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How Jehovah Helps Us to Carry Out Our Ministry

SONG 67

"Preach the Word"

PREVIEW

In this article, we will consider three factors that helped the prophet Ezekiel to carry out his preaching assignment. As we review how Jehovah helped his prophet, we will strengthen our confidence that Jehovah will help us to carry out our ministry.

"They will certainly know that a prophet was among them."

—EZEK. 2:5.

WE CAN expect to face opposition as we carry out our preaching work. That opposition may well increase in the future. (Dan. 11:44; 2 Tim. 3:12; Rev. 16:21) Still, we can be sure that Jehovah will give us the help we need. Why? Jehovah has always helped his servants to accomplish their assignments—no matter how difficult the tasks. To illustrate, let us consider some events in the life of the prophet Ezekiel, who preached to the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

2 What kind of people were in Ezekiel's preaching territory? Jehovah described them as "defiant," "hardhearted," and "rebellious." They were as harmful as thorns and as dangerous as scorpions. No wonder Jehovah told Ezekiel repeatedly: "Do not be afraid"! (**Read Ezekiel 2:3-6.**) Ezekiel was able to carry out his preaching commission because he was (1) sent by Jehovah, (2) empowered by God's spirit, and (3) nourished by God's words. How did these three factors help Ezekiel? And how do they help us today?

EZEKIEL—SENT BY JEHOVAH

3 Jehovah told Ezekiel: "I am sending you." (Ezek. 2:3, 4) Those words must have strengthened Ezekiel. Why? No doubt he recalled that Jehovah had used

1. What can we expect, and of what can we be sure?
2. How did Jehovah describe the people in Ezekiel's territory, and what will we consider in this article? (Ezekiel 2:3-6)
3. What words must have strengthened Ezekiel, and how did Jehovah assure him of His support?



Like Ezekiel, we may face indifference and opposition,
but we know that Jehovah is with us

(See paragraphs 5-6)

similar words when He commissioned Moses and Isaiah as His prophets. (Ex. 3: 10; Isa. 6:8) Ezekiel also knew how Jehovah had helped those two prophets overcome challenges. So when Jehovah told Ezekiel twice: "I am sending you," the prophet had good reason for trusting in Jehovah's support. Further, in the book of Ezekiel, we find this statement numerous times: "The word of Jehovah came to me." (Ezek. 3:16) Moreover, the statement "The word of Jehovah again came to me" occurs repeatedly. (Ezek. 6:1) Surely, Ezekiel was convinced that he was sent by Jehovah. In addition, being the son of a priest, Ezekiel had likely been taught by his father how throughout history Jehovah assured His prophets of His backing. To Isaac, Jacob, and Jeremiah, Jehovah had spoken the

words: "I am with you."—Gen. 26:24; 28:15; Jer. 1:8.

⁴ How would the Israelites in general respond to Ezekiel's preaching? Jehovah stated: "The house of Israel will refuse to listen to you, for they do not want to listen to me." (Ezek. 3:7) By rejecting Ezekiel, the people were rejecting Jehovah. Those words assured Ezekiel that the people's rejection did not mean that he had failed as a prophet. Jehovah also assured Ezekiel that when the judgments he proclaimed came true, the people would "know that a prophet was among them." (Ezek. 2:5; 33:33) No doubt those comforting thoughts gave Ezekiel the strength he needed to fulfill his ministry.

4. What comforting thoughts must have strengthened Ezekiel?

SENT BY JEHOVAH—TODAY

⁵ We too derive strength from knowing that we have been sent by Jehovah. He honors us by calling us his “witnesses.” (Isa. 43:10) What a grand privilege that is! Just as Jehovah urged Ezekiel: “Do not be afraid,” Jehovah urges us: “Do not be in dread.” Why is there no reason to fear our opposers? Like Ezekiel, we are sent by Jehovah and have His backing.—**Read Isaiah 44:8.**

⁶ Jehovah assures us of his support. For example, just before Jehovah stated: “You are my witnesses,” he said: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they will not flood over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame singe you.” (Isa. 43:2) As we carry out our ministry, we sometimes encounter flood-like obstacles and face firelike trials. Even so, with Jehovah’s help we keep preaching. (Isa. 41:13) As in Ezekiel’s day, most people today reject the message. We keep in mind that their rejection does not mean that we have failed as God’s Witnesses. We draw comfort and strength from knowing that Jehovah is pleased when we faithfully continue to declare his message. The apostle Paul stated: “Each person will receive his own reward according to his own work.” (1 Cor. 3:8; 4:1, 2) One longtime pioneer sister says: “It gives me joy to know that Jehovah rewards our efforts.”

5. According to Isaiah 44:8, from what do we derive strength?

6. (a) How does Jehovah assure us of his support? (b) From what do we draw comfort and strength?

EZEKIEL—EMPOWERED BY GOD’S SPIRIT

⁷ Ezekiel saw how powerful God’s spirit is. In vision, he witnessed holy spirit at work on the mighty spirit creatures and on the gigantic wheels of a celestial chariot. (Ezek. 1:20, 21) What was Ezekiel’s reaction? He recorded what happened. “When I saw it, I fell facedown.” Overcome with awe, Ezekiel dropped to the ground. (Ezek. 1:28) Later, whenever Ezekiel reflected on that impressive vision, it must have strengthened his conviction that with the help of God’s spirit, he could accomplish his ministry.

