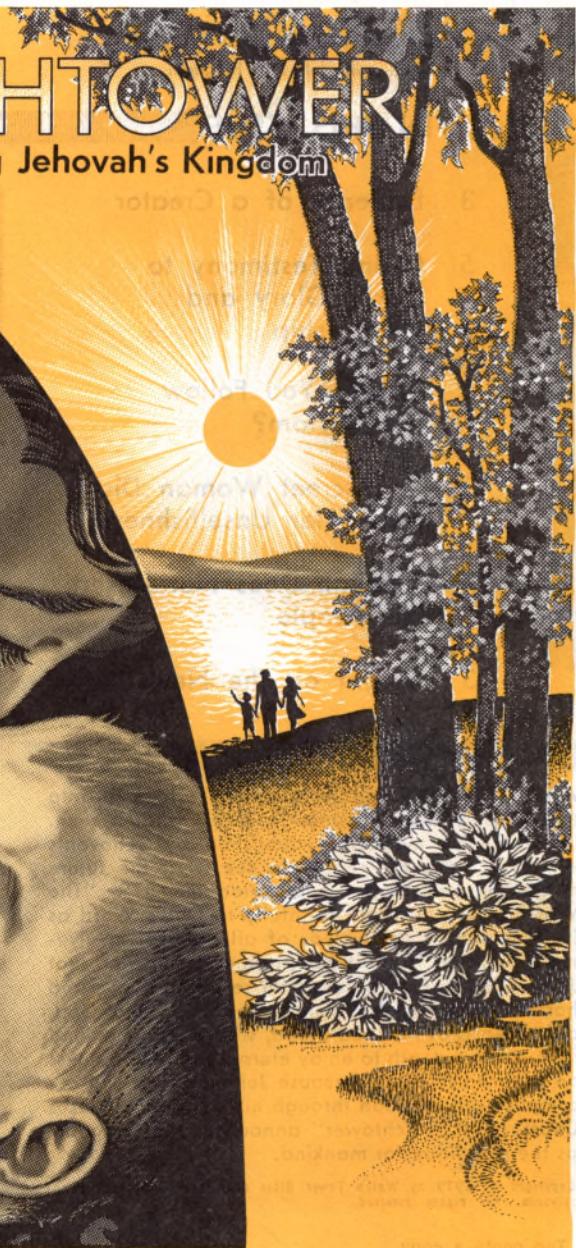


MARCH 15, 1979

THE

WATCHTOWER

Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom



GRAND TESTIMONY to GOD'S GLORY AND CREATORSHIP

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A WATCHTOWER enables a person to look far into the distance and announce to others what is seen. Likewise, this magazine, published by Jehovah's Witnesses, aids the reader to see what the future holds. Since it began publication in 1879, "The Watchtower" has held faithfully to God's Word as its authority. It stays clear of all political involvement. It points to the Bible prophecies showing that Jesus Christ is God's means for restoring peace and harmony to this globe. It shows that this Son of God, on the basis of his shed blood, will release mankind from sin and death to enjoy eternal life in happiness on a paradise earth. Because Jehovah God will accomplish all this soon through his kingdom by Jesus Christ, "The Watchtower" announces that kingdom as the real hope for mankind.

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Ten cents a copy

Watch Tower Society offices	Yearly subscription rates for semi-monthly editions in local currency
America, U.S., 117 Adams St., Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201	\$2.00
Australia, 11 Beresford Rd., Strathfield, N.S.W. 2135	A\$2.50
Canada, 150 Bridgeland Ave., Toronto, Ontario M6A 1Z5	\$2.00
England, Watch Tower House, The Ridgeway, London NW7 1RN	£2.00
Hawaii, 1228 Pensacola St., Honolulu 96814	\$2.00
New Zealand, 6-A Western Springs Rd., Auckland 3	NZ\$3.00
Nigeria, West Africa, P.O. Box 194, Yaba, Lagos State	#1.40
Philippines, P.O. Box 2044, Manila 2800	₱10.00
South Africa, Private Bag 2, Elandsfontein, 1406	R1.80

(Monthly editions cost half the above rates.)
Remittances for subscriptions should be sent to the office in your country. Otherwise send your remittance to 117 Adams Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201.
Printed in U.S.A.

NOW PUBLISHED IN 82 LANGUAGES

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Afrikaans, Arabic, Cebuano, Chichewa, Chinese, Cibemba, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hiligaynon, Ibo, Iloko, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malagasy, Norwegian, Portuguese, Sesotho, Shona, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Tagalog, Thai, Xhosa, Yoruba, Zulu

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The Bible translation used in "The Watchtower" is the modern-language "New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures," unless otherwise indicated.

Notice of expiration is sent at least two issues before subscription expires. Second-class postage paid at Brooklyn, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices.

CHANGES OF ADDRESS should reach us thirty days before your moving date. Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label). Write Watchtower, R.D. 1, Box 300, Wallkill, New York 12589, U.S.A.

POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Watchtower, Wallkill, N.Y. 12589.

Average Printing Each Issue:
9,200,000

Published by
Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society
of Pennsylvania

117 Adams Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201, U.S.A.
Frederick W. Franz, Pres. Grant Suiter, Secy.

EVIDENCE OF A CREATOR



TAKE the most powerful telescope, and look into the immensity of the heavens. Peer through a modern microscope into the amazing intricacy of molecules and atoms. And what do we see? This—that in the stupendously large, as well as in the minutely small, yes, in all the physical universe—there is *order, beauty* and *design*. And where we see design, what do we conclude? Does not the Bible indicate the answer, at Hebrews 3:4?—"Of course, every house is constructed by someone, but he that constructed all things is God."

And what about order? It was the God-fearing scientist Sir Isaac Newton who first noted that things in the universe were moving from order to disorder. This led to the conclusion that, unless there is purposeful intervention by some outside force, every physical transformation in the world about us must be accom-

panied by a loss in design. The original design is breaking down. In the first place, then, Someone must have designed, created and put things in order. Without that Designer's intervention, order will keep on breaking down.

That an intelligent Designer brought forth the universe is in harmony with what some scientists call the "big-bang" theory of creation. In recent years this theory has gained ascendancy over the "steady-state" theory, which claims that the universe has existed eternally, is without beginning. But we do not have to rely on the shifting sands of modern scientific theory to prove that there is a Creator. For the Creator himself makes clear who and what he is: "This is what Jehovah has said, . . . 'I myself have made the earth and have created even man upon it. I—my own hands have stretched out the heavens, and all the army of them I have commanded.'" (Isa. 45:11, 12) The evidence of his creatorship is to be observed and marveled at in so many things that we see around us.

"I . . . HAVE CREATED EVEN MAN"

No doubt, at some time or another, we have all fondled the tiny fingers of an infant—so delicate, so beautifully formed, so precious—so much more refined than animal claws! And no doubt we have reflected on how that baby's small life got started from a mother's egg the size of a pin point, by union with a father's sperm far too small to be seen by the unaided eye. Yes, we all had a tiny beginning, in an egg cell that divided and divided, and kept on dividing, till finally the more than 10,000,000,000,000 cells that make up the adult human "knew" when to leave off dividing.

The entire process of conception and selective growth is marvelous beyond our

comprehension. But it is not beyond the comprehension of God, for he is its Author. As King David said: "My bones were not hidden from you when I was made in secret. . . . Your eyes saw even the embryo of me, and in your book all its parts were down in writing." Yes, it is according to the "blueprint" made by a loving Creator that we were formed, given a marvelous body and endowed with moral attributes and qualities designed to keep our lives in balance and to make living a constant delight. So we have every reason to join David in his melodious words uttered 3,000 years ago: "O Jehovah, you have searched through me, and you know me. . . . You kept me screened off in the belly of my mother. I shall laud you because in a fear-inspiring way I am wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, as my soul is very well aware."—Ps. 139:1, 13-16.

There is no end to the wonders built into God's creation, man. How can some claim that life started by blind chance, and that man evolved from the amoeba by a series of accidents? In the infinitesimal human cell there are the ladderlike DNA molecules, each programmed for that particular individual, the same messages of life being written in each multiplying cell. These tell which cells must go to make up the eyes, the nose, the tongue, the ears, the teeth, the skin, the organs and all other body parts. They make sure that the "kind" is distinctly human, not ape or dog or any other lower animal. They spell out the inheritable characteristics of the individual. The specialized parts that come out of this growth process do indeed bespeak a brilliant Designer!

MAN'S MIND

Unquestionably the most amazing part of God's earthly creation, man, is the brain, in which is centered the mind. The

brain makes rapid growth, reaching three quarters of its adult weight in the first two years of life. No wonder that our toddlers are full of curiosity and questions: "Who made the sky? the birds? the cat? the flowers? Who made me?" Why, even at that early age, the youngster has observed that things about him have makers. He concludes, therefore, that all things had a Maker. Why is it that so many adults have strayed from such logical reasoning?

The brain itself is a marvel of living electronics. Literally thousands of scientists may work for years in producing and programming a computer suited to a particular field. Yet they must concede that, if they produced a computer to match the capacity and versatility of the human brain, they would need a multistory skyscraper to house it all. Yet the three-pound human brain, small enough to hold in one hand, is fully equipped to take care of its own programming, and to handle every field essential to human living. Moreover, as it picks up its messages from the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell, and triggers the speech and actions of its owner, it serves on a plane that no man-made computer will ever be able to attain. And what computer will ever operate from a heart exercising love, human kindness, thankfulness, appreciation? What computer will ever think, reason, explain, or worship its Maker?

In contemplation of man's marvelous makeup, and of all the created world about us, concerning God's visible works, we can say with Job: "Look! These are the fringes of his ways, and what a whisper of a matter has been heard of him!" (Job 26:14) But we do not need to stop at hearing only a whisper concerning our Creator. If we search in his Word, the Bible, we can learn much, not only concerning his creation, but of the grand purpose that lies behind it all.

GRAND TESTIMONY TO GOD'S GLORY AND CREATORSHIP

MANY people who question whether there is a God blind themselves to the evidence that he does exist. Because certain things happen daily, even persons who believe in God may not view these ordinary occurrences as testimony to God's glory and Creatorship. The inspired psalmist, however, stands out in sharp contrast with such persons. He saw in the repetition of very common things a piling up of evidence that unmistakably declared the glory of the Most High.

