavia, literally "South Slavia." I was born on January 9 of that same year, on the outskirts of the village of Podhom, near picturesque Lake Bled.



My parents in the late 1920's

Mother had a strict Catholic upbringing. One of her uncles was a priest, and three of her aunts were nuns. She had a burning desire to own a Bible, to read it, and to understand it. Father, however, took a dim view of religion. He was disgusted by religion's role in the Great War of 1914-18.

Learning the Truth

Sometime after the war, my mother's cousin, Janez Brajec, and his wife, Ančka, became Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known. At the time, they lived in Austria. From about 1936 onward, Ančka came to visit Mother on a number of occasions. She provided a Bible, which Mother quickly read, along with copies of *The Watchtower* and other Bible publications in Slovenian. Finally, because of Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938, Janez and Ančka moved back to Slovenia. I recall that they were an educated, discerning couple with a real love for Jehovah.

*My mother, far right,
with Ančka, who taught
her the truth*

They often discussed Bible truths with Mother, which moved her to dedicate her life to Jehovah. She was baptized in 1938.¹

Mother caused a stir in the area when she stopped observing unscriptural customs, such as the celebrating of Christmas; when she would no longer eat blood sausage; and particularly when she took all the images in our possession and burned them. Opposition was not slow in coming. Mother's aunts, the nuns, made it a point to write to her, trying to convince her to return to Mary and the church. However, when Mother wrote and asked them for answers to specific Bible questions, she received no reply. My grandfather also strongly opposed her. He was not a bad man, but he was put under a great deal of pressure by our relatives and the community. As a result, he destroyed Mother's Bible literature on a number of occasions, but he never touched her Bible. He begged her on his knees to return to the church. He even went so far as to threaten her with a knife. My father, though, let him know in no uncertain terms that such behavior would not be tolerated.

Father continued to support Mother's right to read the Bible and to make her own choices as to her beliefs. In 1946 he too was baptized. Seeing how Jehovah strengthened my mother to stand up fearlessly for the truth despite opposition and how Jehovah rewarded her for her faith motivated me to develop





*With my wife, Stanka,
shortly after we were married*

my own relationship with God. I also benefited greatly from Mother's habit of reading aloud to me from the Bible and from Bible-based publications.

Mother also had long discussions with her sister, Marija Repe, and eventually Aunt Marija and I were baptized on the same day in the middle of July 1942. A brother came to give a short talk, and we were baptized at our home in a large wooden tub.

Forced Labor During World War II

In 1942, in the midst of World War II, Germany and Italy invaded Slovenia and divided it among themselves and Hungary. My parents refused to join the *Volksbund*, the Nazi people's organization. I refused to say "Heil Hitler" in school. Apparently, my teacher informed the authorities of the situation.

We were put on a train bound for a castle near the village of Hüttenbach, Bavaria, that was used as a forced labor camp. Father arranged for me to work and live with the local baker and his family. During this time, I learned to be a baker, which later proved very useful. In time, all the rest of my family (including Aunt Marija and her family) were transferred to the camp in Gunzenhausen.

At the end of the war, I was going to join a group to travel to where my parents were. On

the evening before I was to leave, Father turned up. I do not know where I would have ended up if I had gone with the group, as it was of questionable character. Once more, I felt Jehovah's loving care as he used my parents to protect and train me. Father and I walked for three days to meet up with the family. By June 1945 we all arrived back home.

After the war, the Communists under the leadership of President Josip Broz Tito came to power in Yugoslavia. Consequently, conditions for Jehovah's Witnesses remained difficult.

In 1948 a brother came from Austria and accepted a meal from us. Everywhere he went, the police followed him and arrested the brothers he visited. Father too was arrested for offering him hospitality and not reporting him to the police, and Father spent two years in prison as a result. This was a very difficult time for Mother not only because Father was absent but also because she knew that my younger brother and I would soon face the test of neutrality.

Prison Term in Macedonia

In November 1949, I received my call for military service. I went to report and to explain my conscientious refusal to serve. The authorities would not listen to me and put me on a train with the recruits headed for Macedonia, at the other end of Yugoslavia.

For three years I was cut off from my family and the brotherhood and was left without any literature or even a Bible. It was very difficult. I was sustained by meditating on Jehovah and the example of his Son, Jesus Christ. My parents' example also strengthened me. In addition, constant prayer for strength enabled me to avoid despair.

In time, I was sent to a prison in Idrizovo, near Skopje. In this prison, inmates worked at various tasks and trades. Initially, I worked as

a cleaner and as a courier between offices. Although often bullied by one prisoner who was formerly a member of the secret police, I had a good working relationship with everyone else—guards, prisoners, even the manager of the prison factory.

Later, I learned that a baker was needed in the prison bakery. A few days thereafter, the manager came to the roll call. He walked up the line, stopped in front of me, and asked, "Are you a baker?" "Yes, sir," I said. "Tomorrow morning report to the bakery," was his reply. The prisoner who had mistreated me passed by the bakery often but could do nothing about it. I worked there from February to July in 1950.

I was then transferred to the barracks called Volkoderi, in the south of Macedonia, near Lake Prespa. From nearby Otešovo I was able to write letters home. I worked on a road gang, but most of the time, I worked in a bakery, which made things easier for me. I was released in November of 1952.

During the time I was absent from Podhom, a congregation was formed in the area. At first, the congregation met in a guesthouse in Spodnje Gorje. Later, Father made a room available in our house for the congregation to meet in. I was happy to join them when I returned from Macedonia. I also renewed my acquaintance with Stanka, whom I met before I went to prison. On April 24, 1954, we were married. My respite, however, was coming to a close.

Prison Term in Maribor

In September 1954, I received another call-up. This time, I was sentenced to more than three and a half years in a prison in Maribor, which is located at the eastern end of Slovenia. As soon as I was able to, I purchased some paper and pencils. I started to write down everything I could remember—scriptures, quotes from *The Watchtower*,

and thoughts from other Christian publications. I read my notes and added more to my book as I remembered more. In the end, the book was full, and this enabled me to stay focused on the truth and remain spiritually strong. Prayer and meditation were also invaluable aids to my spiritual strength, enabling me to be more courageous in sharing the truth with others.