⁸ Jehovah commanded Ezekiel: “Son of man, stand up on your feet that I may speak with you.” That command along with God’s spirit gave Ezekiel the strength that he needed to get up from the ground. Ezekiel wrote: “Spirit came into me and made me stand up on my feet.” (Ezek. 2:1, 2) Later and throughout his ministry, Ezekiel was guided by God’s “hand”—that is, God’s holy spirit. (Ezek. 3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1) God’s spirit strengthened Ezekiel for the task he received—that of preaching to the “hardheaded and hardhearted” people in his territory. (Ezek. 3:7) Jehovah told Ezekiel: “I have made your face exactly as hard as their faces and your forehead exactly as hard as their foreheads. I have made your forehead like a diamond, harder than flint. Do not be afraid of them or be terrified by their

7. Whenever Ezekiel reflected on the vision he saw, it must have had what effect on him? (See cover picture.)

8-9. (a) What did Jehovah’s command give Ezekiel? (b) How did Jehovah further strengthen Ezekiel for his difficult territory?



As in Ezekiel's case, what helps us today to carry out the ministry?

(See paragraph 10)

faces.” (Ezek. 3:8, 9) In effect, Jehovah told Ezekiel: ‘Do not let the people’s stubbornness discourage you. I will fortify you.’

9 Thereafter, God’s spirit carried Ezekiel along in his preaching territory. “The hand of Jehovah rested strongly on me,” wrote Ezekiel. It took the prophet a week to absorb the message that he had to deliver and to make it his own. (Ezek. 3:14, 15) Then Jehovah directed him to a valley plain where “spirit entered into [him].” (Ezek. 3:23, 24) Ezekiel was ready to begin his ministry.

EMPOWERED BY GOD’S SPIRIT—TODAY

10 What help do we need to carry out our preaching work? To answer, think back to what happened to Ezekiel. Before he started with his actual preaching activities, God’s spirit gave him the

10. What help do we need to carry out our preaching activities, and why?

strength he needed. Today, as in Ezekiel’s case, we can carry out the preaching work only with the help of God’s spirit. Why? Because Satan wages war against us in order to stop our preaching activities. (Rev. 12:17) From a human standpoint, we seem totally outmatched by Satan. But by means of our witnessing work, we are conquering him! (Rev. 12:9-11) In what way? When we share in the ministry, we show that we are not intimidated by Satan’s threats. Each time we preach, Satan suffers a defeat. So, what conclusion can we draw from our being able to carry out our preaching activities despite opposition? We can conclude that we are empowered by holy spirit and that we have Jehovah’s approval.—Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 4:14.

11 What further assurance can we draw

11. What will God’s spirit do for us, and how can we keep receiving it?

from knowing that Jehovah had figuratively hardened Ezekiel's face and forehead? God's spirit can make us equal to any challenge we might encounter in our ministry. (2 Cor. 4:7-9) What, then, can we do to make sure that we keep receiving God's spirit? We need to pray for it persistently, confident that Jehovah will hear our prayers. Jesus taught his disciples: "Keep on asking, . . . keep on seeking, . . . keep on knocking." In response, Jehovah will "give holy spirit to those asking him."—Luke 11:9, 13; Acts 1:14; 2:4.

EZEKIEL—NOURISHED BY GOD'S WORDS

¹² Ezekiel was not only empowered by God's spirit but also nourished by God's words. In vision, Ezekiel saw a hand holding a scroll. (**Read Ezekiel 2:9–3:3.**) Where did the scroll come from? What did it contain? How did it nourish Ezekiel? Let us see. The scroll came from God's throne. Likely, Jehovah used one of the four angels Ezekiel saw earlier to hand the scroll to him. (Ezek. 1:8; 10:7, 20) The scroll contained God's words—an extensive judgment message that Ezekiel was to convey to the rebellious exiles. (Ezek. 2:7) That message was written on both the front and the back of the scroll.

¹³ Jehovah told his prophet to eat the scroll and "fill [his] stomach with it." Obediently, Ezekiel ate the scroll completely. What did this part of the vision mean? Ezekiel needed to absorb fully

12. Based on Ezekiel 2:9–3:3, where did the scroll come from and what did it contain?

13. What did Jehovah tell Ezekiel to do with the scroll, and why was it sweet?

the message he was to deliver. It had to become part of him, as it were, affecting his inmost feelings. Then something surprising happened. Ezekiel discovered that the scroll "was as sweet as honey." (Ezek. 3:3) Why? For Ezekiel, the honor of representing Jehovah was a sweet, or a pleasant, experience. (Ps. 19:8-11) He was grateful that Jehovah had approved of him to serve as his prophet.

¹⁴ Later, Jehovah told Ezekiel: "Take to heart and listen to all my words that I speak to you." (Ezek. 3:10) With those instructions, Jehovah told Ezekiel to store in his memory the words written in the scroll and to meditate on them. Doing so nourished Ezekiel personally. It also provided him with a powerful message to deliver to the people. (Ezek. 3:11) With God's message in his heart and on his lips, Ezekiel was ready to take on his assignment and fulfill it.—Compare Psalm 19:14.

NOURISHED BY GOD'S WORDS—TODAY

¹⁵ To endure in our ministry, we too need to continue to be nourished by God's words. We need to "take to heart" all that Jehovah speaks to us. Today Jehovah speaks to us by means of his written Word, the Bible. How can we make sure that God's Word continues to affect our thoughts, feelings, and motivations?

¹⁶ Just as we are nourished physically when we eat food and digest it, we

14. What helped Ezekiel to be ready to take on his assignment?

15. To endure, what do we need to "take to heart"?

16. What must we do with God's Word, and how can we absorb it in our heart?

are nourished spiritually when we study God's Word and meditate on it. We keep in mind the lesson about the scroll. When it comes to God's Word, Jehovah wants us to "fill [our] stomach with it," that is, to absorb it. We can do so by means of prayer, reading, and meditation. First, we pray to prepare our heart to receive God's thoughts. Then, we read a Bible passage. Next, we pause in order to meditate, to think deeply, about what we have read. What will be the outcome? The more we meditate, the more our figurative heart will absorb God's Word.