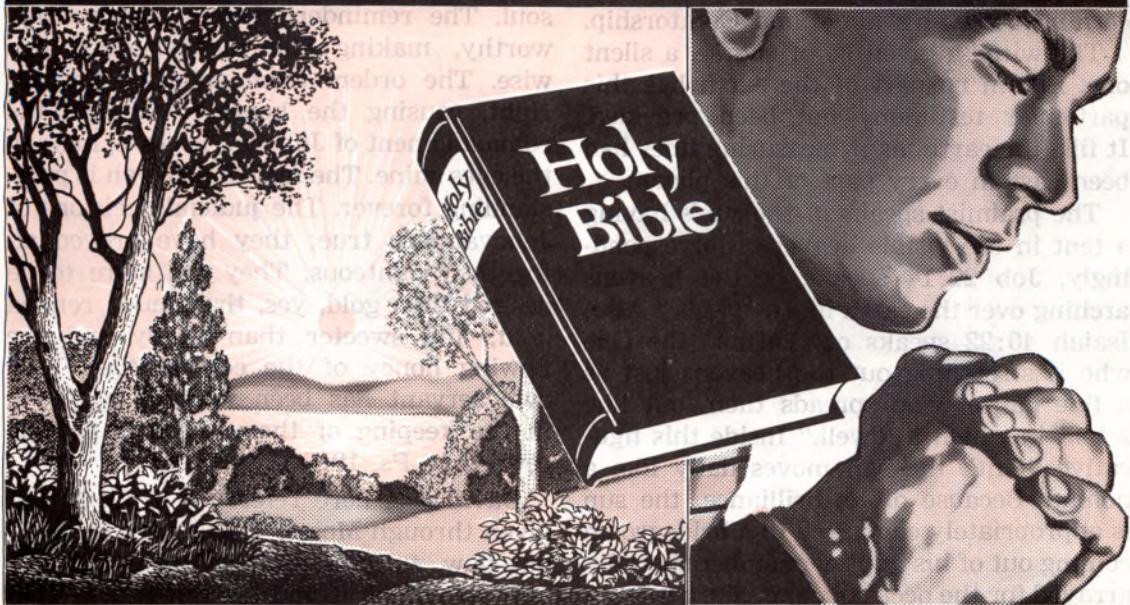
TESTIMONY OF THE VISIBLE HEAVENS

The psalmist wrote: "The heavens are declaring the glory of God; and of the work of his hands the expanse is telling. One day after another day causes speech to

bubble forth, and one night after another night shows forth knowledge. There is no speech, and there are no words; no voice on their part is being heard. Into all the earth their measuring line has gone out, and to the extremity of the productive land their utterances. In them he has set a tent for the sun, and it is like a bridegroom when coming out of his nuptial chamber; it exults as a mighty man does to run in a path. From one extremity of the heavens is its going forth, and its finished circuit is to their other extremities; and there is nothing concealed from its heat."—Ps. 19:1-6.

In this poetic way, the psalmist David indicated that the visible heavens—sun, moon and stars—declare God's glory. The

Creation, inspired guidance and divine help testify to the existence of a loving God.



great number of heavenly bodies, their orderly, dependable movements and the beneficial purpose that they serve provide grand testimony to a God of wisdom, power and benevolence. A God who has so well arranged the visible universe must be infinitely wise and powerful. When we consider, for example, how dependent on the sun life on earth is, we must conclude that the Maker of the sun deeply cares about living things. In revealing certain admirable qualities of Jehovah God, the visible heavens are indeed declaring his glory.

The testimony concerning God's glory and Creatorship is not limited to what can be seen in the heavens during the course of one day or one night. One day after another day and one night after another night present the same testimony. Just one 24-hour display of the sun, moon and stars would provide a marvelous witness concerning the Creator. But *each* day this testimony can be read in the skies above. So it is as if this witness is continually bubbling forth or effervesing by day and, during the night, the visible heavenly bodies are likewise providing knowledge concerning Jehovah's glory and Creatorship.

The witness given is, of course, a silent one. But in no part of the earth has this particular testimony not been provided. It fills the earth, as if measuring lines had been cast in every part of this planet.

The psalmist speaks of the sun's having a tent in the visible heavens. Correspondingly, Job 22:14 speaks of the heavens arching over the earth like a "vault." Also, Isaiah 40:22 speaks of God as "the One who is stretching out the heavens just as a fine gauze, who spreads them out like a tent in which to dwell." Inside this figurative "tent" the sun moves daily like a nomad. Because of its brilliance, the sun is appropriately compared to a bridegroom coming out of his nuptial chamber specially arrayed for the occasion, and, like a mighty

man running a race, it pursues its "circuit" through the heavens. Since the sun sheds its light on every part of the earth from the area of its rising to its setting, everything on earth benefits from its warmth or heat. There are no exceptions to this.

GOD'S LAW BEARS WITNESS

The witness concerning Jehovah's glory and Creatorship is not limited to what can be observed in the visible heavens. According to Genesis 1:14, one of the reasons for the existence of the heavenly luminaries is that they "serve as signs and for seasons and for days and years." So they have provided the means for calculating days and years, have guided men at sea and have been the means for determining the proper time for certain agricultural operations. But the heavenly luminaries are not the means that God has provided to guide men in making vital moral decisions. The Most High has provided his commands, and these, too, testify to his glory.

The psalmist David continued: "The law of Jehovah is perfect, bringing back the soul. The reminder of Jehovah is trustworthy, making the inexperienced one wise. The orders from Jehovah are upright, causing the heart to rejoice; the commandment of Jehovah is clean, making the eyes shine. The fear of Jehovah is pure, standing forever. The judicial decisions of Jehovah are true; they have proved altogether righteous. They are more to be desired than gold, yes, than much refined gold; and sweeter than honey and the flowing honey of the combs. Also, your own servant has been warned by them; in the keeping of them there is a large reward."—Ps. 19:7-11.

David was here referring to God's law given through Moses. It was perfect, without flaw, fully measuring up to the purpose for which it had been provided. That

law could bring back the soul or the individual in the sense that obedience to it brought a reviving of his being and promoted his welfare.

All the reminders included in God's law were trustworthy. They could safely be followed as a guide for life. Though inexperienced and unsure of himself, the person who heeded God's reminders would act wisely, avoiding a course leading to ruin.

The orders or particularized rules set forth in the Mosaic law were upright, that is, in full harmony with principles of righteousness and justice. By conducting himself in harmony with the conviction that God's orders are upright, a person would gain an inward happiness, a joy of heart.

Being pure, clean, without any undesirable trait, the commandment of Jehovah makes the eyes radiant with clearness of vision. It enables a person to avoid moral error and to follow an upright course.

A wholesome fear or a deep respect toward the Creator is manifest by obeying his commands. Such a fear is pure. It does not debase an individual as did the dread of false deities, whom their worshipers viewed as being angry and demanding to be appeased by human sacrifices. A wholesome fear of God is what the Law taught. Such a fear will continue to be expressed by Jehovah's devoted servants. It is, therefore, a fear that stands forever.

God's law consisted, in part, of judicial decisions. These were true, dependable, stable, being firmly founded on divine procedures of justice. In every respect those judicial decisions were righteous. Since the judicial decisions are from God and wholly beneficial, it is most desirable to have them in one's mind and heart. They are more valuable than material riches—gold. To persons who allow themselves to be guided by them, they are sweeter than

honey. These judicial decisions warn against a person's taking a wrong course, strengthening his determination to resist temptation. Adherence to them is rewarding in that such obedience promotes the highest good of the individual. He shuns a course of life that would be emotionally, physically and mentally injurious.

Truly a law so helpful and beneficial as the one given to the Israelites furnishes eloquent testimony regarding a wise, just and loving God.

HELP PROVIDED FOR GOD'S SERVANTS

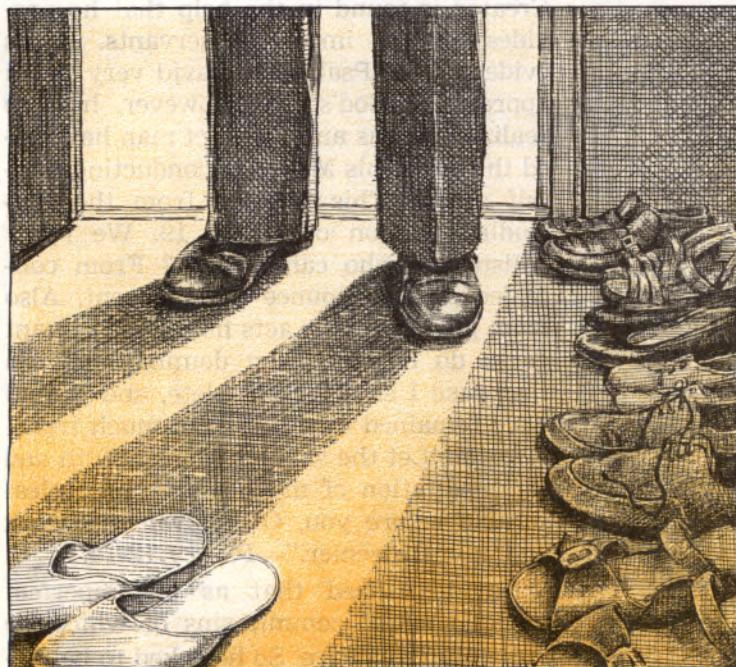
Additional testimony concerning the Creator is found in the help that he provides for his imperfect servants. As is evident from Psalm 19, David very much appreciated God's law. However, he also realized that as an imperfect man he needed the aid of his Maker in conducting himself aright. This is clear from the concluding portion of Psalm 19. We read: "Mistakes—who can discern? From concealed sins pronounce me innocent. Also from presumptuous acts hold your servant back; do not let them dominate me. In that case I shall be complete, and I shall have remained innocent from much transgression. Let the sayings of my mouth and the meditation of my heart become pleasurable before you, O Jehovah my Rock and my Redeemer."—Ps. 19:12-14.

David realized that as an imperfect man he might commit sins of which he was not even aware. So he asked to be forgiven the transgressions that might have been hidden from him. Then, when his imperfect flesh might prod him to take a wrong course, he very much wanted God's help. He desired that Jehovah restrain him from high-handed, presumptuous deeds. He wanted to be held back from having presumptuous acts become the dominant course of action for him. If he had indulged his sinful flesh, he would

have come under the control or domination of sin. He wanted, instead, to be complete in his devotion to the Most High. To the extent possible, he desired to be found "innocent from much transgression." Therefore, he prayed that his appeal for help, stemming from the "meditation" stimulated by the heart, be found pleasurable before his God. In times of danger and distress David relied on Jehovah as on a solid rock. He also regarded Jehovah as his Redeemer, the One who could

save him from the clutches of wicked men as well as from his slipping into sin.

Thus, Psalm 19 forcefully points to the combined witness of creation, the written law contained in the Bible and divine help given to upright ones as something revealing the existence of the Most High. This testimony should move us to want to be found approved by him. Yes, may the 'meditation of our heart' prove pleasurable to him as we continue to look to Jehovah God to direct our steps aright.



SHOULD YOU FOLLOW THE CUSTOM?

A COUPLE from Rhodesia were visiting friends in Austria. While there, they were invited to an informal gathering in the home of some other people. Upon entering that house, they were invited to take off their shoes and were each handed a pair of slippers. At first,

the couple were taken aback. They were not accustomed to taking off their shoes in front of strangers, especially in someone else's home. However, they soon recovered their composure and readily complied with the request. Why? Because it apparently was the custom of that household.

This, of course, was a relatively easy decision to make, since no big issue was at stake. However, not all problems involving custom are that easily resolved, especially when they relate to matters of Christian conscience. A great many customary practices are innocuous and, in fact, add zest and richness to life. Some are very damaging and can seriously impair a person's relationship with his Creator, whereas others should be earnestly sought after if one is going to walk in the way of life.