At that time, I was allowed to receive one letter a month and one 15-minute visit a month. Stanka traveled all night on the train in order to be at the prison early to visit me, and then she could travel back the same day. I found these visits to be very encouraging. Then I put into action a plan to get a Bible. Stanka and I were seated opposite each other at a table, with a guard assigned to watch us. When the guard was not looking, I slipped a letter into her handbag, asking her to put a Bible in her bag the next time she visited.

Stanka and my parents thought that this was too dangerous, so they took apart a copy of the Christian Greek Scriptures and put pages of it inside some buns. In this way I received the Bible I needed. In the same manner, I also received copies of *The Watchtower*, handwritten by Stanka. I would immediately make another copy in my own handwriting and destroy the original so that no one

The congregation that met in our family home in 1955



finding the articles would be able to discover where I had obtained them.

Because of my persistent witnessing, fellow prisoners commented that I would surely get in trouble. On one occasion, I was engaged in quite an animated Bible discussion with a fellow prisoner. We heard the key being inserted in the lock, and in walked a guard. I immediately thought that I would receive solitary confinement. But that was not the guard's intention. He had heard the discussion and wanted to join in. Satisfied with the answers to his questions, he left and locked the cell door behind him.

During the last month of my sentence, the commissioner in charge of reforming the prisoners commended me for my determined stand for the truth. I felt that this was a fine reward for my efforts to make known Jehovah's name. In May 1958, I was again released from jail.

Escape to Austria, Then Australia

In August 1958 my mother died. She had been ill for some time. Then in September of 1958, I received my third call-up. That evening Stanka and I made the momentous decision that led us to the dramatic border crossing mentioned earlier. Without telling anyone, we packed a couple of backpacks and a tarpaulin and left through the window, bound for the Austrian border just west of Mount Stol. It seemed that Jeho-

vah made the way out for us when he knew that we needed some relief.

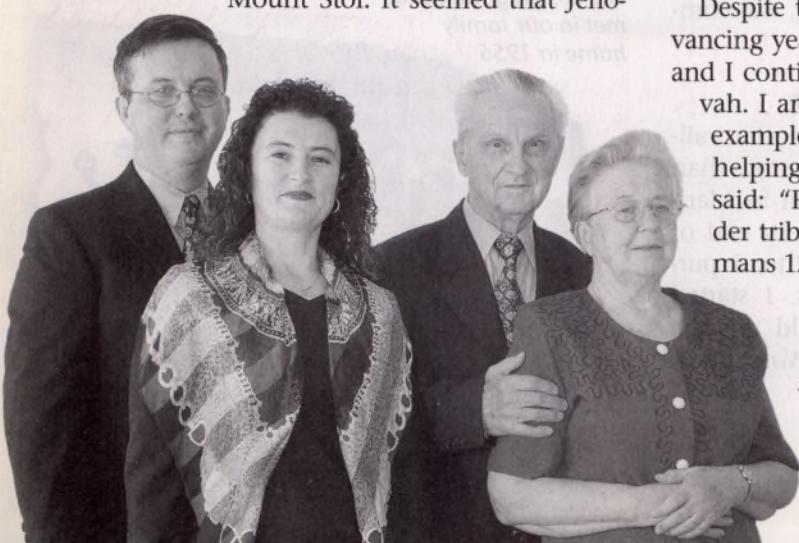
The Austrian authorities sent us to a refugee camp near Salzburg. During our six months there, we were always with the local Witnesses, so we spent very little time in the camp. Others in the camp were amazed at how quickly we had made friends. It was during this time that we attended our first assembly. Another first was being able to preach freely from house to house. It was very difficult for us to leave these dear friends when it was time to depart.

The Austrian authorities offered us the chance to immigrate to Australia. Never did we even dream that we would go so far. We traveled by train to Genoa, Italy, and then boarded a ship bound for Australia. We finally settled in the city of Wollongong, New South Wales. Here our son, Philip, was born on March 30, 1965.

Living in Australia has opened up many avenues of service, including the opportunity to preach to others who have migrated from the areas formerly known as Yugoslavia. We are thankful for Jehovah's blessings, including our being able to serve him as a united family. Philip and his wife, Susie, have the privilege of serving in the Australia branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses, and they even had the opportunity to spend two years at the branch office in Slovenia.

Despite the challenges brought on by advancing years and health problems, my wife and I continue to enjoy our service to Jehovah. I am so grateful for my parents' fine example! It continues to strengthen me, helping me to do what the apostle Paul said: "Rejoice in the hope. Endure under tribulation. Persevere in prayer."—Romans 12:12.

*With my wife, our
son, Philip, and his wife, Susie*



"KEEP ON THE WATCH" —THE HOUR OF JUDGMENT HAS ARRIVED!

"Keep on the watch . . . because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."—MATTHEW 24:42.

WHAT would you do if you knew that a thief was on the prowl, burglarizing homes in your neighborhood? To protect your loved ones and your valuables, you would keep alert, watchful. After all, a thief does not send a letter announcing when he is coming. On the contrary, he comes stealthily and unexpectedly.

² On more than one occasion, Jesus used the ways of a thief as an illustration. (Luke 10:30; John 10:10) Regarding events that would occur during the time of the end and that would lead up to his coming to execute judgment, Jesus gave this warning: "Keep on the watch, therefore, because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know one thing, that if the householder had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have kept awake and not allowed his house to be broken into." (Matthew 24:42, 43) So Jesus likened his coming to the arrival of a thief—unexpected.

³ The illustration was fitting, for the precise date of Jesus' coming would not be known. Earlier, in the same prophecy, Jesus

- 1, 2. To what did Jesus fittingly liken his coming?
3, 4. (a) What is involved in heeding Jesus' warning about his coming? (b) What questions arise?

The information in this study article is based on the brochure *Keep on the Watch!* released at the district conventions that were held around the world during 2004/05.

said: "Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36) Jesus, therefore, urged his listeners: "Prove yourselves ready." (Matthew 24:44) Those heeding Jesus' warning would be ready, conducting themselves properly, whenever he would come as Jehovah's Executive Agent.