17 Why is it vital to read the Bible and meditate on it? Doing so gives us the inner strength we need to preach the Kingdom message now and to proclaim the hard-hitting judgment message that we may deliver in the near future. Also, when we meditate on Jehovah's appealing qualities, our relationship with him will grow ever stronger. As a result, we will enjoy something truly sweet, or pleasant—inner peace and contentment.

—Ps. 119:103.

17. Why is it vital to meditate on what we read in the Bible?

MOTIVATED TO ENDURE

18 Unlike Ezekiel, we are not inspired to prophesy to the people. We are, however, determined to continue delivering the inspired message that Jehovah has preserved in his written Word until the preaching work has been completed to his satisfaction. When the time of judgment arrives, the people in our territory will have no basis to say that they did not receive a warning or that God overlooked them. (Ezek. 3:19; 18:23) Instead, they will have to recognize that the message we preached came from God.

19 What will give us the strength to fulfill our ministry? The same three factors that strengthened Ezekiel. We keep preaching because we know that we have been sent by Jehovah, we are empowered by God's holy spirit, and we are nourished by God's Word. With Jehovah's help, we are motivated to carry out our ministry and endure "to the end."

—Matt. 24:13.

18. What will the people in our territory have to acknowledge, and why?

19. What will give us the strength to fulfill our ministry?

WHY SHOULD WE KEEP IN MIND THAT WE ARE . . .

- sent by Jehovah?
- empowered by God's spirit?
- nourished by God's words?

How Jehovah Helps Us to Endure With Joy

SONG 3

Our Strength, Our Hope,
Our Confidence

PREVIEW

This article considers three ways in which Jehovah helps his worshippers to endure life's challenges with joy. We will learn about these forms of help by considering Isaiah chapter 30. As we review this chapter, we will be reminded of the importance of praying to Jehovah, studying his Word, and meditating on our present and future blessings.

JEHOVAH can help us to cope with the challenges in our life and to find joy in our sacred service. In what ways does he help us? And how can we benefit to the full from the help that Jehovah provides? These questions will be answered in this article. However, before we examine the answers, let us consider this related question: Is Jehovah really willing to help us?

² A word used by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Hebrews can help us to find the answer. Paul wrote: “Jehovah is my **helper**; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:6) Bible reference works state that the word “helper,” as used in this verse, refers to a person who runs to the aid of someone crying for help. Picture Jehovah hurrying to rescue someone in distress. You will surely agree that this description highlights Jehovah’s willingness—yes, eagerness—to be our Helper. With Jehovah on our side, we can endure our trials with joy.

³ What are some ways in which Jehovah helps us to endure our trials with joy? To answer, let us turn to the book of Isaiah. Why? Many of the prophecies Isaiah was inspired to write apply to God’s servants today. Further, Isaiah often describes Jehovah in terms that we can easily understand. Take as an example Isaiah chapter 30. There, in language that creates vivid pictures in our mind, Isaiah describes how Jehovah helps us as his peo-

1-2. (a) What questions will we consider? (b) What shows that Jehovah is eager to help us?

3. What are three ways in which Jehovah helps us to endure our trials with joy?

ple (1) by listening attentively and responding to our prayers, (2) by providing us with guidance, and (3) by giving us blessings now and in the future. Let us take a closer look at these three ways in which Jehovah helps us.

JEHOVAH LISTENS TO US

4 In the opening words of Isaiah chapter 30, Jehovah describes the Jews as “stubborn sons,” who “add sin to sin.” He continues, saying: “They are a rebellious people, . . . who are unwilling to hear the law of Jehovah.” (Isa. 30:1, 9) Because the people refused to listen, Isaiah foretold that Jehovah would allow them to suffer calamity. (Isa. 30:5, 17; Jer. 25:8-11) And, indeed, they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. However, there were some faithful ones among the Jews, and Isaiah had a message of hope for them. He told them that one day Jehovah would restore them to favor. (**Read Isaiah 30:18, 19.**) And that is exactly what happened. Jehovah brought an end to their captivity. However, their deliverance would not come right away. The statement “Jehovah is waiting patiently to show you favor” indicated that some time would pass before the faithful ones would be rescued. In fact, the Israelites spent 70 years in exile in Babylon before a remnant was allowed to return to Jerusalem. (Isa. 10:21; Jer. 29:10) Once the people were back in their homeland, the tears of sorrow they had shed in captivity were replaced by tears of joy.

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4. (a) How did Jehovah describe the Jews of Isaiah’s day, and what did He eventually allow? (b) What hope did Jehovah hold out for faithful ones? (Isaiah 30:18, 19)

5 Today we can draw comfort from the words: “He will surely show you favor at the sound of *your cry for help*.” (Isa. 30:19) Isaiah assures us that Jehovah will listen attentively when we cry out to Him and will respond quickly to our supplications. Isaiah adds: “He will answer you as soon as he hears it.” These reassuring words remind us that our Father is willing—yes, eager—to come to the aid of those who reach out to him. Knowing this helps us to endure with joy.

6 What additional assurance about our prayers can we draw from this verse? Jehovah gives attention to the prayer of each one of us. Why can we say that? In the first part of Isaiah chapter 30, the pronoun “you” is used in the plural form because Jehovah is addressing his people as a group. However, in verse 19 “you” is used in the singular; the message is addressed to individuals. Isaiah writes: “**You** will by no means weep”; “he will surely show **you** favor”; “he will answer **you**.” As a loving Father, Jehovah does not tell a discouraged son or daughter, “You should be as strong as your brother or sister.” Rather, he views us as individuals and gives our prayers his personal attention.—Ps. 116:1; Isa. 57:15.

7 When we approach our God about a matter that concerns us, Jehovah’s immediate response may be to give us the strength to cope with the situation. And if our trial does not end as soon as we had hoped, we may need to ask

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5. What assurance does Isaiah 30:19 give us?
 6. How do Isaiah’s words indicate that Jehovah listens to the prayer of each one of his servants?
 7. How do Isaiah and Jesus highlight the need to pray with persistence?