WHAT IS CUSTOM? Custom has been defined as a "long-established practice considered as un-

written law." It is also "a usage or practice common to many . . . or habitual with an individual." As a legal term, it applies to "unwritten law established by . . . uniform practice."

To illustrate this, let us turn to the Bible book of Genesis, chapter 29. There we find an account of Jacob's negotiations with his uncle Laban for the hand of his younger daughter, Rachel, in marriage. The agreement was that Jacob should work seven years for Laban in return for Rachel, whom he loved very much. At the end of seven years, Jacob approached Laban, saying: "Give over my wife, because my days are up." However, Laban tricked Jacob by giving him his older daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel. Obviously, Jacob was greatly upset at this deception and protested to his uncle. What was Laban's answer? "It is not customary to do this way in our place, to give the younger woman before the firstborn." In spite of his being thus deceived, Jacob did not dispute this unwritten law but showed his recognition of it by agreeing to wait for another week before receiving Rachel as his wife.—Gen. 29:15-28.

We might also use a modern-day example that demonstrates the meaning of the word "custom." In Rhodesia, marriages must be legally registered by a government agent in order to have official recognition. At one time this was not the case. The marriage celebration had to be carried out according to African custom, an unwritten law, in order to receive recognition in the community. Among other things, this involved the payment of a bride-price, or *lobola*, as well as the presence of a go-between to establish approval of the marriage by the parents or guardians. Even today many an African woman, although in possession of a marriage registration certificate, does not consider herself really married unless these customary practices have been followed.

These are examples of commonly practiced customs that are not necessarily bad, unless, of course, they are misused. Many, in fact, are very pleasurable and greatly add to the enjoyment of life. For instance, who does not enjoy eating Chinese food—or trying to—with a pair of chopsticks? The custom of removing one's shoes on entering a home not only is relaxing but also is a practical way of showing consideration for the hostess and her efforts to keep her house clean and neat. Also, from time immemorial, harvest customs have included rejoicing and merrymaking. (Ps. 126:5, 6) Yes, such customs add much to the joy of living.

Jesus Christ did not condemn all customary practices. In fact, on one occasion he chided a Pharisee named Simon for failing to follow a certain practice associated with hospitality. (Luke 7:44-46) On another occasion, Jesus took advantage of the custom of Scripture reading in a synagogue in order to give a fine witness concerning his Messiahship. (Luke 4:16-21; compare Acts 15:21.) The apostle Paul also made good use of the custom of reading the Scriptures in the synagogue. In fact, doing this, and explaining God's Word, became his personal custom. In Thessalonica, "according to [his] custom," Paul made use of a Jewish synagogue and "for three sabbaths he reasoned with [the Jews] from the Scriptures." The result? "Some of them became believers and associated themselves with Paul and Silas." (Acts 17:2-4) So, in order to give a witness, both Jesus and Paul took advantage of a fine custom.

CUSTOMS TO BE AVOIDED

There are customs, however, that are harmful. By the time that Jesus was on earth the Jews had built up a system of traditions that placed heavy burdens on the people. In fact, many viewed these traditions as having greater value than

the written word of God. Jesus himself scathingly denounced as hypocrites those who imposed such traditions and thus made void God's word. Did the guilty Pharisees benefit from this? No, for the disciples said to Jesus: "Do you know that the Pharisees stumbled at hearing what you said?" Not only were the Pharisees themselves blinded, but so were those on whom these traditions were being imposed. (Matt. 15:1-14) The ignorance fostered by such customs or traditions actually resulted in the Jews' putting to death the very one who proved to be the long-promised Messiah, "the Chief Agent of life."—Acts 3:14-17.

Today we also have customs that can lead to spiritual shipwreck unless we have a strong dependence on God's Word. In Rhodesia, for instance, it is customary for a newly married man to leave his wife in his home village and go to the city for secular work. According to unwritten law, he must do so or be censured by the community. But what generally happens when this custom is followed? Once in the city, the man has to have accommodations. So he finds a room, probably sharing it with one or more other persons. In time, he begins to feel the need for someone to cook his meals and wash his clothes. So he looks for what is called a *mapoto* wife. *Mapoto* is simply a term derived from the English word "pot" and transliterated into the Shona language. This woman not only cares for the man's household needs but also satisfies his sexual cravings. So the situation becomes a matter of living in adultery.

But what about the wife back in the village? She cares for the fields, the domestic animals and the children, and she may see her husband only once or twice a year. Without a husband at home most of the time, the woman also is sorely tempted to commit immorality. So here is a case where a customary practice can

lead to a direct violation of God's pure Word of truth. The Bible says that when a man and a woman enter wedlock they become one flesh and should therefore stick together. (Matt. 19:5, 6) Of course, there may be occasions when a husband or a wife finds it necessary to be separated from his or her mate for a time, possibly due to unforeseen circumstances. Or, this may even take place by mutual consent so that some temporary obligation can be fulfilled. But when living separately becomes a practice, as in the example just cited, it can lead to great harm.

Happily, Christian witnesses of Jehovah living where this practice is carried on have courageously borne the reproach that comes with failure to follow the custom. They do so rather than indulging in a course of action that results in Jehovah's disapproval and the possible loss of everlasting life. Some, rather than leaving their wives and going to the city for work, have enterprisingly engaged in raising such crops as coffee and bananas. Jehovah has blessed them for their sincere desire to stick close to their families and to the guidelines that he gives in his Word. Even though this might result in some form of community disapproval, they do it as unto Jehovah and not to men.—Col. 3:23.

Some customs involve practices so gross that they are detestable to Jehovah, and,

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hence, to his people. Among such practices are sodomy, bestiality, homosexuality, incest and other forms of sexual immorality. These were being indulged in by the Canaanite inhabitants of the Promised Land. After citing the practices that were unclean and detestable to him, Jehovah warned the Israelites: "You must keep your obligation to me not to carry on any of the detestable customs that have been carried on before you, that you may not make yourselves unclean by them." He then emphasized the seriousness of the matter by saying, "I am Jehovah your God."—Lev. 18:1-30.

Thus we see Jehovah's viewpoint of such vile practices. But what about today? Are these practices common in your country? What is the situation in your own neighborhood? Is it not true that some nations are even changing their laws so that homosexuality no longer is punishable by law and homosexuals are looked on as respectable in the community? Just as in the days of the ancient Israelites and the early Christian congregation, such practices are repulsive to all those who want to 'become holy in all their conduct.'—1 Pet. 1:15; Rom. 1:24-27.

DESIRABLE CUSTOMS TO FOLLOW

So far we have discussed customs that add pleasure to a person's life, customs that involve the matter of a Bible-trained conscience and those that must be avoided in order for a Christian to remain clean in Jehovah's eyes. Now let us give some attention to customary practices that the Christian would want to follow in order to maintain his separateness from the world. Call to mind that the definition of "custom" carries the thought of a practice that is "common to many," or "habitual with an individual." What are some customs that a Christian should develop?

Do you recall the account in the 17th chapter of the book of Acts, where it is

recorded that Paul and Silas left Thessalonica and went to Berea? How did the Bereans respond to Christian teaching? Verse 11 says: "They received the word with the greatest eagerness of mind, carefully examining the Scriptures *daily* as to whether these things were so." Is it your custom to make the study of God's Word a *daily* practice? Do you have periods of deep meditation on the things that you have learned? A person who makes this a regular custom in his life is counted happy.—Ps. 1:1, 2.

What about the matter of associating with fellow Christians in worship? Would you not say that this is a desirable practice to develop? The apostle Paul thought so. In fact, in writing to the Hebrew Christians, he made reference to a custom that apparently had developed among some—that of *neglecting* to gather together in such worship. Instead of approving this practice, the apostle urged his fellow believers to follow the opposite custom. He said that they should be gathering together in order to stir up one another to love and fine works. No less should we be doing the same thing—in fact, 'all the more so as we behold the day drawing near.'—Heb. 10:24, 25.

Finally, we might ask ourselves: How much concern do I show for others? Do I make it my practice to share the truth with fellow believers and others in their homes? Just examine the attitude of Jesus' apostles as to this practice. In Jerusalem, on one occasion, Peter and John were charged not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus. Before the Jewish Sanhedrin these apostles respectfully, but boldly, declared: "We cannot stop speaking about the things we have seen and heard." Then, after being released, these servants of God joined fellow believers, and all together they prayed: "Jehovah, give attention to their threats, and grant your slaves to keep speaking your word with all bold-

ness." (Acts 4:18-30) What a fine attitude!

But that was not all. Later, because of their bold activity, the apostles were put in prison. However, during the night they were released by an angel. And where did they go? To the temple to continue declaring the "good news." Soon they found themselves before the Jewish court. After boldly stating that they "must obey God as ruler rather than men," they were flogged and released. But what did they do? "Every day in the temple and from house to house they continued without let-up teaching and declaring the good news about the Christ, Jesus." (Acts 5:17-42) What fine habits these faithful followers of Jesus Christ had developed! Do you have

the same attitude toward the Christian custom of declaring the "good news"?

So, then, how would you answer the question, Should you follow the custom? Wise decisions will result in warm companionship with fellow believers while at the same time adding variety and richness to your life. Above all, you will thus be building up a close, warm, personal relationship with Jehovah, who provides all things for our enjoyment. Additionally, you will be ensuring for yourself, and perhaps for others to whom you declare the "good news," the privilege of living in God's new order of righteousness, where all customs will reflect the glory of Jehovah.—1 Cor. 10:31.

A DISCREET WOMAN *Displays Her Unselfishness*

THERE it stood in the city of Shushan (Susa). The structure was a magnificent palace! Its builders? Likely, Persian King Darius I and his son Xerxes I. Decorative materials for the building had been brought from distant places. For instance, an inscription of Darius states that the cedar timber was brought from Lebanon, the gold from Sardis and Bactria, the silver and copper from Egypt, and the ivory from such lands as Ethiopia and India.

² Today only meager ruins remain of that once-splendid palace. But through the Bible book of Esther, doubtless written by the devout Hebrew Mordecai, we can "visit" that royal residence during the early fifth century before the Common Era. We

can relive the dramatic events of a decade (from about 484 to 474 B.C.E.) when God's people faced probable genocide throughout the Persian Empire. Those were the days of Ahasuerus (evidently Xerxes I). Our venture into the distant past will be very rewarding, for such Biblical accounts were written for the instruction of godly persons, that 'through our endurance and

1, 2. (a) What dramatic events of the fifth century B.C.E. are we about to consider, and where are they recorded? (b) Who was Ahasuerus? (c) Why will this venture into the past be rewarding?

comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope.'—Rom. 15:4.

SELFISHNESS LEADS TO HUMILIATION

³ Persian King Ahasuerus, whose domain embraces 127 jurisdictional districts from India to Ethiopia, is occupying the throne at his part-time residence Shushan the castle, a complex of royal buildings within a fortified area. It is now the third year of his reign and he has called a conference of his princes, servants, military men and nobles. The gathering spans 180 days,

3-5. What is Shushan the castle, and what kind of gathering is held there in the third year of the reign of King Ahasuerus?

possibly to accommodate the numerous officials whose duties prevent their presence all at the same time. (A military purpose may have been involved, for the Greek historian Herodotus reported that in the third year of Xerxes' reign the king held an assembly to plan for warfare against Greece.)—Esther 1:1-4.