⁴ Some important questions arise: Is Jesus' warning only for people of the world, or do true Christians also need to "keep on the watch"? Why is it urgent to "keep on the watch," and what does this involve?

A Warning for Whom?

⁵ It is certainly true that the Lord's coming will be thieflike to people of the world, who shut their ears to the warning of impending calamity. (2 Peter 3:3-7) However, what about true Christians? The apostle Paul wrote to fellow believers: "You yourselves know quite well that Jehovah's day is coming exactly as a thief in the night." (1 Thessalonians 5:2) There is no doubt in our minds that "Jehovah's day is coming." But does that minimize the need for us to keep on the watch? Notice that it was to his disciples that Jesus said: "At an hour that *you* do not think to be it, the Son of man is coming."

5. How do we know that the warning to "keep on the watch" applies to true Christians?

(Matthew 24:44) Earlier, when urging his disciples to seek continually the Kingdom, Jesus cautioned: "Keep ready, because at an hour that *you* do not think likely the Son of man is coming." (Luke 12:31, 40) Is it not clear that Jesus had his followers in mind when he warned: "Keep on the watch"?

⁶ Why do we need to "keep on the watch" and "keep ready"? Jesus explained: "Two men will be in the field: one will be taken along and the other be abandoned; two women will be grinding at the hand mill: one will be taken along and the other be abandoned." (Matthew 24:40, 41) Those who prove themselves ready will be "taken along," or saved, when the ungodly world is destroyed. Others will be "abandoned" to destruction because they have been selfishly pursuing their own way of life. These may well include individuals who were once enlightened but who did not keep on the watch.

⁷ Not knowing the exact day of the end of this old system gives us the opportunity to demonstrate that we serve God out of a pure motive. How so? It may be that the end seems to be a long time in arriving. Sad to say, some Christians who feel this way have allowed their zeal for Jehovah's service to cool off. Yet, by our dedication, we have without reservation presented ourselves to Jehovah to serve him. Those who know Jehovah realize that a last-minute display of zeal will not impress him. He sees what is in the heart.

—1 Samuel 16:7.

⁸ Because we truly love Jehovah, we find the greatest delight in doing his will. (Psalm 40:8; Matthew 26:39) And we want to serve Jehovah forever. That prospect is not less pre-

6. Why do we need to "keep on the watch"?
7. What does not knowing when the end will come allow us to do?
8. How does love for Jehovah move us to keep on the watch?

cious just because we must wait a little longer than we may have expected. Above all, we keep on the watch because we eagerly anticipate what Jehovah's day will mean for the accomplishment of his purpose. Our earnest desire to please God moves us to apply the counsel of his Word and give his Kingdom first place in our life. (Matthew 6:33; 1 John 5:3) Let us consider how keeping on the watch should influence the decisions we make and the way we live our life each day.

Where Is Your Life Heading?

⁹ Many people today recognize that serious problems and shocking events have become everyday occurrences, and they may not be pleased with the direction that their own life is taking. However, do they know the real meaning of world conditions? Do they realize that we are living in "the conclusion of the system of things"? (Matthew 24:3) Do they recognize that the prevalence of selfish, violent, even ungodly attitudes marks these times as "the last days"? (2 Timothy 3:1-5) There is an urgent need for them to wake up to the significance of all of this and to consider the way their life is heading.

¹⁰ What about us? Every day we face decisions that involve our employment, our health, our family, and our worship. We know what the Bible says, and we endeavor to apply it. Therefore, we do well to ask ourselves: 'Have I allowed the anxieties of life to push me off course? Am I letting the world's philosophies, its thinking, determine the choices I make?' (Luke 21:34-36; Colossians 2:8) We need to continue to demonstrate that we trust in Jehovah with all our heart and not lean upon our own understanding. (Proverbs 3:5) In that way, we will keep "a

9. Why is there an urgent need for people of the world to wake up to the significance of our times?
10. What must we do to be sure that we are keeping on the watch?

Jesus likened his coming to the arrival of a thief



firm hold on the real life"—eternal life in God's new world.—1 Timothy 6:12, 19.

¹¹ The Bible contains many warning examples that can help us to keep on the watch. Consider what happened in Noah's day. Well in advance, God saw to it that warning was given. But apart from Noah and his household, people took no note. (2 Peter 2:5) Regarding this, Jesus said: "Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be." (Matthew 24:37-39) What can we learn from that? If any of us are allowing mundane concerns—even the normal activities of life—to crowd out the spiritual activities that God urges us to keep in first place, we need to think seriously about our situation.—Romans 14:17.

¹² Think, too, about the days of Lot. The city of Sodom, where Lot and his family lived, was materially prosperous but morally bankrupt. Jehovah sent his angels to bring the place to ruin. The angels urged Lot and his family to flee from Sodom and

11-13. What can we learn from the examples of what happened (a) in the days of Noah? (b) in the days of Lot?

not to look back. Encouraged by the angels, they did leave the city. Lot's wife, however, evidently could not let go of her feelings for her home in Sodom. Disobediently, she looked back, and for this she paid with her life. (Genesis 19:15-26) Prophetically, Jesus warned: "Remember the wife

of Lot." Are we acting on that warning?—Luke 17:32.

¹³ Those who heeded divine warnings were spared. That was true of Noah and his family and of Lot and his daughters. (2 Peter 2:9) As we take to heart the warning in these examples, we are also encouraged by the message of deliverance contained therein for lovers of righteousness. That fills our heart with confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promise of "new heavens and a new earth" in which "righteousness is to dwell."—2 Peter 3:13.

'The Hour of the Judgment Has Arrived!'

¹⁴ As we keep on the watch, what can we expect? The book of Revelation outlines progressive steps in the fulfillment of God's purpose. Acting on what it says is vital if we are to prove ourselves ready. The prophecy vividly describes events that would occur in "the Lord's day," which began when Christ was enthroned in heaven in 1914. (Revelation 1:10) Revelation alerts us to an angel who has been entrusted with "everlasting good news to declare." He proclaims in a loud voice: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of the judgment by him has arrived." (Revelation 14:6, 7) That "hour" of judgment is a brief period; it includes both the

14, 15. (a) What does "the hour" of judgment include? (b) What is involved in 'fearing God and giving him glory'?

pronouncement and the execution of the judgments that are depicted in that prophecy. We are now living in that period.