Jehovah repeatedly for the strength to endure it. He invites us to do so. That is implied by these words of Isaiah: “Do not give [Jehovah] any rest.” (Isa. 62:7) What does that mean? Our prayers to Jehovah should be so persistent that it is as if we were not allowing Jehovah to rest. Isaiah’s words remind us of Jesus’ illustrations about prayer found at Luke 11:8-10, 13. There Jesus encourages us to pray with “bold persistence” and to “keep on asking” for holy spirit. We can also beg Jehovah to provide the guidance we need in order to make proper decisions.

JEHOVAH GUIDES US

8 Read Isaiah 30:20, 21. When the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem for a year and a half, the distress that the people experienced became as familiar to them as bread and water. But according to verses 20 and 21, Jehovah promised the Jews that if they repented and changed their behavior, he would come to their rescue. Referring to Jehovah as their “Grand Instructor,” Isa-

iah promised the people that Jehovah would teach them how to worship Him acceptably. Those words were fulfilled when the Jews were released from captivity. Jehovah proved to be a Grand Instructor for them, and under his guidance, his people succeeded in restoring pure worship. We are blessed to have Jehovah as our Grand Instructor today.

9 Continuing his illustrative language, Isaiah describes us as students who are being taught by Jehovah in two ways. First, Isaiah states: “You will see your Grand Instructor with your own eyes.” In this illustration, the Instructor is depicted as standing in front of his students. We are privileged to benefit from his instruction today. How does Jehovah instruct us? He does so by means of his organization. How thankful we are for the clear guidance we receive from that source! The instruction given at our congregation meetings and conventions as well as through the publications, broadcasts, and many other means helps us during challenging times to endure with joy.

8. In ancient times, how were the words of Isaiah 30:20, 21 fulfilled?

9. What is one way in which we today receive Jehovah’s guidance?



What did Isaiah mean when he said: “Do not give [Jehovah] any rest”?
(See paragraph 7)

¹⁰ Isaiah records a second way that Jehovah instructs us, saying: “Your own ears will hear a word behind you.” The prophet here describes Jehovah as an attentive instructor who is walking behind his students, pointing to the way ahead and giving them guidance. Today we hear God’s voice from behind us. How? God’s inspired words were recorded in the Bible long ago, a time far behind us. So when we read the Bible, it is as if we were hearing God’s voice coming from behind us.—Isa. 51:4.

¹¹ How can we benefit to the full from the guidance Jehovah provides by means of his organization and his Word? Note that Isaiah makes two statements. First, “this is the way.” Second, “walk in it.” (Isa. 30:21) It is not enough to know “the way.” We also need to “walk in it.” By means of Jehovah’s Word, as it is explained by his organization, we learn what Jehovah requires of us. We also learn how to apply what we learn. To endure with joy in our service to Jehovah, we need to take both steps. Only

10. In what way do we hear “a word behind [us]”?
11. To endure with joy, what steps do we need to take, and why?

then can we be assured of Jehovah’s blessing.

JEHOVAH BLESSES US

¹² **Read Isaiah 30:23-26.** How was this prophecy fulfilled for the Jews who returned to the land of Israel after the Babylonian captivity? They received abundant blessings—both physical and spiritual. Jehovah blessed his people with an ample supply of physical food. More important, though, he favored them with an abundance of spiritual food as pure worship was gradually restored. The spiritual blessings that God’s people enjoyed at that time vastly exceeded anything they had experienced before. As indicated in verse 26, Jehovah greatly increased the spiritual light. (Isa. 60:2) Jehovah’s blessings helped his servants to keep serving him with joy and inner strength “because of the good condition of the heart.”—Isa. 65:14.

¹³ Does the prophecy about the restoration of pure worship apply to us

12. Based on Isaiah 30:23-26, how would Jehovah bless his people?
13. How has the prophecy of restoration been fulfilled in our day?

today? Absolutely! In what way? Since 1919 C.E., millions of people have broken free from captivity to Babylon the Great, the world empire of false religion. They have been directed to a much better place than Israel's Promised Land. They have been led to a spiritual paradise. (Isa. 51:3; 66:8) What is that spiritual paradise?

¹⁴ Since 1919 C.E., the anointed have enjoyed living in a spiritual paradise.* As time has progressed, those with an earthly hope, the “other sheep,” have also settled in this spiritual land and have enjoyed Jehovah’s abundant blessings.—John 10:16; Isa. 25:6; 65:13.

* **EXPRESSION EXPLAINED:** “Spiritual paradise” refers to the secure environment in which we worship Jehovah in unity. In this environment, we have an abundance of spiritual food that is free from religious lies and we have plenty of satisfying work to do in preaching the good news of God’s Kingdom. We enjoy a close relationship with Jehovah, and we live in peace with our loving brothers and sisters, who help us to endure life’s challenges with joy. We enter the spiritual paradise when we begin worshipping Jehovah in the right way and when we do our best to imitate him.

14. What is the spiritual paradise, and who dwell there today? (See Expression Explained.)

¹⁵ Where is the spiritual land, or paradise, located today? Jehovah’s worshippers can be found in all parts of the earth. Therefore, the spiritual paradise they inhabit also exists throughout the world. So, today, no matter where we live on earth, we can be part of the spiritual paradise as long as we are actively supporting true worship.