⁴ In concluding this notable gathering, the king holds a seven-day banquet for all the people in Shushan the castle. This feast is held in the courtyard of the palace garden. Just look at the surroundings! Why, decorative articles include linen, cotton, blue material held fast in ropes of fine



fabric, and reddish-purple wool in silver rings. Here are marble pillars and couches of gold and silver on a pavement of porphyry, marble, pearl and black marble.—Esther 1:5, 6.

⁵ At this banquet wine is being drunk from golden vessels of various kinds. The Persians are renowned for their drinking. But the custom of obligating guests to drink a specific amount is not being followed at this banquet.—Esther 1:7, 8.

⁶ Elsewhere in the royal complex, Persian Queen Vashti is holding a banquet for the women. It is now the seventh day of the king's feast and his heart is in a merry mood with wine. He tells seven court officials to bring beautiful Vashti before him and his guests. But, what is this? She keeps refusing to heed the king's word. Enraged, Ahasuerus seeks the advice of seven of his closest princes, a council of wise men well versed in legal matters. "According to law," asks the monarch, "what is to be done with Queen Vashti?" This selfish woman is guilty of insubordination!—Esther 1:9-15.

⁷ Listen! As chief spokesman of the seven princes, Memucan contends that Vashti has wronged, not only the king, but also the princes and people of the entire empire. Her conduct will become known and all the wives, even princesses, will despise their husbands. So, Memucan suggests, let the king decree that Vashti may not come in before him and that her royal dignity be given to a better woman. Then all the married women will honor their husbands.—Esther 1:16-20.

⁸ This recommendation pleases Ahasuerus. Soon documents are dispatched to all the jurisdictional districts, to each people in its own language. Now written among the unchangeable laws of the Medes and

6. Vashti is what kind of woman, and how is this made evident?

7, 8. (a) Vashti has wronged whom, and to what does her course lead? (b) What do you think we can learn from Vashti's conduct?

the Persians, this decree provides "for every husband to be continually acting as prince in his own house." (Esther 1:21, 22) Vashti's insubordination and selfishness have cost her the royal crown. They have led to her humiliation.

A SUBMISSIVE WOMAN GAINS FAVOR

⁹ Some time passes before the rage of Ahasuerus subsides. Then, in keeping with the recommendations of the king's ministers, appointed commissioners locate beautiful young virgins in all the jurisdictional districts. These women are brought to Shushan the castle and are placed in the charge of the eunuch Hegai. The selected virgins are to be given massages, and, finally, the young woman most pleasing to Ahasuerus will be made queen instead of Vashti. (About four years elapsed between the deposing of Vashti and the choosing of her replacement, the delay apparently resulting from the king's absence while prosecuting war against the Greeks.)—Esther 2:1-4, 16, 17.

¹⁰ Very interested in this search for a new queen is the king's servant Mordecai. This devout Jew of the tribe of Benjamin is a descendant of a certain Kish, whom the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar took into exile from Jerusalem along with King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) and others (in 617 B.C.E.). Some time ago, Mordecai became the guardian of the Jewish orphan girl Hadassah, whose name means "myrtle." Otherwise known as Esther (meaning "fresh myrtle"), she is the daughter of Mordecai's deceased uncle Abihail. And what a lovely young woman she has become! Why, she is "pretty in form and beautiful in appearance." It is not surprising that, as a replacement for Vashti is sought, Esther should be among the young women collected together at Shushan the

9. How will a queen be selected to replace Vashti?

10. (a) Who is Mordecai? (b) Who is Esther?

castle and placed in the charge of Hegai.
—Esther 2:5-8, 15.

¹¹ Esther is pleasing to Hegai, who hastens to give her the prescribed massages and appropriate food. In fact, seven young women are chosen to attend her in the best area of the house of the women. Esther does not reveal that she is a Jewess, thus complying with the instructions of her older cousin Mordecai. For six months, the selected virgins receive massages with oil of myrrh, followed by six months of massaging with balsam oil. Then each woman goes in to Ahasuerus, thereafter returning to "the second house of the women" in the charge of Shaashgaz, the guardian of the king's concubines.—Esther 2:9-14.

¹² Esther is unselfish, does not rely on showy adornment, and therefore requests nothing that Hegai does not mention. All along, she has been gaining favor in the eyes of everyone seeing her. It is now Tebeth (December-January), the 10th month in Ahasuerus' seventh year. Tension runs high as Esther is taken before the king. Is he pleased with her? Indeed he is! The Persian ruler comes to love Esther more than all the other women and makes her queen instead of Vashti. For all his princes and servants the happy king holds a great feast, "the banquet of Esther." Moreover, he grants an amnesty for the jurisdictional districts (perhaps remission of tribute, a release from military service or prison, or a combination of these). Ahasuerus keeps giving presents that only a monarch's wealth would make possible. What a time of joy!—Esther 2:15-18.

¹³ A truly submissive woman has gained

11. How does Hegai deal with Esther, and, in compliance with Mordecai's instructions, what fact does she not reveal?

12. What traits does Esther possess, how does Ahasuerus view her, and with what result?

13. (a) What was Esther's principal adornment? (b) How can 20th-century Christian women profit from considering the conduct of Vashti and Esther?

favor. Although Esther now sits as Persian queen, she complies with Mordecai's instructions. (Esther 2:19, 20) Looking back, we may well visualize Esther as a beautiful woman in royal attire. But her principal 'adornment was the secret person of the heart in the incorruptible apparel of a quiet and mild spirit, which is of great value in God's eyes.' (1 Pet. 3:3, 4) Twentieth-century Christian women have good reason to shun the selfishness of deposed Vashti and imitate the submissive, unselfish qualities of godly Esther.

¹⁴ It is also noteworthy that when Esther was made queen, there was great joy, in which Mordecai, her older cousin, surely shared wholeheartedly. He must have felt that this would work out finally for the benefit of all the Jews in the Persian provinces.

LOYAL, BUT UNCOMPROMISING

¹⁵ Esther has been keeping in touch with Mordecai and following his instructions. While he sits in the king's gate, court officials Bighan and Teresh (who seemingly guard the door of the king's private apartment) become indignant and keep seeking to lay hand on Ahasuerus. Learning of the plot, Mordecai immediately tells Esther, who speaks to the king in his name. Her statements launch an investigation. Soon the two traitors are executed and their dead bodies are publicly exposed on a stake or post because their crimes have been offenses against the king. Even though Mordecai then goes unrewarded, his act of loyalty is recorded in the current book of affairs.—Esther 2:21-23.

¹⁶ Although Mordecai is loyal and has proper regard for governmental authority, he is uncompromising. Time passes and

14. Why would Mordecai especially be joyful at Esther's becoming queen?

15. What plot does Mordecai report, and what happens to the traitors?

16, 17. (a) Who is Haman? (b) Why does Mordecai refuse to prostrate himself before Haman?

for some reason Ahasuerus appoints a certain wealthy Haman as prime minister. Also, by royal command all the monarch's servants at the gateway of the palace grounds are bowing low and prostrating themselves to Haman. But look at Mordecai! He persistently refuses to prostrate himself before the newly appointed prime minister. This fills Haman with rage.—Esther 3:1-5.

¹⁷ Why has Mordecai taken such a resolute position? Well, Haman is an Agagite, probably a royal Amalekite. Jehovah had decreed the eventual extermination of the Amalekites because they showed hatred of God and his people by attacking the Israelites in the wilderness. (Ex. 17:8, 14-16; Deut. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:1-33) Hence, godly Mordecai staunchly refuses to prostrate himself before Haman. Bowing would denote, not just respect, but peace and possibly homage toward this Amalekite. Mordecai is unyielding because this is a matter of maintaining integrity to God.

¹⁸ Enraged Haman begins seeking to annihilate both Mordecai and his people, the Jews throughout the empire. To that end, during Nisan, the first month in Ahasuerus' 12th year, the unscrupulous Agagite resorts to divination. He has "someone [evidently an astrologer] cast Pur, that is, the Lot." This is done to determine the most favorable day to exterminate Jehovah's people.—Esther 3:6, 7.

¹⁹ Speaking now to King Ahasuerus, Haman lyingly paints the Jews as undesirables, as lawbreakers. Adding an economic appeal, the Agagite says: "Let there be a writing that they be destroyed; and ten thousand silver talents [worth millions of dollars] I shall pay into the hands of those doing the work by bringing it into the king's treasury."—Esther 3:8, 9.

18. Enraged Haman plans to do what to Mordecai and the Jews throughout the Persian Empire?

19, 20. What does Haman lyingly say to Ahasuerus about the Jews, and so what is done?

²⁰ Does Ahasuerus believe the false charges? He does! Removing his signet ring, used to seal official documents, the king gives it to Haman. "The silver is given to you, also the people, to do with them according to what is good in your own eyes," says the Persian ruler. Soon, under Haman's direction, royal secretaries are penning letters containing a decree for the destruction of the Jews. In turn, the wicked Agagite uses the signet ring bearing the monarch's distinctive symbol. Haman presses the ring into wax or some other soft substance on these documents so as to authenticate them.—Esther 3:10-12.

²¹ Soon the letters are in the hands of couriers riding speedy post horses. The decree, published in various languages and carried throughout the empire, authorizes the plundering and annihilation of the Jews. When? On the 13th day of the winter month Adar (February-March). Understandably, then, while Ahasuerus and Haman sit and drink, there is confusion in the city of Shushan, where there are many Jews.—Esther 3:13-15; 9:18.

A TIME FOR COURAGE

²² As Mordecai learns of the genocide scheme, he rips his garments apart, puts on coarse sackcloth and ashes in symbol of mourning, and makes a loud and bitter outcry. Similarly, the imminence of calamity produces great mourning among the Jews in all the jurisdictional districts. However, there also is fasting—and surely many prayers are ascending to Jehovah God.—Esther 4:1-3.

²³ Esther, too, is greatly pained. She sends Mordecai garments to replace his sackcloth, but he does not accept them. In answer to an inquiry, he sends the

21. By royal decree, what is to happen to the Jews on Adar 13 in the 12th year of Ahasuerus' reign?

22. How do Mordecai and the other Jews react when learning about the genocide scheme?

23. Mordecai commands Esther to do what, but what could happen if she went in to the king uninvited?

queen a copy of the law just issued and commands her to go before the king to implore favor for her people. Her response? 'Everyone knows that any man or woman coming in to the king when not called will be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter will a person stay alive. As for me, I have not been called in to him now for thirty days.' (Esther 4:4-11) Yes, Esther would lose her life unless King Ahasuerus specifically approved of her presence by extending to her his scepter, the rod he carries as an emblem of his royal authority. It certainly would take courage and faith in Jehovah to go before the monarch uninvited.

²⁴ Nevertheless, Mordecai replies: "Do not imagine within your own soul that the king's household will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you are altogether silent at this time, relief and deliverance themselves will stand up for the Jews from another place; but as for you and your father's house, you people will perish. And who is there knowing whether it is for a time like this that you have attained to royal dignity?" (Esther 4:12-14) Mordecai has faith that Esther has been brought to royal dignity at this very time for a special purpose—the deliverance of God's people. But will she

24. What faith does Mordecai express regarding Esther's being brought to royal dignity?

display unselfishness, courage and faith?