¹⁵ Now, before the hour of judgment concludes, we are urged: "Fear God and give him glory." What does this involve? Proper fear of God should cause us to turn away from badness. (Proverbs 8:13) If we honor God, we will listen to him with deep respect. We will not be too busy to read his Word, the Bible, regularly. We will not minimize his counsel to attend Christian meetings. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) We will cherish the privilege of proclaiming the good news of God's Messianic Kingdom and will do so zealously. We will trust in Jehovah at all times and with our whole heart. (Psalm 62:8) Recognizing that Jehovah is the Universal Sovereign, we honor him by willingly submitting to him as the Sovereign of our life. Do you truly fear God and give him glory in all such ways?

¹⁶ Revelation chapter 14 goes on to describe further events that are to take place in the hour of judgment. Babylon the Great,

16. Why can we say that the judgment against Babylon the Great stated at Revelation 14:8 has already been fulfilled?

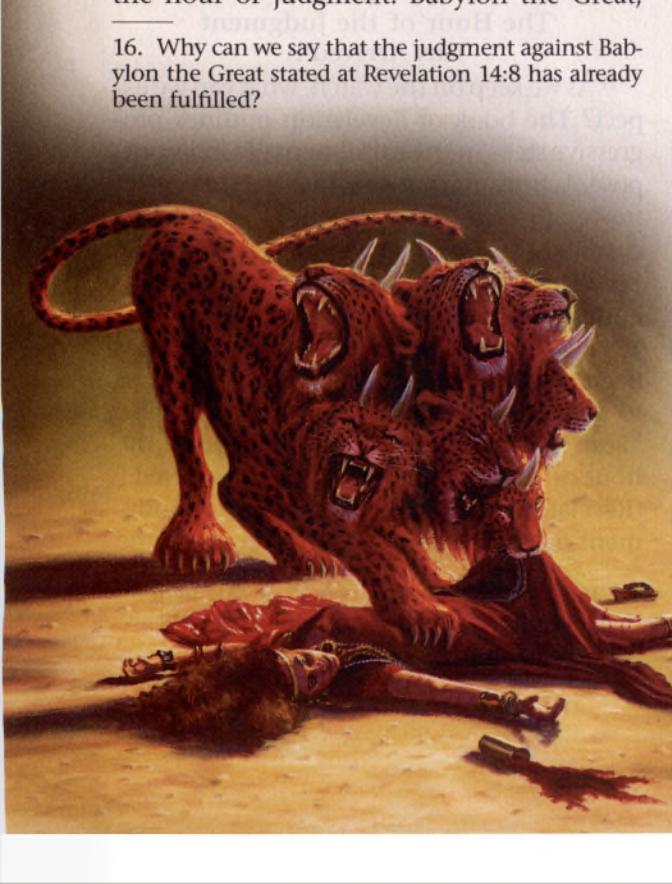
the world empire of false religion, is mentioned first: "Another, a second angel, followed, saying: 'She has fallen! Babylon the Great has fallen!'" (Revelation 14:8) Yes, from God's viewpoint, Babylon the Great has already fallen. In 1919, Jehovah's anointed servants were set free from the bondage of Babylonish doctrines and practices, which have dominated peoples and nations for millenniums. (Revelation 17:1, 15) They could henceforth devote themselves to promoting true worship. Global preaching of the good news of God's Kingdom has taken place since then.—Matthew 24:14.

¹⁷ That is not all there is to God's judgment against Babylon the Great. Her final destruction is soon to come. (Revelation 18:21) With good reason, the Bible urges people everywhere: "Get out of her [Babylon the Great] ... if you do not want to share with her in her sins." (Revelation 18:4, 5) How do we get out of Babylon the Great? This involves more than just severing any ties with false religion. Babylonish influence is present in many popular celebrations and customs, in the world's permissive attitude toward sex, in the promoting of entertainment involving spiritism, and much more. To keep on the watch, it is vital that both in our actions and in the desires of our heart, we give evidence that we are truly separate from Babylon the Great in every way.

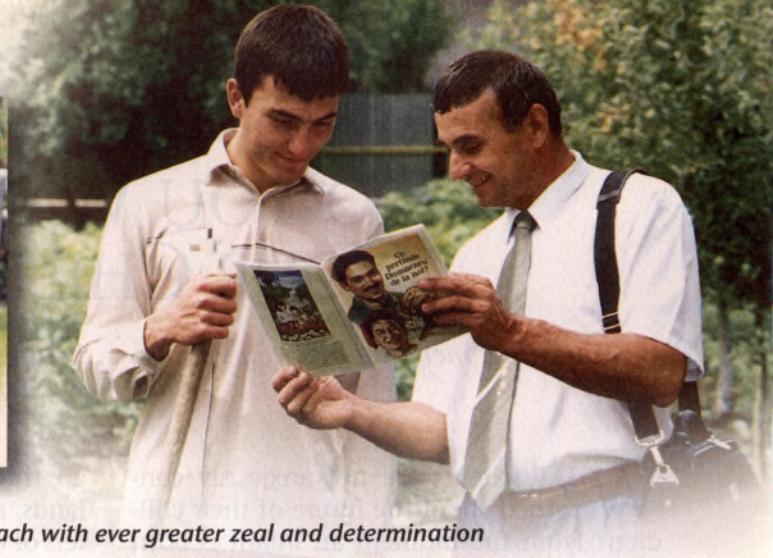
¹⁸ At Revelation 14:9, 10, a further aspect of 'the hour of judgment' is described. Another angel says: "If anyone worships the wild beast and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand, he will also drink of the wine of the anger of God." Why? "The wild beast and its image" are symbols of hu-

17. What is involved in getting out of Babylon the Great?

18. In view of what is described at Revelation 14:9, 10, what are alert Christians careful to avoid?



The destruction of
Babylon the Great is near



Let us be resolved to preach with ever greater zeal and determination

man rulership, which does not acknowledge Jehovah's sovereignty. Alert Christians are careful not to allow themselves to be influenced or to be marked, in either attitude or action, as being in servitude to those who refuse to acknowledge the supreme sovereignty of the true God, Jehovah. Christians know that God's Kingdom has already been set up in heaven, that it will put an end to all human rulerships, and that it will stand forever.