¹⁶ To remain in the spiritual paradise, we must, among other things, maintain our deep appreciation for the worldwide Christian congregation. How can we do that? By focusing on the beauty, not on the imperfections, of those who inhabit it. (John 17:20, 21) Why is that so important? Think of this comparison. We would expect to see a variety of trees in a beautiful park, or garden. Similarly, the spiritual paradise existing in the congregations today is adorned with a variety of individuals who are compared to trees. (Isa. 44:4; 61:3) We need to make sure that we continue to focus

15. Where is the spiritual paradise located?

16. How can we continue to see the beauty of the spiritual paradise?



How can each one of us contribute to the beauty of the spiritual paradise?
(See paragraphs 16-17)

on the beauty of the “forest,” not on the blemishes found on the individual “trees” nearest us. We cannot allow our own imperfections or those of others in the congregation to distract us from the overall beauty of the united worldwide Christian congregation.

¹⁷ How are we personally involved in contributing to this unity? By being peacemakers. (Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18) Each time we take the initiative to promote peaceful relations with others in the congregation, we add to the beauty of the spiritual paradise. We keep in mind that Jehovah has drawn each of the inhabitants of the spiritual paradise to pure worship. (John 6:44) Imagine how happy Jehovah must be when he sees us working hard to strengthen the peace and unity among those whom he views as precious—his servants!—Isa. 26:3; Hag. 2:7.

¹⁸ How can we benefit to the full from the blessings that we receive as God’s servants? We can think deeply about what we study in God’s Word and in our Bible-based publications. Such study

17. What can each one of us do to contribute to the unity of the congregation?

18. On what should we often meditate, and why?

and meditation will help us to cultivate Christian qualities that move us to show “brotherly love” and “tender affection for one another” in the congregation. (Rom. 12:10) As we meditate on our current blessings, we strengthen our relationship with Jehovah. And meditating on the blessings that Jehovah has in store for us will keep the hope of serving him forever very real to us. All of this will contribute to our joy in serving Jehovah now.

DETERMINED TO ENDURE

¹⁹ Jehovah “will rise up” in our behalf when he brings an end to this wicked world. (Isa. 30:18) We are confident that Jehovah—“a God of justice”—will not allow Satan’s world to exist for one day longer than justice requires. (Isa. 25:9) We wait patiently with Jehovah for that day of deliverance to arrive. In the meantime, we are determined to continue to treasure the privilege of prayer, to study and apply God’s Word, and to meditate on our blessings. As we do, Jehovah will help us to endure with joy in our worship to him.

19. (a) According to Isaiah 30:18, of what can we be sure? (b) What will help us to endure with joy?

HOW DOES ISAIAH CHAPTER 30 REMIND US THAT JEHOVAH IS WILLING TO . . .

■ listen to us?

■ guide us?

■ bless us?

Let Nothing Separate You From Jehovah

SONG 122

Be Steadfast, Immoveable!

PREVIEW

To endure faithfully in these last days, we must continue to trust in Jehovah and his organization. The Devil tries to use trials to break that trust. This article will discuss three challenges the Devil uses and what we can do to counteract his efforts.

"I trust in you, O Jehovah."—PS. 31:14.

JEHOVAH invites us to be close to him. (Jas. 4:8) He wants to be our God, our Father, and our Friend. He answers our prayers and helps us during difficult times. And he uses his organization to teach us and protect us. But what must we do to draw close to Jehovah?

² We can draw close to Jehovah by praying to him and by reading his Word and meditating on it. As we do, we are filled with love and appreciation for him. We are motivated to give him the obedience and praise that he so richly deserves. (Rev. 4:11) The more we get to know Jehovah, the more we will trust in him and the organization that he has provided to help us.

³ The Devil, however, tries to separate us from Jehovah, especially when we are facing challenges. What is his strategy? He tries little by little to undermine our trust in Jehovah and his organization. But we can resist his tactics. When our faith is strong and our trust in Jehovah is unshakable, we will not abandon our God and his organization.—**Read Psalm 31:13, 14.**

⁴ In this article, we will discuss three challenges that may come from outside the congregation; each one

1. How do we know that Jehovah wants to be close to us?
2. How can we draw close to Jehovah?
3. How does the Devil try to separate us from Jehovah, but what will help us never to abandon our God and his organization? (Psalm 31: 13, 14)
4. What will we discuss in this article?

could undermine our trust in Jehovah and his organization. How could these challenges separate us from Jehovah? And what can we do to counteract Satan's efforts?

WHEN WE EXPERIENCE HARDSHIPS

5 At times, we face hardships—such as family opposition or the loss of our job. How could such hardships undermine our trust in Jehovah's organization and separate us from him? When we endure adversity for a long time, we may feel hopeless and downhearted. Satan takes advantage of such opportunities and seeks to get us to doubt Jehovah's love for us. The Devil wants us to question whether Jehovah or His organization is responsible for our suffering. Something similar happened to some of the Israelites in Egypt. At first they believed that Jehovah had appointed Moses and Aaron to deliver them from slavery. (Ex. 4:29-31) But later when Pharaoh made their lives harder, they blamed Moses and Aaron for their problems, telling them: “**You** have made Pharaoh and his servants despise us and **you** have put a sword in their hand to kill us.” (Ex. 5:19-21) They blamed God's loyal servants. How sad! If you have been enduring hardships for a long time, how can you keep your trust in Jehovah and his organization strong?

6 Pour out your heart to Jehovah in prayer, and look to him for support. The

5. How could hardships undermine our trust in Jehovah and his organization?

6. What do we learn from the prophet Habakkuk about how to cope with hardships? (Habakkuk 3:17-19)

prophet Habakkuk faced many hardships. At one point, he seems to have doubted whether Jehovah cared about him. So he poured out his feelings to Jehovah in prayer. He said: “How long, O Jehovah, must I cry for help, but you do not hear? . . . Why do you tolerate oppression?” (Hab. 1:2, 3) Jehovah responded to the heartfelt prayer of his loyal servant. (Hab. 2:2, 3) After meditating on Jehovah's saving acts, Habakkuk was filled with renewed joy. He became convinced that Jehovah cared for him and would help him endure any trial. (**Read Habakkuk 3:17-19.**) What is the lesson for us? When you face hardships, pray to Jehovah and tell him how you feel. Then look to him for support. When you do, you can be confident that Jehovah will give you the strength you need to endure. And when you feel his support, your faith in him will grow stronger.