²⁵ In reply, Esther urges Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan and fast in her behalf. "I shall fast likewise," she says, "and upon that I shall come in to the king, which is not according to the law; and in case I must perish, I must perish." Esther is about to jeopardize her very life, but this discreet woman is determined to act with courage and unselfishness in behalf of her people. So it is that Esther, Mordecai and the Jews at Shushan couple prayers with fasting and look to Jehovah God for their deliverance. —Esther 4:15-17.

²⁶ In modern times, too, spirit-anointed followers of Jesus Christ, who are spiritual Jews, and their associates must bravely face trials and foes. (Rom. 2:28, 29) The ruling King, Jesus Christ, may allow the enemies of God's people to go to the limit in their efforts to destroy them. How vital it is, then, that anointed Christians and their dedicated associates act courageously, praying for divine wisdom and manifesting victorious faith! But will Jehovah continue to uphold his people? Judge for yourself, as the dramatic events of Esther's day continue to unfold before us.

25. In fasting, what do Esther, Mordecai and the Jews at Shushan do?

26. Today, what may enemies of God's people be permitted to do, but, in view of this, what should be done by anointed Christians and their dedicated associates?

JEHOVAH DOES NOT DESERT HIS PEOPLE

"Jehovah will not forsake his people, nor will he leave his own inheritance."—Ps. 94:14.

"JEHOVAH will not desert his people for the sake of his great name." The prophet Samuel had said it. Similarly, the

psalmist had declared: "Jehovah will not forsake his people, nor will he leave his own inheritance."—1 Sam. 12:22; Ps. 94:14.

² Do you personally place confidence in

1, 2. The prophet Samuel and the psalmist said what about Jehovah's relationship with His people?

such words? Could Esther, Mordecai and the Jews of their day be certain that Jehovah would not desert his people? We shall see.

ACTING WITH CONFIDENCE IN JEHOVAH

³ It is now the third day since the distressed Jews in the Persian Empire began fasting and praying to Jehovah. Courageous, unselfish Queen Esther has dressed royally and, unbidden, stands in the inner courtyard of the king's house. From his throne, King Ahasuerus sees his queen. Is she doomed? No. He extends to her the golden scepter and she approaches, touching its top. Esther has gained the king's favor and hears him ask: "What do you have, O Esther the queen, and what is your request? To the half of the kingship—let it even be given to you!" In response, she invites Ahasuerus and Prime Minister Haman to a banquet, and her gracious invitation is accepted.—Esther 5:1-5.

⁴ The Persian monarch and Haman the Agagite are present for Esther's banquet of wine later that day. In time, the king asks Esther: "What is your petition?" In replying, she invites Ahasuerus and Haman to a banquet the next day. Upon departing, Haman is joyful. But when integrity-keeping Mordecai the Jew does not quake because of him, the Amalekite is filled with rage, although he exercises self-control. On entering his own home, Haman calls together his wife and friends. He cannot resist the urge to boast and tell them how Ahasuerus has exalted him over all the princes and servants of the king.—Esther 5:6-11.

⁵ "What is more," continues Haman,

3. (a) What happens when Esther, unbidden, goes before King Ahasuerus? (b) What is Esther's request?
4. After Esther's banquet, what spoils Haman's joy?
5. Haman's wife and friends recommend that he do what about Mordecai?

"Esther the queen brought in with the king to the banquet that she had made no one but me, and tomorrow also I am invited to her with the king." Yet, something greatly troubles the boasting Agagite, for he adds: "But all this—none of it suits me as long as I am seeing Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate." Haman's wife Zeresh and his friends are sure that they have the solution. "Let them make a stake fifty cubits high," say they. "Then in the morning say to the king that they should hang Mordecai on it. Then go in with the king to the banquet joyful." Just think! Mordecai's dead body hanging on a stake 50 cubits (73 feet or 22 meters) high! 'Good!' thinks haughty Haman, and he has the stake erected.—Esther 5:12-14.

⁶ As we await the next day's developments, we have time to meditate on the course of Mordecai and Esther. Both placed their confidence in Jehovah and sought his guidance. Out of love for Jehovah's people, Esther even took her life in her hands, courageously going before the king uninvited. Like Mordecai and Esther, anointed Christians of today show similar love for all of God's people. And despite persecution by religious opposers, God's present-day servants act with implicit trust in Jehovah.

THE HAND OF JEHOVAH BECOMES MORE EVIDENT

⁷ When Jehovah chooses to do so, he can direct or control governmental authorities so as to accomplish his will. Fittingly, therefore, an inspired proverb states: "A king's heart is as streams of water in the hand of Jehovah. Everywhere that he delights to, he turns it." (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:21) Observe now how the hand of the

6. Like Mordecai and Esther, anointed Christians today display what attitudes?

7. Jehovah can do what with governmental authorities so as to accomplish his will?

Most High became more evident in the days of Mordecai and Esther.

⁸ Ahasuerus is unable to sleep the night before this second banquet, likely because the hand of Jehovah is at work. Possibly drawing the conclusion that he has failed in some way, the king has the book of records read to him. At length, he hears a report of Mordecai's loyalty in uncovering the assassination plot of the two court officials Bigthana (Bigthan) and Teresh. But the king learns that this loyal act has gone unrewarded. So the Persian monarch determines that Mordecai shall be honored.—Esther 6:1-3.

⁹ Early the next morning, scheming Haman is granted access to King Ahasuerus. But before the Agagite can carry out his murderous plot against Mordecai, the king asks: "What is to be done to the man in whose honor the king himself has taken a delight?" Haman says in his heart: "To whom would the king take delight in rendering an honor more than me?" Then doubtless visualizing himself in the role of the highly honored one, Haman says: 'Bring out the king's horse with the royal headdress on its head. (No ordinary horse is good enough for lofty Haman!) Let the man be clothed with the king's own royal apparel. Then, have the man ride on the horse in the public square of the city, and have it proclaimed aloud before him: "This is how it is done to the man in whose honor the king himself has taken a delight." —Esther 6:4-9.

¹⁰ "Quickly," says Ahasuerus, "take the apparel and the horse, just as you have said, and do that way to Mordecai the Jew who is sitting in the king's gate. Do

not let anything go unfulfilled of all that you have spoken." What a devastating blow to proud Haman! But what can he do? Failure to comply would mean certain death. So it is not long before Mordecai, clothed in royal apparel and astride the king's horse, is riding in the public square with a humiliated Haman calling out before him: "This is how it is done to the man in whose honor the king himself has taken a delight." Afterward, Mordecai returns to the king's gate and Haman hurries to his house, mourning and with his head covered in shame. His wife and friends bring him no comfort, but say: "If it is from the seed of the Jews that Mordecai is before whom you have started to fall, you will not prevail against him, but you will without fail fall before him." Yes, to the Agagite's wife and friends, the fact that he has had to conduct a public ceremony in honor of Mordecai is viewed as an omen that Haman will go down before this Jew. Hardly has Haman heard these dire words when the king's court officials arrive and take him to Esther's second banquet.—Esther 6:10-14.

COURAGEOUS IDENTIFICATION AND BOLD EXPOSURE

¹¹ During the banquet, Ahasuerus asks: "What is your petition, O Esther the queen?" It takes courage to reply, but the queen says: "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if to the king it does seem good, let there be given me my own soul at my petition and my people at my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be annihilated, killed and destroyed. Now if we had been sold for mere men slaves and for mere maidservants, I should have kept silent. But the distress

8. What happens on one occasion when Ahasuerus cannot sleep?
9. Thinking that he himself is to be honored, what lavish ceremony does Haman outline?
10. (a) What devastating emotional blow does Haman experience? (b) After the ceremony honoring Mordecai, does the Agagite receive any comfort from his wife and friends?

11, 12. (a) Esther says what about herself and her people during her second banquet attended by Ahasuerus and Haman? (b) How does Haman react when identified as a misrepresentor and treacherous schemer, but why is it that Esther does not relent?

is not appropriate when with damage to the king.”—Esther 7:1-4.

¹² What is this? Why, Queen Esther is Jewish, and annihilation has been decreed for her people! Ahasuerus wants to know who is responsible. Boldly, Esther says: “The man, the adversary and enemy, is this bad Haman.” The queen has been fair in having the now-terrified Amalekite present when exposing him. Courageously, Esther has indicted Haman as responsible for gross misrepresentation and has identified him as a treacherous schemer against the Persian monarch’s own interests. Enraged, the king goes into the palace garden. Frightened Haman, knowing he can expect no mercy from Ahasuerus, falls on the couch on which Esther has been reclining. He pleads for his very life. But

Esther does not relent, for this would displease Jehovah, who has decreed the complete destruction of the Amalekites.—Esther 7:5-8.

¹³ Returning from the garden, Ahasuerus sees desperate Haman on Esther’s couch and cries out: “Is there also to be a raping of the queen, with me in the house?” Immediately, the king sentences the wicked Agagite to death. Soon the lifeless body of Haman is hanging on the very stake erected for the Jew Mordecai. Only then does the monarch’s rage subside.—Esther 7:8-10.

¹⁴ In retrospect, we note that courageous Esther, not only revealed her identity as a Jewess, but boldly exposed Haman as an enemy of God’s people. Comparably today, those who have since World War

I become anointed followers of Jesus Christ have, with earlier anointed ones, courageously identified themselves as spiritual Jews and, as such, witnesses of Jehovah. (Isa. 43:10-12) And they certainly have enemies. For instance, like Haman, the clergy of Christendom have sought the destruction of Jehovah’s people. But genuine Christians boldly have exposed these hateful foes whose schemes will get them no farther than did



Esther does not relent and wicked Haman is sentenced to death

13. What happens to Haman at the command of King Ahasuerus?

14. What modern-day comparison can be made in connection with Esther’s identifying herself as a Jewess and boldly exposing Haman as an enemy of God’s people?

those of the unscrupulous Amalekite, Haman. This is so because Jehovah's people, who speak God's Word with boldness, have divine support in facing plots and persecution.—Isa. 54:17; Acts 4:29-31.

A CHANGE FROM DISTRESS TO REJOICING

¹⁵ Ahasuerus gives executed Haman's house to Esther, who has told the king about her relationship with Mordecai. Also, the monarch removes his signet ring that had been taken from Haman and gives it to this loyal Jew, making Mordecai the prime minister in place of the Agagite. Acting in accord with the degree of authority granted her by the king, Esther places Mordecai over the house of Haman.—Esther 8:1, 2.

¹⁶ Once again imperiling her life in behalf of her people, Esther goes before the king uninvited and falls at his feet weeping. Ahasuerus holds out the golden scepter and Esther rises, saying: 'If to the king it seems good and I have found favor before him, let a written document be prepared to undo the scheme of Haman. How can I bear to look upon the calamity of my people and the destruction of my relatives?' Because the laws of the Medes and the Persians are immutable, Ahasuerus authorizes Esther and Mordecai to write in his name a counteracting official document in behalf of the Jews.—Esther 1:19; 8:3-8.