—Daniel 2:44.

Do Not Lose Your Sense of Urgency!

¹⁹ As we get deeper into the last days, pressures and temptations will only intensify. As long as we are living in this old system and are plagued by our own imperfection, we are affected by such things as poor health, old age, the loss of loved ones, hurt feelings, disappointment in the face of apathy toward our efforts to preach God's Word, and much more. Never forget that Satan would like nothing better than to exploit the pressures we face to induce us to give up—to stop preaching the good news or to quit living by God's standards. (Ephesians 6:11-13) This is

19, 20. (a) As we get deeper into the last days, what can we be certain that Satan will try to do? (b) What should we be determined to do?

not the time to lose our sense of urgency regarding the times in which we live!

²⁰ Jesus knew that we would be under much pressure to give up, so he counseled us: "Keep on the watch . . . because you do not know on what day your Lord is coming." (Matthew 24:42) Let us, then, keep ever alert to where we are in the stream of time. Let us be on guard against Satan's ploys that could cause us to slow down or quit. Let us be resolved to preach the good news of God's Kingdom with ever greater zeal and determination. By all means, let us keep our sense of urgency as we heed Jesus' warning: "Keep on the watch." Doing so, we will bring honor to Jehovah and will be among those in line for his eternal blessings.

How Would You Answer?

- How do we know that Jesus' warning to "keep on the watch" applies to true Christians?
- What warning examples in the Bible can help us to "keep on the watch"?
- What is the hour of judgment, and what are we urged to do before it concludes?

PARENTS—WHAT FUTURE DO YOU WANT FOR YOUR CHILDREN?

"You young men and also you virgins . . . Let them praise the name of Jehovah."

—PSALM 148:12, 13.

WHAT parents are not anxiously concerned about the future of their children? From the moment an infant is born—or even before—the parents start worrying about his welfare. Will he be healthy? Will he develop normally? As the child grows older, there are additional concerns. By and large, parents want only what is best for their offspring.—1 Samuel 1:11, 27, 28; Psalm 127:3-5.

² In today's world, however, it is a challenge for parents to provide what is best for their children. Many parents have gone through hard times—wars, political upheavals, economic hardships, physical or emotional traumas, and so on. Naturally, it is their heartfelt desire that their children not

1. What concerns do parents have for their children?
2. Why do many parents today feel strongly about having their children enjoy a good life when they grow up?

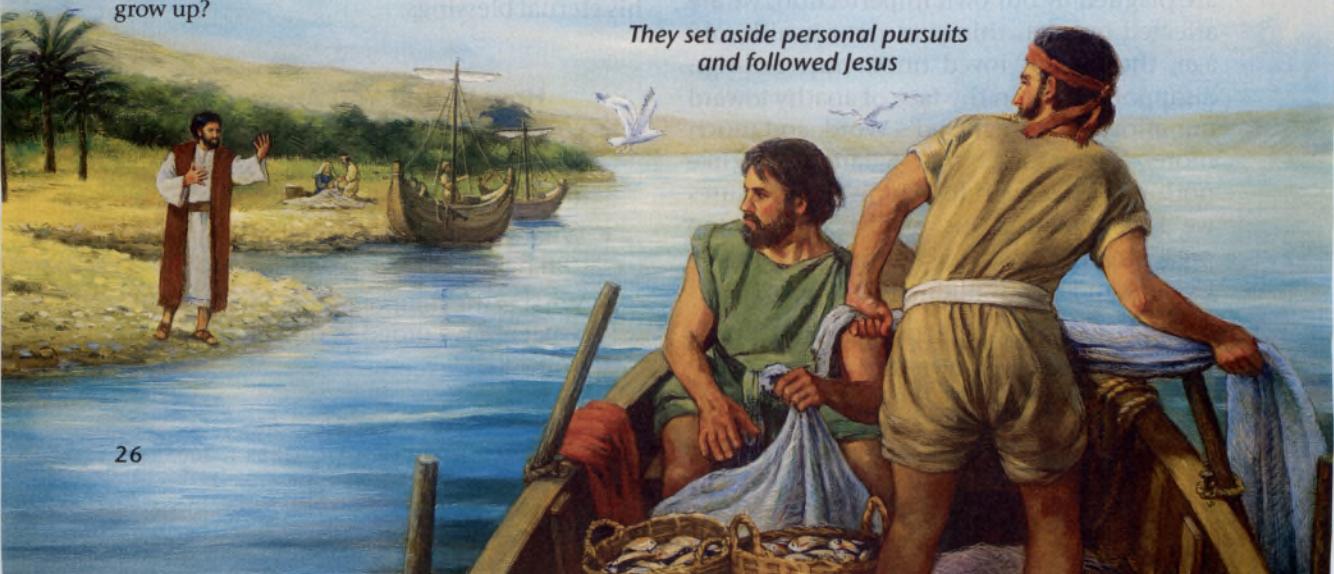
go through the same things. In affluent lands, parents may see the sons and daughters of their friends and relatives move ahead in professional careers and enjoy seemingly successful lives. Thus, they feel compelled to do everything they can to ensure that their children too will be able to enjoy a reasonably comfortable and secure life—a good life—when they grow up.—Ecclesiastes 3:13.