7 Maintain your spiritual routine. Consider how doing so helped Shirley, a sister in Papua New Guinea, when she faced hardships.* Shirley's family was poor and, at times, struggled to obtain enough food. A relative tried to undermine her trust in Jehovah. He said: “You say that God's holy spirit is helping you, but where is the help? The family is still poor. You are wasting your time preaching.” Shirley admits: “I asked myself: ‘Does God care about us or not?’ So I immediately prayed to Jehovah and told

* Some names have been changed.

7. Of what did Shirley's relatives try to convince her, and what kept her from losing faith in Jehovah?



Though Paul was in chains, Onesiphorus courageously supported him. Today, our brothers and sisters support their imprisoned fellow believers, as shown in this reenactment
(See paragraphs 11-12)

him everything that was on my mind. I kept up with reading the Bible and our publications, and I continued to preach and attend meetings." She soon began to realize that Jehovah was looking after her family. Her family did not go hungry, and they were happy. Shirley says: "I felt that Jehovah was answering my prayers." (1 Tim. 6:6-8) If you stick to your spiritual routine, you too will not allow hardships or doubts to separate you from Jehovah.

WHEN RESPONSIBLE BROTHERS ARE MISTREATED

⁸ By means of the media and social networks, our enemies spread lies or misinformation about responsible brothers in Jehovah's organization. (Ps. 31:13) Some brothers have been arrested and charged as criminals. The first-century Christians faced a simi-

8. What may happen to responsible brothers in Jehovah's organization?

lar situation when the apostle Paul was wrongfully accused and arrested. How did they react?

⁹ Some Christians in the first century stopped supporting the apostle Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome. (2 Tim. 1:8, 15) Why? Were they ashamed of Paul because the public viewed him as a criminal? (2 Tim. 2:8, 9) Or were they intimidated, fearing that they too would be persecuted? Whatever their reason, imagine how Paul must have felt. He had endured many hardships and had even risked his life for them. (Acts 20:18-21; 2 Cor. 1:8) May we never become like those who abandoned Paul during his time of need! What should we keep in mind when responsible brothers are persecuted?

¹⁰ *Remember why we are persecuted*

9. How did some Christians react when the apostle Paul was imprisoned?

10. What should we remember when responsible brothers are persecuted, and why?

and who causes it. Second Timothy 3:12 states: “All those desiring to live with godly devotion in association with Christ Jesus will also be persecuted.” So we should not be surprised that Satan targets responsible brothers in his attacks. His intent is that such attacks will break their integrity and intimidate us.—1 Pet. 5:8.

11 Continue to support your brothers and loyally stick to them. (Read 2 Timothy 1:16-18.) A first-century Christian named Onesiphorus reacted differently when Paul was imprisoned. “He did not become ashamed of [Paul’s] prison chains.” Rather, Onesiphorus searched for Paul, and when he found him, he looked for practical ways to support him. In doing so, Onesiphorus risked his own life. What is the lesson for us? We must not let fear of man intimidate us or prevent us from supporting our brothers who are being persecuted. Instead, let us defend them and come to their aid. (Prov. 17:17) They need our love and support.

12 Consider how our brothers and sisters in Russia have come to the aid of their dear fellow believers who are imprisoned. When some are put on trial, many brothers and sisters come to the court to support them. What is the lesson for us? When responsible brothers are defamed, arrested, or persecuted, do not become intimidated. Pray for them, care for their family mem-

bers, and look for other practical ways to show your support.—Acts 12:5; 2 Cor. 1:10, 11.

WHEN WE ARE RIDICULED

13 Unbelieving relatives, workmates, or schoolmates may ridicule us for our preaching work or for living by Jehovah’s high moral standards. (1 Pet. 4:4) They may say: “I like you as a person, but your religion is too strict and out of touch with reality.” Some may criticize us for how we deal with disfellowshipped ones, saying: “How can you call yourself a loving person?” Comments like these can plant seeds of doubt in our mind. We may begin to wonder: ‘Is Jehovah expecting too much of me? Is his organization too restrictive?’ If you are facing such a situation, how can you stay close to Jehovah and his organization?

14 Be determined to uphold Jehovah’s standards. Job was a man who upheld Jehovah’s standards despite being ridiculed for doing so. One of Job’s so-called friends even tried to convince him that it did not matter to God whether Job followed His standards or not. (Job 4:17, 18; 22:3) But Job refused to believe such lies. He knew that Jehovah’s standards of right and wrong are correct, and he was determined to uphold them. He did not allow others to take away his integrity. (Job 27:5, 6) What is the lesson for us? Do not let ridicule cause you to question Jehovah’s standards. Think

11. What do we learn from the example of Onesiphorus? (2 Timothy 1:16-18)

12. What do we learn from our brothers and sisters in Russia?

13. How can ridicule undermine our trust in Jehovah and his organization?

14. How should we react when others ridicule us for living by Jehovah’s standards? (Psalm 119:50-52)

Job refused to believe the lies of so-called friends who ridiculed him. Instead, he was determined to maintain his integrity to Jehovah
(See paragraph 14)



back on your own experience. Have you not seen time and again that Jehovah's standards are right and that they benefit you? Be determined to support the organization that upholds those standards. Then no amount of ridicule from any source will ever separate you from Jehovah.—**Read Psalm 119:50-52.**

15 Consider the experience of Brizit, a sister in India. She was ridiculed by family members because of her faith. Shortly after her baptism in 1997, her unbelieving husband lost his job. So he decided that he, Brizit, and their daughters should move in with his parents, who lived in another city. But Brizit would face even greater challenges. Because her husband was unemployed, she would have to work full-time to support her family. Additionally, the nearest congregation was about 350 kilometers (220 mi) away. Sadly, her husband's family opposed her because of her faith. The

situation became so critical that Brizit's family had to move again. Then, unexpectedly, her husband died. Later, one of her daughters died of cancer at just 12 years of age. To make matters worse, Brizit's relatives blamed her for these events. They claimed that if she had not become one of Jehovah's Witnesses, all those tragedies would not have happened. Still, she kept trusting in Jehovah and remained close to his organization.