¹⁷ With that the newly appointed prime minister swings into action. On the 23rd day of Sivan (May-June), the king's secretaries are summoned and Mordecai dictates a counterdecree. Soon it will reach the Jews, the other people and the governmental officials—satraps (or viceroys),

subordinate governors and princes—in Persia's 127 jurisdictional districts. Mordecai authenticates the documents by sealing them with the king's signet ring. And what is the substance of the new law? King Ahasuerus has granted the Jews the right to congregate themselves and stand for their souls, to annihilate those showing hostility to them. Yes, they will be able to defend themselves on the 13th of Adar (February-March), the day formerly set for their extermination! Without delay and riding in relays, couriers on speedy post horses urge their mounts forward, carrying the counterdecree to every part of the sprawling empire.—Esther 8:9-14.

¹⁸ Going forth from before the king, prime minister Mordecai is dressed in royal apparel of blue and linen. He wears a fine-fabric cloak of wool dyed reddish purple and has a great crown of gold on his head. Certainly, he has reason to be happy because of the counterdecree. In fact, joy prevails in Shushan, and ultimately there is rejoicing, a banquet and a good day for the Jews throughout the empire. Furthermore, dread of the Jews has fallen upon the people, many of whom are becoming proselytes.—Esther 8:15-17.

¹⁹ Reflection on what has just transpired provides encouragement for present-day Christians. As Haman plotted to annihilate the natural Jews, so the religious leaders of Christendom have sought to exterminate today's spiritual Jews, Christ's spiritual brothers. Jesus, exercising regal power over the earth as Ahasuerus did over the Persian Empire, has permitted such attempts, but has also made it possible for his anointed followers to stand for their lives as Jehovah's Christian witnesses. Moreover, thousands of honest-hearted people, like the Persian proselytes of Esther's day, have taken their stand with these

15. What is done with Haman's house, and to what position is Mordecai appointed?

16. In response to an appeal by Esther, what authorization involving the Jews does Ahasuerus grant?

17, 18. (a) What does Mordecai do in behalf of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire, and what right are they granted in connection with Adar 13? (b) Among the Jews, what reaction is there to the counterdecree?

19. Reflecting on Haman's plot, the counterdecree and related events, do you see any encouragement for today's Christians?

spiritual Jews by embracing true worship.
—Zech. 8:23; Gal. 6:16.

JEHOVAH BACKS HIS PEOPLE

²⁰ The months now have passed and it is the 13th day of Adar. Having congregated themselves in their cities, the Jews lay hand on those seeking their injury. Not a man stands his ground before God's people. In fact, they are assisted by government officials because the dread of Mordecai has fallen upon such men. But it is primarily because of Jehovah's backing that the Jews strike down those hating them. In Shushan the castle alone they kill 500 men, and Haman's 10 sons are put to death. Throughout the empire, 75,000 foes are destroyed, but nowhere do the Jews lay their hand on any plunder. In harmony with a request made by Esther, King Ahasuerus grants the Jews in the capital city of Shushan an extra day of fighting, during which they kill another 300 men but do no plundering. Also, the bodies of Haman's 10 sons are hanged. With their enemies destroyed, the victorious Jews make Adar the 14th in outlying districts and the 15th at Shushan a time of banqueting and rejoicing.—Esther 9:1-19.

²¹ Jehovah has delivered his people and they should remember this. Accordingly, Mordecai sends written documents to the Jews throughout the empire. Why? To impose on them the obligation of annually commemorating the 14th and 15th of Adar as days of banqueting, gift-giving and joy. Later, another letter on this matter is sent to the Jews with the confirmation of Queen Esther. This festival of deliverance is called Purim, a name that comes from Haman's act in having Pur, or the Lot, cast to determine the auspicious day for carrying out the extermination plot that

20. How do the Jews and their enemies fare on Adar 13 and 14?

21. Mordecai imposes on the Jews the obligation to observe what festival each year, and what is its purpose?

ultimately turned upon his own head.
—Esther 9:20-32.

JEHOVAH DELIVERS THE RIGHTEOUS

²² For Esther, Mordecai and the other Jews the crisis is past. Jehovah has not deserted his people. As time progresses, King Ahasuerus lays forced labor on the land and the isles of the sea. (For instance, sometime during his reign he completed much of the construction work his father Darius I initiated at Persepolis.) High in government office—in fact, second only to the king—is Mordecai. This faithful Jew, approved and respected by God's dedicated people, continues working for their good and speaking peace to all their offspring.

—Esther 10:1-3.

²³ Truly, Mordecai was a man of faith, courage, decisiveness, integrity and loyalty to Jehovah and to God's people. Esther was a discreet woman, who kept silent when necessary, but spoke fearlessly at the right time. She accepted counsel from Mordecai, even when following it endangered her life. Indeed, this beautiful and submissive woman displayed love, unselfishness and loyalty toward her people. Both she and Mordecai trusted fully in Jehovah and prayerfully sought divine direction.

²⁴ What fine examples for God's people today! In the face of opposition and persecution, they are serving side by side, loyal to Jehovah and to one another. Yes, they are confident that Jehovah God will uphold and deliver them, even as he backed and delivered Esther, Mordecai and their people. (Phil. 1:27-30) True, "many are the calamities of the righteous one, but out of them all Jehovah delivers him." (Ps. 34:19) So, let the praises of our God be proclaimed and may we ever trust in him, for Jehovah does not desert his people.

22. Mordecal, high in government office, continues doing what in behalf of God's people?

23. What fine qualities did Mordecal and Esther manifest?

24. In view of what happened in God's dealings with Mordecal, Esther and the other Jews, of what can Jehovah's people be confident today?

INSIGHT ON THE NEWS

- The writings of Cyril Burt, the British founder of educational psychology, were viewed for years as 'proof' that racial differences in intelligence are caused by heredity.

Whites Smarter than Blacks? Recent findings published in "Science" magazine have shown

"beyond any reasonable doubt" that such data collected by Burt was "fabricated." In his widely acclaimed writings, Burt asserted that whites were smarter than blacks, that upper-class children were mentally superior to slum children, that the English were more intelligent than the Irish and Jews, and that men were brainier than women.

It was previously thought that some of his errors resulted "from carelessness rather than deliberate fraud," but the disclosure revealed that the entire column of numbers arranged by Burt was identical with figures published over 30 years earlier and derived from a completely different survey. He merely picked various IQ's and assigned these to different classes of persons.

The report summarized recent findings of IQ tests: "[An IQ test] measures only a particular aspect of mental ability. Different tests test different mental faculties. In any group of people there will be those who excel in one capacity but do poorly in another." No race is inherently more intelligent than another for "[God] made out of one man every nation of men."—Acts 17:26.

- What did the Roman Catholic Church advise its members about voting to legalize gambling?

Gambling and the Church found equivocation from the hierarchy—often because the church's own legalized gambling generates millions of dollars annually in revenues." So stated the "National Catholic Reporter," which added: "The church generally does not condemn gambling; church leaders tend to condemn 'excessive' gambling. There is little consistency when the church goes public: In New Jersey, the Newark archdiocese opposed the 1974 and 1976 referendums that finally permitted casino gambling in Atlantic City:

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In the Camden diocese, which embraces Atlantic City, the bishop said the question was for each voter to decide."

What about Church-sponsored bingo games? If these are mere recreation as the Church claims, then why the need for large "jackpots," some reportedly worth \$1,500 (U.S.)? New York priest William Bradley admitted: "We shouldn't be in bingo—except that we have to pay the bills, subsidize the schools."

Whether the Church authorities are willing to label bingo as gambling or not, the 1976 report from the Commission of Review of the National Policy toward Gambling stated that "charitable bingo . . . is operated, however, like a commercial [gambling] operation . . . and the commission recommends, for regulatory purposes, no distinction be made."

God-fearing persons realize that all forms of gambling build greed and that "greedy graspers for more" and "swindlers" will "not have a share in the kingdom of God."—1 Cor. 6:10, "Williams" translation.

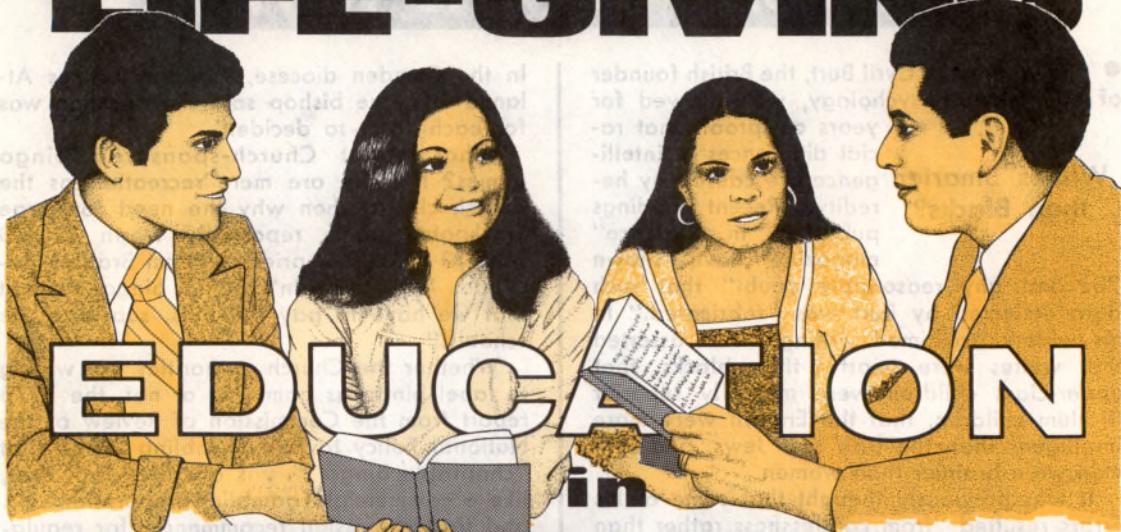
- Ten years ago there were 373 suicides in the 10 to 19 age group of German schoolchildren. Two years ago the figure was 517, of

Young Suicides whom 103 were between 10 and 15 years old. Eight hundred are expected to commit suicide this year, according to a report from two citizen groups in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The picture is just as bleak in Canada, where it is reported of young people: "They have slick discos and high-rise apartments, flexible politics and easy-going sex. They also have more competition for fewer jobs, shrinking wages, inflationary prices—and the fastest growing rate of suicide."

What is wrong? Referring to the "me" generation of today, a Toronto psychologist says: "Chronically lonely people in this age group are self-centred. They don't give to others yet they expect enormous attention in return." But hundreds of thousands of happy youngsters have found satisfaction by following the Bible counsel to remove vexation and calamity from their lives and make a commitment to their Grand Creator.—Eccl. 11:9–12:1.

LIFE-GIVING EDUCATION in COSTA RICA



COSTA RICA has long been called the "Switzerland of the Americas." Perhaps this is due to its beautiful verdant mountains. It has also been a land of peace. In fact, the army was abolished in 1948, and this country has often been praised for its peaceful way of settling both internal and external problems.