Choosing a Good Life

³ As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians have chosen to dedicate their life to Jehovah. They have taken to heart Jesus' words: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake day after day and follow me continually." (Luke

3. What choice have Christians made?

*They set aside personal pursuits
and followed Jesus*



9:23; 14:27) Yes, a Christian's life does involve self-sacrifice. Yet, it is not a life of deprivation and misery. On the contrary, it is a happy and satisfying life—a good life—because it involves giving, and as Jesus said, "there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

⁴ People in Jesus' day were living under very difficult circumstances. In addition to making a living, they had to bear the harsh rule of the Romans and the oppressive burden of the formalistic religionists of the day. (Matthew 23:2-4) Still, many who heard about Jesus gladly set aside personal pursuits—even careers—and became his followers. (Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9; Colossians 4:14) Were those disciples taking a risk and endangering their future? Note Jesus' words: "Everyone that has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive many times more and will inherit everlasting life." (Matthew 19:29) Jesus assured his followers that the heavenly Father knew their needs. He therefore urged them: "Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you."—Matthew 6:31-33.

⁵ Things are not very different today. Jehovah knows our needs, and those who put Kingdom interests first in their life, especially those pursuing the full-time ministry, have the same assurance that he will care for them. (Malachi 3:6, 16; 1 Peter 5:7) Some parents, however, are ambivalent in this regard. On the one hand, they would like to see their children make advancement in Jehovah's service, perhaps in time entering the full-time ministry. On the other hand, considering the economic and employment situation in the world today, they feel that it is impor-

4. What did Jesus urge his followers to pursue?
5. How do some parents feel about Jesus' assurance that God will care for his servants?

tant for young ones to get a good education first so that they will have the necessary qualifications for a desirable job or at least have something to fall back on if needed. To such parents, a good education often means higher education.

Preparing for the Future

⁶ The educational system varies from country to country. In the United States, for example, public schools offer 12 years of basic education. Thereafter, students may choose to attend university or college for four or more years, leading to a bachelor's degree or to postgraduate studies for careers in medicine, law, engineering, and so forth. Such university education is what is meant when the term "higher education" is used in this article. On the other hand, there are technical and vocational schools, offering short-term courses that result in a certificate or diploma in some trade or service.

⁷ The trend today is for secondary schools or high schools to groom their students for higher education. To this end, most high schools focus on academic subjects that enable the students to score well in university entrance examinations rather than on courses that will equip the students for the workplace. High school students today are under tremendous pressure from teachers, counselors, and fellow students to aim for enrollment in the best universities, where they will hopefully earn the degrees that can open for them doors to promising and well-paying jobs.

⁸ What, then, are Christian parents to do? Of course, they want their children to do well in school and learn the necessary skills for

6. In what way is the term "higher education" used in this article?
7. What pressures are students exposed to in high schools?
8. What choices are Christian parents confronted with?

maintaining themselves in the days ahead. (Proverbs 22:29) But should they simply let their children be swept along by the spirit of competition for material advancement and success? What sort of goals do they put before their children, either by word or by personal example? Some parents work very hard and save so as to be able to send their children to institutions of higher learning when the time comes. Others are willing to go into debt for this purpose. The cost of such a decision, however, cannot be measured merely in dollars and cents. What is the cost of pursuing higher education today?—Luke 14:28-33.

The Cost of Pursuing Higher Education

⁹ When we think of cost, we usually think of financial expenditures. In some countries, higher education is government sponsored and qualified students do not have to pay fees or tuition. In most places, however, higher education is expensive and is getting more so. A *New York Times* Op-Ed article observes: “Higher education used to be regarded as an engine of opportunity. Now it’s certifying the gap between the haves and the have-lesses.” In other words, quality higher education is fast becoming the domain of the rich and influential, who put their children through it to ensure that they too become the rich and influential of this system. Should Christian parents choose such a goal for their children?—Philippians 3:7, 8; James 4:4.

¹⁰ Even where higher education is free, there may be strings attached. For example, *The Wall Street Journal* reports that in one Southeast Asian country, the government runs a “pyramid-style school structure that unabashedly pushes the cream to

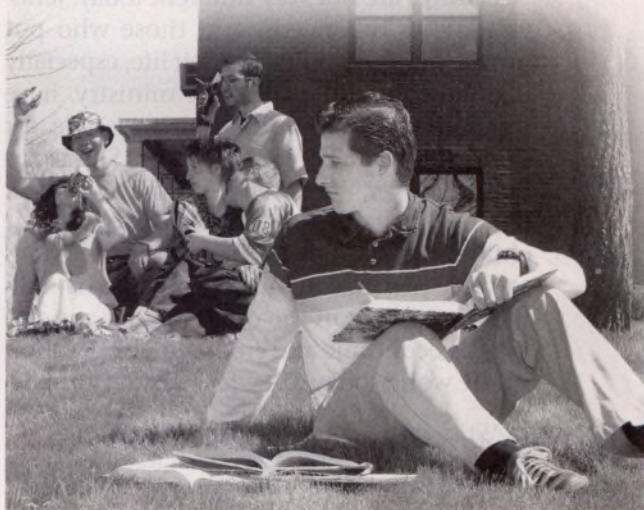
9. What can be said about the financial cost of higher education today?

10. How is higher education closely linked to advancing the present system?

the top.” “The top” ultimately means placement in the world’s elite institutions—Oxford and Cambridge in England, the Ivy League schools in the United States, and others. Why does the government provide such a far-reaching program? “To fuel the national economy,” says the report. The education may be practically free, but the price that the students pay is a life engrossed in advancing the present system. Though such a way of life is highly sought-after in the world, is it what Christian parents want for their children?—John 15:19; 1 John 2:15-17.

¹¹ Then there is the environment. University and college campuses are notorious for bad behavior—drug and alcohol abuse, immorality, cheating, hazing, and the list goes on. Consider alcohol abuse. Reporting on binge drinking, that is, drinking for the sole purpose of getting drunk, *New Scientist* magazine says: “About 44 per cent of [university students in the United States] binge at least once in a typical two-week period.” The same problem is common among young people in Australia, Britain, Russia, and elsewhere. When it comes to sexual immorality, the talk

11. What do reports show regarding alcohol abuse and sexual immorality among university students?



among students today is about "hooking up," which according to a *Newsweek* report "describes one-time sexual encounters—anything from kissing to intercourse—between acquaintances who've no plans to even talk afterward." Studies show that from 60 to 80 percent of students engage in this kind of activity. "If you're a normal college student," says one researcher, "you do it."—1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9, 10.