16 Since Brizit lived so far away from the congregation, a circuit overseer encouraged her to preach in her local area and to conduct meetings in her home. At first, she felt overwhelmed. But she followed the direction. She shared the good news with others, held meetings in her home, and set aside time for family worship with her daughters. What was the result? Brizit was able to start

15. Why was Brizit ridiculed?

16. How was Brizit blessed for sticking close to Jehovah and his organization?

and conduct many Bible studies, and a number of her students got baptized. In 2005 she began serving as a regular pioneer. Her trust in Jehovah and her loyalty to his organization were rewarded. Her daughters are faithfully serving Jehovah, and there are now two congregations in that area! Brizit is convinced that Jehovah gave her the strength to cope with her hardships and to endure ridicule from her family.

REMAIN LOYAL TO JEHOVAH AND HIS ORGANIZATION

¹⁷ Satan wants us to believe that Jehovah abandons us during our hardships and that supporting Jehovah's organization will only make life more difficult for us. Satan wants us to feel intimidated when responsible brothers are slan-

dered, persecuted, or imprisoned. And by means of ridicule, he wants to undermine our trust in Jehovah's standards and His organization. However, we are well-aware of his evil tactics and we are not fooled. (2 Cor. 2:11) Be resolved to reject Satan's lies and to remain loyal to Jehovah and His organization. Remember, Jehovah will never abandon you. (Ps. 28:7) Therefore, let nothing separate you from Jehovah!—Rom. 8:35-39.

¹⁸ In this article, we discussed challenges that we may face from outside of the congregation. But our trust in Jehovah and his organization can also be put to the test by challenges that come from within the congregation. How can we successfully deal with such challenges? We will discuss this in the next article.

17. What should we be resolved to do?

18. What will we discuss in the next article?

HOW CAN WE STAY CLOSE TO JEHOVAH AND HIS ORGANIZATION . . .

- when we experience hardships?
- when responsible brothers are mistreated?
- when we are ridiculed?

SONG 123

Loyally Submitting
to Theocratic Order

PREVIEW

Our loyalty to Jehovah and his organization could be tested, especially when we face challenges within the congregation. This article will discuss three of these challenges and what we can do to stay loyal to Jehovah and his organization.

Keep Your Senses When Your Loyalty Is Tested

“Keep your senses in all things.”—2 TIM. 4:5.

WHEN we face adversities, our loyalty to Jehovah and his organization can be tested. How can we overcome such challenges? We need to keep our senses and stay awake, standing firm in the faith. (**Read 2 Timothy 4:5.**) We keep our senses by remaining calm, thinking clearly, and striving to see matters from Jehovah's perspective. When we do that, our thoughts will not be controlled by emotions.

² In the preceding article, we considered three challenges we may face that come from outside of the congregation. In this article, we will consider three challenges from within the congregation that could test our loyalty to Jehovah. They are (1) when we feel mistreated by a fellow Christian, (2) when we receive discipline, and (3) when we struggle to adapt to organizational changes. How can we keep our senses and loyally stick to Jehovah and his organization when faced with such challenges?

WHEN WE FEEL MISTREATED BY A FELLOW CHRISTIAN

³ Have you ever felt mistreated by a fellow Christian, perhaps someone in a position of responsibility? Likely, the brother did not intend to hurt you. (Rom. 3:23; Jas. 3:2) Still, his actions may have upset you. You may have lost sleep thinking about the matter. You may have even wondered, ‘If a brother can act this way, is this really

1. What does it mean to keep our senses? (2 Timothy 4:5)
2. What will we discuss in this article?
3. How might we react if we feel mistreated by a fellow Christian?

God's organization?' That is exactly how Satan wants us to react. (2 Cor. 2:11) Such negative thinking could cause us to separate ourselves from Jehovah and his organization. So if we feel that a brother or a sister has mistreated us, how can we keep our senses and avoid giving in to harmful thinking?

4 Do not become embittered. When Joseph was a teenager, his older brothers mistreated him. They hated him, and some of them even wanted to kill him. (Gen. 37:4, 18-22) Eventually, they sold him into slavery. As a result, Joseph faced severe trials that lasted about 13 years. Joseph could have questioned whether Jehovah really loved him. And he could have wondered if Jehovah had abandoned him in his time of need. But Joseph did not become embittered. Instead, he kept his senses by remaining calm. When he had the chance to retaliate against his brothers, he refrained from doing so and showed love for them and forgave them. (Gen. 45:4, 5) Joseph behaved this way because he was able to think clearly. Rather than focus on his problems, he saw the big picture—Jehovah's purpose. (**Read Genesis 50:19-21.**) What is the lesson? If you are mistreated, do not become embittered against Jehovah or wonder if he has abandoned you. Instead, meditate on how he is helping you to endure the trial. Additionally, when others mistreat you, try to cover over their imperfections with love.—1 Pet. 4:8.