Since 1948 academic education has been emphasized here, and thus Costa Rica enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in Latin America. Of course, knowledge of God's Word, the Bible, is even more important. (John 17:3) There are over 5,000 individuals in this country who are very interested in imparting this superior knowledge to their neighbors. These Bible educators are Jehovah's Witnesses, and their teaching work has reached almost every part of this land.

Bordered by Panama on the south, Nicaragua on the north, the waters of the

Pacific Ocean on the west and the Caribbean Sea on the east, this Central American republic is divided north and south by a mountainous backbone. To the east and west of these cool highlands and plateaus lie humid, tropical lowlands, the Pacific and the Atlantic coastal plains. But to become better acquainted with Costa Rica and its people, let us accompany a traveling Christian elder (a district overseer) and his wife to four assemblies of Jehovah's Witnesses in different parts of this land.

VIRGIN JUNGLES ON THE ATLANTIC COASTAL PLAIN

The first assembly is at Puerto Limón, some 162 kilometers (100 miles) from San José, Costa Rica's capital. Our friends thought we would enjoy the scenic ride on the narrow-gauge railway, instead of a trip on the much faster bus. They were

right. Breathtaking mountain scenery on the left is offset by the white waters of a river rushing through its gorge hundreds of feet below us on the right. We swallow hard as the veteran train winds along this stretch of track on a narrow ledge only some three meters (10 feet) wide.

As we descend, the cool, forested mountains soon give way to rolling hills. Now, as if a giant hand has rolled out a green carpet for miles on end, before us extends the dense jungle of the Atlantic coastal plain. Randomly placed in the dark foliage are light-green spots, actually banana plantations. In many of these, there are thriving congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses.

We are told: "Life on these banana plantations is often likened to that in the old North American 'wild west.' . . . As an example, I recall a man who lived on a plantation on the Pacific coastal plain. He was well known in the area as a brawler, and drank to the point of consuming only pure alcohol. An elder in the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses moved in next door and began to show interest in him . . . In order to find some questions that his Witness neighbor would not be able to answer, he began reading the Bible. Soon, however, it was he who was answering questions during the home Bible study that his neighbor conducted with him." Today, the man serves as a ministerial servant and regular pioneer, a full-time Kingdom proclaimer. In these areas, Jehovah's Witnesses are known for their clean living, honesty and close-knit family life.

Soon we are right down into the humid, shady jungle plain, making frequent stops at small towns. Finally, we reach Puerto Limón. A Witness from Germany and his Panamanian wife are serving here in the circuit work, and he tells us:

"Puerto Limón was built on the site where Columbus is said to have landed

on his fourth and last voyage. The majority of the population has descended from Jamaican islanders who immigrated before the turn of the century to work as free laborers on the railroad then being constructed and on the developing banana plantations. The striking feature of the Kingdom work in Costa Rica is its early start, as compared with most Latin-American countries. As far back as 1904, Jehovah's servants were busy teaching peaceful Bible truths to the English-speaking inhabitants of the Atlantic coast, some congregations having been established before 1914. The teaching work in the rest of the country had its roots here . . . Although most of the people now speak Spanish, three English-language congregations continue to care for the large number of the people in the area that feel more at home speaking English."

The following day we participate in the teaching activity from door to door and find the people in general to be very friendly and ready to discuss the Bible. Notable is the interest shown by youths.

Among some 800 assembly delegates are Zenón and his cousin Jesús. Although they worked full time, they regularly traveled for hours by motorcycle to care for the spiritual needs of a group of interested persons in Puertoviejo. Now, Zenón and Jesús have arranged their affairs so as to participate in the spiritual teaching work full time as special pioneers and are assigned to that small river port.

All too soon we must depart. We head back up to the central plateau, noted for its cooler climate, looming volcanoes and abundant coffee groves. The next circuit assembly is to be held in San José, the capital.

ON THE CENTRAL PLATEAU

The central plateau is home for most of the country's 2,000,000 people. Located here are the four largest cities and more

than half of Jehovah's Witnesses in Costa Rica. We find the attractive, recently remodeled branch office of the Watch Tower Society near the heart of San José. The demand for Bibles and Bible literature required the expanding of the original building constructed in 1955. Why, in just the last 10 years, the branch office shipped the congregations more than 63,000 Bibles and 163,000 copies of the Bible aid *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life!* This amounts to about one Bible for every 30 persons in the country and a *Truth* book for one individual in 12.

We note that the people here on the central plateau are quite cosmopolitan, yet interested in the Bible and especially in matters affecting the family. Although the family unit is faring somewhat better in Costa Rica than in many other parts of the world, people here are worried. Drugs, alcoholism and immorality have weakened the traditionally strong Latin-American family ties. So, as we go from house to house, it is not unusual for a busy housewife, on hearing that the Bible deals with family life, to dry her hands and invite us inside the home.

In a small town some 10 kilometers (6 miles) from San José, there were no witnesses of Jehovah. A number of parents there sought family guidance from the Catholic Church, but all in vain. Impressed by certain Watch Tower publications (including the *Truth* book) that directed them to the Bible, all agreed that they would use our literature to study the Scriptures and would apply the things learned. Then they would simply ask Jehovah's Witnesses to let them join as a congregation. They began calling themselves "Jehovah's worshipers." However, false ideas and practices began creeping in, such as naming 12 apostles—women as well as men. After a time, the branch office arranged for a Bible study with one family and good progress was made. Later,

the remaining members of the group also asked that a study be conducted with them. On arriving for the first study, a missionary found 17 people waiting, all with Bible in hand and *Truth* books opened. Soon, individual family studies were arranged in place of one large meeting, and progress became more rapid. In time, special pioneers and an elder and his wife from the United States moved into the town. Today, a healthy congregation of 71 publishers and two regular pioneers zealously carry on the spiritual teaching work there. All of these were among the 2,000 present at the circuit assembly in San José, and some had parts on the program.

Time passes quickly and the district overseer tells us to pack light clothing once again. Our third and fourth assemblies will be on the warm Pacific coastal plain.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH ON THE PACIFIC COASTAL PLAIN

Our comfortable bus whisks us over a modern highway past sugarcane fields. Although the climate is quite warm on the Pacific coastal plain, here one finds no tropical jungles. The land is drier and there is less rainfall here. Soon we find ourselves in Costa Rica's principal port and resort area, Puntarenas.

On hand to greet us is another traveling elder. He tells us that Kingdom proclaimers in this area make every effort to reach all who might be interested in learning about the Kingdom. This includes the famous prison isle of San Lucas. The Puntarenas Congregation regularly carries on Bible teaching work there.

Some years ago, two young inmates on San Lucas—one a convicted thief and the other serving a long sentence for murder—took their stand as Christians beside those who had patiently helped them. One of these men states: "Imagine the impression made on the other convicts when

whole boatloads of brothers came just to visit me and another interested inmate. Of course, they talked about the Bible to other convicts and the guards; but afterward they would spend a lot of time building us up and just being with us. How those visits fortified us! After all the visitors would leave, my companion and I would try to teach inmates and guards alike as we had seen the brothers doing this. Years later, we found that two of the guards with whom we had sown the first Kingdom seeds had become Jehovah's Witnesses too. Due to my conduct, my sentence became shorter and shorter and I was freed after just three and a half years." Both of these young men continued to make good progress outside prison, were baptized and are serving Jehovah faithfully.

After enjoying the assembly at Punta-renas, we head north toward the Nicaraguan border. We will attend a circuit assembly in Guanacaste Province, with its large *haciendas* (ranches) and cattle estates. *Vaqueros* (cowboys) are in evidence, and the people, as a rule, are quite generous and hospitable. Often while witnessing from house to house the brothers are asked to sit down and enjoy some *pinolillo*, a cold drink made of ground corn. Many of these humble country folk have never had the chance to learn to read and write. But more widespread is Bible illiteracy, and Jehovah's Witnesses are working hard here to help people in both ways.

Our trip to this assembly has taken us to a small town in the foothills of Miravalles volcano. Three hours of bumps and dust in a four-wheel-drive vehicle pale by

comparison with the efforts made by many of our brothers to get to this gathering. One couple made a two-day journey by horseback. Others walked 12 miles (19 kilometers) or more to catch a bus. Some sold a calf or a pig in order to have money for the fare. However, the 300 persons present found the program to be well worth the effort made to attend the assembly.

We enjoyed hearing about three young fleshly brothers whose parents are not Jehovah's Witnesses. However, the boys took the truth seriously, to the point of being baptized. Then, rather than increasing their material holdings by stocking with cattle a farm that they had received, they sold it and used the money to support themselves in the full-time teaching work. Now, as special pioneers, Abner, Ezer and Eliud are happily helping to establish congregations of God's people in isolated parts of the country.

We certainly consider our four-week trip with the traveling overseer to have been very rewarding. It has helped us to appreciate the virgin rain forest, the high, mist-shrouded volcanoes, the green banana plantations and the dry yellow grass of large *haciendas*. Especially have we enjoyed becoming better acquainted with the peaceful people of Costa Rica, this land of many contrasts. Also, we have benefited from our association with Jehovah's Christian witnesses. They are participating in the most important teaching work on earth today. Those who respond to it favorably are being "taught by Jehovah," and their peace will be abundant.—Isa. 54:13.

A "Chatterer"

CERTAIN Athenian philosophers referred to the apostle Paul as a "chatterer." (Acts 17:18) The Greek word that they used could refer to 'a crow that picks up seed.' In a figurative sense, this term was applied to a person who

picks up scraps by begging or stealing. In using the expression with reference to Paul, the philosophers were labeling him as one who repeats scraps of knowledge, hence, an idle babbler.

"Let Us Not Sleep On As The Rest Do"

"IT'S a real joy to be alive!" Did you ever feel that way on awaking from a good night's sleep, refreshed, strengthened, ready for renewed activity? Or, have you ever taken refuge in sleep as a help in overcoming sorrow or disappointment? And who, on being faced with a serious decision to make, has not said something like 'Let me sleep on it'? Recent scientific studies indicate that sleep may even be instrumental in the learning processes and memorizing. Truly, sleep is a gift from man's Creator, Jehovah.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes sleep as "a recurring state of inactivity, decrease of consciousness and decrease in responsiveness to events in the environment." Obviously a "state of inactivity" or a 'decrease of consciousness and responsiveness' is not always desirable. Like other gifts from Jehovah God we could misuse sleep to our own detriment. Proverbs 20:13 warns: "Do not love sleep, that you may not come to poverty."

Christians therefore should strive to have a balanced view of sleep. A person would certainly want to get sufficient rest so that he could fulfill his Christian obligations properly. On the other hand, we should not lazily "love sleep" to the point of neglecting vital matters.

Jesus gave us a fine example to follow. He was willing to work hard, curing the sick and expelling demons even "after evening had fallen." But the next day, "early in the morning, while it was still dark," he was already up, in this case so that he could have privacy for prayer to his Father.—Mark 1:32, 35.

The apostle Paul, an elder in the early Christian congregation, is an example for Christian elders today. Speaking to the older men of the congregation in Ephesus, he said: "Bear in mind that for three years, night and day, I did not quit admonishing each one with tears." (Acts 20:31) Yes, "night and day." Also, he wrote about "sleepless nights" resulting from his conscientious efforts to help the congregation.—2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27.