¹² In addition to the bad environment, there is the pressure of schoolwork and examinations. Naturally, students need to

12. What pressures are college students exposed to?

study and do their homework to pass the exams. Some may also need to hold at least a part-time job while going to school. All of this takes a great deal of their time and energy. What, then, will be left for spiritual activities? When pressures mount, what will be let go? Will Kingdom interests still come first, or will they be put aside? (Matthew 6:33) The Bible urges Christians: "Keep strict watch that how you walk is not as unwise but as wise persons, buying out the opportune time for yourselves, because the days are wicked." (Ephesians 5:15, 16) How sad that some have fallen away from the faith as a result of succumbing to the demands on their time and

What Is the Value of Higher Education?

Most people who enroll in a university look forward to earning a degree that will open doors for them to well-paying and secure jobs. Government reports show, however, that only about one quarter of those who go to college earn a degree within six years—a dismal success rate. Even so, does that degree translate into a good job? Note what current research and studies have to say.

"Going to Harvard or Duke [universities] won't automatically produce a better job and higher pay. . . . Companies don't know much about young employment candidates. A shiny credential (an Ivy League degree) may impress. But after that, what people can or can't do counts for more."—*Newsweek*, November 1, 1999.

"While today's typical job requires higher skills than in the past . . . , the skills required for these jobs are strong high school-level skills—math, reading, and writing at a ninth-grade level . . . , not college-level skills. . . . Students do not need to go to college to get a good job, but they do need to master high school-level skills."—*American Educator*, Spring 2004.

"Most colleges are seriously out of step with the real world in getting students ready to become workers in the postcollege world. Vocational schools . . . are seeing a mini-boom. Their enrollment grew 48% from 1996 to 2000. . . . Meanwhile, those expensive, time-sucking college diplomas have become worthless than ever."—*Time*, January 24, 2005.

"Projections from the U.S. Department of Labor through 2005 paint the chilling scenario that at least one-third of all four-year college graduates will not find employment that matches their degrees."—*The Futurist*, July/August 2000.

In view of all of this, more and more educators are seriously doubting the value of higher education today. "We are educating people for the wrong futures," laments the *Futurist* report. In contrast, note what the Bible says about God: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk. O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

energy or of getting entangled in unscriptural conduct at college!

¹³ Of course, immorality, bad behavior, and pressures are by no means limited to the college or university campus. However, many worldly youths view all such things merely as part of the education, and they think nothing of it. Should Christian parents knowingly expose their children to that kind of environment for four or perhaps more years? (Proverbs 22:3; 2 Timothy 2:22) Is the risk involved worth whatever benefit the young ones may receive? And most important, what are the young ones learning about things that should come first in their life?* (Philippians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:21) Parents must give serious and prayerful consideration to these questions, as well as to the danger of sending their children away to school in another city or another country.

What Are the Alternatives?

¹⁴ Today, the popular opinion is that for young people to succeed, the only option is to get a university education. However, instead of following what is popular, Christians heed the Bible's admonition: "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2) What is God's will for his people, young and old, in this final stage of the time of the end? Paul urged Timothy: "Keep your senses in all things, suffer evil, do the work of

* For accounts of those who valued theocratic education more than university education, see *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1982, pages 3-6; April 15, 1979, pages 5-10; *Awake!* June 8, 1978, page 15; and August 8, 1974, pages 3-7.

13. What questions must Christian parents consider?

14, 15. (a) In spite of popular opinion, what Bible counsel applies today? (b) What questions can young ones ask themselves?

an evangelizer, fully accomplish your ministry." Those words are surely applicable to all of us today.—2 Timothy 4:5.

¹⁵ Rather than be caught up by the materialistic spirit of the world, all of us need to 'keep our senses'—our spiritual bearings. If you are a young person, ask yourself: 'Am I putting forth my best effort to "accomplish my ministry," to make myself a qualified minister of God's Word? What are my plans for pursuing my ministry "fully"? Have I considered taking up full-time service as a career?' These are challenging questions, especially when you see other youths indulging in selfish pursuits, "seeking great things" that they think will lead to a bright future. (Jeremiah 45:5) Christian parents, therefore, wisely provide their children from infancy with the right kind of spiritual environment and training.—Proverbs 22:6; Ecclesiastes 12:1; 2 Timothy 3:14, 15.

¹⁶ "Mother watched our association very closely," recalls the eldest of three boys in one family in which the mother has been a full-time minister over the years. "We did not associate with our schoolmates but only with those in the congregation who had good spiritual habits. She also regularly invited those in full-time service—missionaries, traveling overseers, Bethelites, and pioneers—to our home for association. Listening to their experiences and seeing their joy helped to implant in our hearts the desire for full-time service." What a joy to see today all three sons in the full-time ministry—one serving at Bethel, one having attended the Ministerial Training School, and one pioneering!

¹⁷ Besides providing a strong spiritual environment, parents must also offer their chil-

16. How can Christian parents wisely provide the right kind of spiritual environment for their children?

17. What guidance can parents provide young ones in their choice of school subjects and vocation goals? (See box on page 29.)



Christian parents wisely provide their children from infancy with a strong spiritual environment

dren, as early as possible, proper guidance in their choice of school subjects and vocation goals. Another young man, now in Bethel service, says: "Both of my parents pioneered before and after they got married and did their best to pass on the pioneer spirit to the whole family. Whenever we were choosing subjects at school or making decisions that would affect our future, they always encouraged us to make a choice that would give us the best opportunity to find part-time work and pioneer." Rather than choose academic subjects that are geared toward a university education, parents and children need to consider courses that are useful in pursuing a theocratic career.*

¹⁸ Studies show that in many countries, there is an acute need, not for university graduates, but for people to work in the trades and services. *USA Today* reports that "70% of the workers in the coming decades will not need a four-year college degree, but, rather, an associate degree from a community college or some type of technical certif-

* See *Awake!* October 8, 1998, "In Search of a Secure Life," pages 4-6, and May 8, 1989, "What Career Should I Choose?" pages 12-14.