However, there is also such a thing as spiritual sleep, and this is what Paul was speaking about at 1 Thessalonians 5:6 when he said: "Let us not sleep on as the rest do."

In speaking of "us," he was obviously referring to genuine Christians, who are religiously *active, responsive* to Jehovah's direction and conscious of the development of God's purposes. They must be spiritually awake! "The rest" would be persons, perhaps including some professed Christians, who are spiritually asleep and thus unconcerned about Jesus' "presence" and the coming "sudden destruction" of the wicked.—1 Thess. 4:15; 5:1-3.

Today that sort of spiritual sleep or apathy affects far more persons than it did in Paul's day. Even some of Christendom's clergy perceive this. The prevailing spiritual sleep is made plain by all the hopeful talk about "a new religious 'awakening.'" Commenting on this, in April 1978, *The Detroit News* said that "reports of a religious revival in the United States may be a bit premature, if not downright

exaggerated, . . ." And it quoted a dean of a Protestant seminary in Oklahoma as observing: "In my judgment, the church has fallen on hard times because it has gradually but definitely become illiterate in the faith." What about in other lands? The Austrian religious journal *das gespräch* (the conversation) said: "Cardinal König [of Austria] also revealed who is to blame for the world's miserable condition. . . . The blame lies to a great extent with the so-called "Christian nations," who in the past colonized practically the entire world and then went about "Christianizing" it. But they did not really bring Christ's spirit, only the name. They have failed to live the gospel."—September 1976, p. 2.

A DANGER FOR GENUINE CHRISTIANS

Paul admonished "let us not sleep," showing that even genuine Christians must be careful to avoid being lulled into sleep. Remember that on the last night that Jesus was with them the disciples fell asleep, despite his urgings to wakefulness. Although physical in nature, their sleep indicated a tendency toward spiritual drowsiness. Jesus said: "At such a time as this you are sleeping!" (Matt. 26:40-45; Mark 14:37-41) Just think of all that was involved: The truthfulness of God's Word, the faithfulness of his Son, the destiny of the human race. Fully conscious of all that was involved, Jesus was spiritually awake, petitioning his Father for needed strength. His disciples would have done well to have copied his example.

"Keep on the watch and pray continually, that you may not enter into temptation," Jesus told them. (Matt. 26:41) How timely and appropriate this warning! Shortly thereafter, at the time of his betrayal, "all the disciples abandoned him and fled," and Peter even went so far as to disown him three times. (Matt. 26:56, 69-75) Spiritual drowsiness is dangerous.

This is understandable because even untimely physical sleep can lead to disaster. We recall Judge Samson who was betrayed by Delilah and "woke up from his sleep" only to discover "that it was Jehovah that had departed from him."—Judg. 16:19-21.

If physical sleep at inappropriate times can lead to disaster, how much more so spiritual sleep. It is *always* inappropriate. Revelation 16:15 says concerning such: "Happy is the one that stays awake and keeps his outer garments, that he may not walk naked and people look upon his shamefulness." Yes, spiritual sleep can lead to loss of our Christian clothes of identification.—Compare Proverbs 23:21.

SELF-EXAMINATION VITAL

But how do you think true Christians can stay awake? As an aid to knowing let us consider some parallels between physical and spiritual sleep. This will also help us in making personal examination so as to prevent even the slightest tendency toward spiritual drowsiness.

Sleep, we learned, is a "state of inactivity." So, to what extent are we active in Christian matters, such as in proclaiming the "good news" that Jesus is present in Kingdom power and soon will bring "sudden destruction" on the wicked? Not that we want to compare the amount of our activity with that of others, for this would be not only unwise but also unloving. (Gal. 6:4, 5) But, by taking into consideration our personal circumstances, our health, our family responsibilities, our abilities, as well as our limitations, each of us can individually judge his own degree of wakefulness in this respect. Regarding our spiritual activities in this harvesttime, we can well take to heart what Proverbs 10:5 says: "The son acting with insight is gathering during the summertime; the son acting shamefully is fast asleep during the harvest."

Sleep is further described as a "decrease of consciousness." Hence, are we still very conscious of our spiritual needs, as is appropriate for Christians who truly believe that we are near the end of this system of things? Do we show this by regular study and meeting attendance? Are we eager to read the newest literature published to help us to understand the Bible? How much better it is to use our time with such matters than wasting it on revelries or the constant pleasure-seeking that characterizes many who are spiritually asleep.—1 Thess. 5:7.

Sleep also shows a "decrease in responsiveness." We can ask, 'How do I respond when encouraged to some special Christian activity? Is my response immediate and enthusiastic? Am I as responsive in applying new things learned as when I first became acquainted with the truth of God's Word?'

Let us take the illustration of literal sleep a little farther: Sleep is characterized by a drop in body temperature and a decrease in heart rate. Do we sense a cooling off in our zeal and love for others? Or are we still "aglow with the spirit," zealously sharing the Christian message? Can we, like Jeremiah, say that the truth is "like a burning fire" within us that we simply cannot contain?—Rom. 12:11; Jer. 20:9.

Another feature of sleep is dreaming. Dreams bring no lasting happiness, and in fact can even lead to disappointment when one awakens to stark reality. Isaiah 29:8 describes it like this: "Yes, it must occur just as when someone hungry dreams and here he is eating, and he actually awakes and his soul is empty."

Could it be that we are living in a "dream," asleep to the reality of the changing world scene, perhaps spending too much time and money in pursuit of material interests? Even as a dreamer has no sense of time, have we also lost the

sense of urgency of the times in which we are living? Remember Paul warned Thessalonian Christians that the end of this system would overtake many like a thief in the night. (1 Thess. 5:4; Matt. 24:43, 33) Could we be overdoing recreation, perhaps even missing Christian meetings in pursuing such? Or advocating changes in meeting times to fit in better with our personal plans, rather than in consideration of the best interests of the flock and those whom we should be teaching? How much better to be awake to the real facts of life: God's established kingdom is actively ruling; this wicked system of things is facing imminent and permanent destruction; our personal destiny is at stake.—1 Tim. 4:16.

HOW TO AVOID DROWSINESS

We need to understand what causes sleep. Physical sleep is not primarily caused by external forces. Oh, things such as a warm room, lack of fresh air, or warm milk may contribute to sleepiness. But sleep is actually triggered by some inside mechanism that is not yet completely understood. Similarly, external forces can contribute to spiritual drowsiness. For example, public indifference to our preaching work could. Or, as Jesus warned, letting our hearts "become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life" would also tend to lull us to sleep. (Luke 21:34) These dangers must be avoided. But probably what we are inside, not our outside environment, will in the long run either keep us spiritually awake or lull us to sleep. So we must guard our internal makeup, keeping our heart awake to its first love. We must watch our thoughts, our motives, our desires, pay close attention to the man we are inside. (Eph. 3:16-19) How fine is the apostle's counsel: "Be persevering in prayer, remaining awake in it with thanksgiving!"—Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:8, 11, 16-22.

COPY JEHOVAH'S EXAMPLE OF WAKEFULNESS

In 'not sleeping on as the rest do' true Christians can follow Jehovah's fine example of wakefulness. To the "rest" it may appear that Jehovah is slow in bringing an end to the present system with all its corruption and injustice. (2 Pet. 3:9) Thus they likely will still be 'asleep' when the "great tribulation" suddenly is upon them. (1 Thess. 5:3) But Jehovah will prove himself to be wide awake indeed. His course then will compare with the description in Psalm 78:65, 66: "Then Jehovah began to awake as from sleeping, like a mighty one sobering up from wine. And

he went striking down his adversaries from behind; a reproach of indefinite duration he gave to them."—Compare Jeremiah 1:12.

Now is the time for us to find Christian joy in being *active* in Jehovah's service, being conscious of our spiritual needs and the critical time in which we live and in being responsive to His direction. Now is the time to be spiritually awake even as Paul said elsewhere: "It is already the hour for you to awake from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than at the time when we became believers. The night is well along; the day has drawn near." —Rom. 13:11, 12.

QUESTIONS from READERS

- Lecithin is found in blood. And many processed foods have lecithin as an ingredient. Is such lecithin obtained from blood?

No, there is no reason for thinking so.

Lecithin is a natural substance that has many industrial uses because of its affinity for both oil and water in an emulsion. It is often used commercially in ice cream, candies and baking products, as well as in some cosmetics and chemical products. But what is the source of this lecithin?

Lecithin is a phospholipid present in all living cells. The 1977 *Encyclopedia Americana* points out: "The highest concentrations of lecithins are found in brain and nervous tissue and in red blood cells. They are also present in large quantities in egg yolk and in some types of plant seeds."—Vol. 17, p. 147.

The fact that blood contains lecithin has been of concern to some Christians who have seen lecithin listed as an ingredient on food labels. The Bible commands Christians to 'ab-

stain from blood.' (Acts 15:28, 29) They should thus avoid eating unbled meat and foods made with blood, such as blood sausage or blood pudding. Since red blood cells, though, contain concentrations of lecithin, some Christians have refused to eat any product having lecithin listed as an ingredient. Others have felt compelled to write to manufacturers to check on the source of the lecithin used in certain foods.

However, *The Encyclopedia Americana* continues: "Commercially, lecithin is used as an emulsifier in the food industry, particularly in the manufacture of margarine and chocolate. *Lecithin for industrial uses is obtained from eggs or as a by-product in the manufacture of soybean oil.*" (Italics added.)

Because commercial quantities of relatively inexpensive lecithin can be obtained from eggs or soybean oil, there is no reason for any manufacturer to seek to have lecithin extracted from blood. By way of illustration: Red blood cells also contain molecules of iron. Yet how senseless it would be for a manufacturer to consider extracting iron from blood so he could make cooking pots or other iron products when the same substance (iron) can be obtained from iron ore at a fraction of the cost.

The fact is, then, that commercial lecithin does not come from blood. So Christians need not be concerned about blood when they see "lecithin" listed on the label of some food product.

God's Word Reunites a Family

A report from the Dominican Republic tells about an army officer whose family was on the verge of a breakup. He was sent to France, but, because of financial difficulties, the man found it necessary to send his family to the United States. Soon, however, the man became intimately involved with other women. He states:

"After a while I realized that I was not doing what was right and my conscience began to bother me. So I also went to the United States. There I prayed to God for help.

"I heard about meetings being held in a place near home. So I took my wife and younger children to this place. It was a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses. Soon a study was started with us and I

progressed rapidly. As I began to learn from the Bible about family life, I put those things into practice. Our disunited family soon became united. We became Kingdom publishers, and now we are back home here in the Dominican Republic, happy and contented."

At one time, this man was domineering and not very humble. Now, however, he is a Christian serving humbly in one of the congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Santo Domingo.

"WATCHTOWER" STUDIES FOR THE WEEKS

- April 22: A Discreet Woman Displays Her Unselfishness. Page 12. Songs to Be Used: 51, 44.

April 29: Jehovah Does Not Desert His People. Page 17. Songs to Be Used: 88, 65.