18. What job opportunities might young ones consider?

icate." Many such institutions offer short courses in office skills, auto repair, computer repair, plumbing, hairdressing, and a host of other trades. Are these desirable jobs? Certainly! Perhaps they are not as glamorous as some might envision, but they do offer the means and the flexibility needed by those whose true vocation is service to Jehovah.

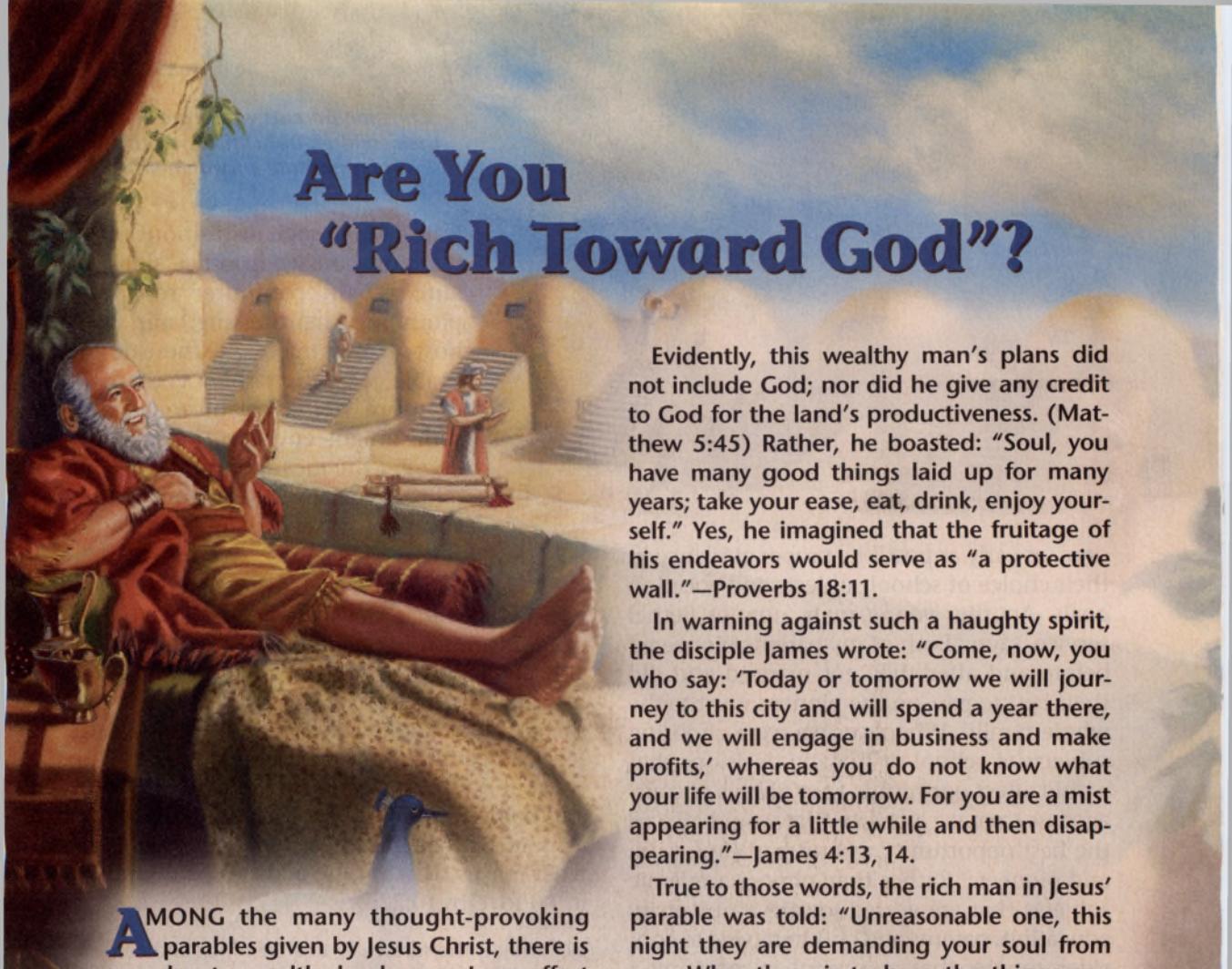
—2 Thessalonians 3:8.

¹⁹ "You young men and also you virgins," entreats the Bible, "let them praise the name of Jehovah, for his name alone is unreachably high. His dignity is above earth and heaven." (Psalm 148:12, 13) Compared with the positions and rewards that the world offers, a career in full-time service to Jehovah is without doubt the surest way to a life of joy and contentment. Take to heart the Bible's assurance: "The blessing of Jehovah—that is what makes rich, and he adds no pain with it."—Proverbs 10:22.

19. What is the surest way to a life of joy and contentment?

Can You Explain?

- In what do Christians put their trust for a secure future?
- What challenges do Christian parents face regarding their children's future?
- What must be considered when counting the cost of pursuing higher education?
- How can parents help their children to pursue a career in Jehovah's service?



Are You “Rich Toward God”?

Evidently, this wealthy man's plans did not include God; nor did he give any credit to God for the land's productiveness. (Matthew 5:45) Rather, he boasted: "Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, enjoy yourself." Yes, he imagined that the fruitage of his endeavors would serve as "a protective wall."—Proverbs 18:11.

In warning against such a haughty spirit, the disciple James wrote: "Come, now, you who say: 'Today or tomorrow we will journey to this city and will spend a year there, and we will engage in business and make profits,' whereas you do not know what your life will be tomorrow. For you are a mist appearing for a little while and then disappearing."—James 4:13, 14.

AMONG the many thought-provoking parables given by Jesus Christ, there is one about a wealthy landowner. In an effort to make a secure future sure for himself, the landowner made plans to build bigger storehouses. Yet, in Jesus' illustration, the man is called an "unreasonable one." (Luke 12:16-21) A number of Bible translations even use the word "fool." Why the harsh assessment?

True to those words, the rich man in Jesus' parable was told: "Unreasonable one, this night they are demanding your soul from you. Who, then, is to have the things you stored up?" Like a disappearing mist, the rich man would pass away before he could see his dreams fulfilled. Do we discern the lesson? Said Jesus: "So it goes with the man that lays up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God." Are you "rich toward God"?