4. How did Joseph keep his senses when he was mistreated, and what lessons can we learn from his example? (Genesis 50:19-21)

5 Consider a modern-day experience of an elder from South America named Miqueas.* He recalled a time when he felt that he had been harshly treated by some brothers in positions of responsibility. He said: "I had never experienced that kind of stress before. I was frightened. I could not sleep at night, and I shed tears of helplessness." Still, Miqueas kept his senses and worked hard to control his feelings. He prayed frequently, asking Jehovah to give him holy spirit and strength to endure. He also looked up information in our publications that could help him. What is the lesson? If you feel mistreated by a brother or a sister, remain calm and try to control any negative feelings that you may have. You may not know what circumstances could have caused the person to speak or act that way. So talk to Jehovah in prayer, and ask him to help you see matters from the other person's standpoint. Doing so may help you to give your fellow worshipper the benefit of the doubt and to overlook the offense. (Prov. 19:11) Remember, Jehovah is aware of your situation and he will give you the strength you need to endure.—2 Chron. 16:9; Eccl. 5:8.

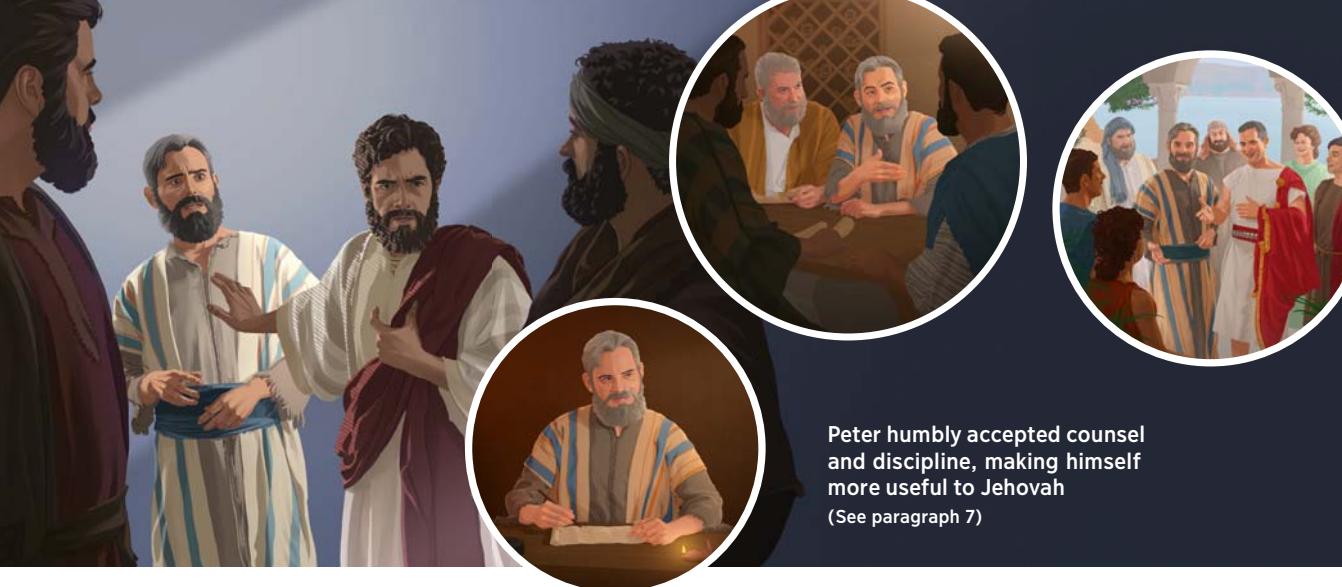
WHEN WE RECEIVE DISCIPLINE

6 Discipline can be emotionally painful. But if we focus only on the pain,

* Some names have been changed.

5. How did Miqueas keep his senses when he felt that he had been mistreated?

6. Why is it important that we see Jehovah's discipline as an expression of his love? (Hebrews 12:5, 6, 11)



Peter humbly accepted counsel
and discipline, making himself
more useful to Jehovah
(See paragraph 7)

we may begin to minimize the discipline, feeling that it is not justified or that it is too harsh. As a result, we may miss out on something special—seeing the discipline as an expression of Jehovah's love for us. (**Read Hebrews 12: 5, 6, 11.**) And if we allow our emotions to control us, we give Satan an opportunity to exploit our feelings. He wants us to reject the discipline and, even worse, to distance ourselves from Jehovah and from the congregation. If you have been disciplined, how can you keep your senses?

7 Accept discipline, and make the needed adjustments. More than once, Jesus corrected Peter in front of the other apostles. (Mark 8:33; Luke 22:31-34) What a humbling experience! However, Peter remained loyal to Jesus. He accepted the discipline and learned from his mistakes. Consequently, Jehovah rewarded Peter's loyalty and assigned him weighty responsibilities in the congre-

gation. (John 21:15-17; Acts 10:24-33; 1 Pet. 1:1) What can we learn from Peter's example? We benefit ourselves and others when we see beyond the embarrassment of the discipline, accept the correction, and make the needed adjustments. When we do so, we become even more useful to Jehovah and to our brothers.

8 Consider what happened to Bernardo, a brother in Mozambique. He was removed as an elder. How did Bernardo initially feel? He says, "I was resentful because I did not like the discipline I received." He was concerned about how others in the congregation would view him. He admits, "It took me a few months to gain the right view of the situation and to trust in Jehovah and his organization again." What helped Bernardo to have the right perspective?

9 Bernardo corrected his thinking. He explains: "When I served as an elder, I used Hebrews 12:7 to help others to

7. (a) As shown in the picture, how was Peter used by Jehovah after he accepted discipline?
(b) What do you learn from Peter's example?

8-9. After being disciplined, how did Bernardo initially feel, but what helped him to correct his thinking?

have the right view of Jehovah's discipline. Now I asked myself, 'Who needs to apply this scripture?' All of Jehovah's servants—including me." Then Bernardo took further steps to rebuild his trust in Jehovah and His organization. He intensified his spiritual routine of Bible reading and deep meditation. Although he felt insecure about how his brothers and sisters viewed him, he worked with them in the ministry and participated in congregation meetings. In time, Bernardo was reappointed as an elder. If, like Bernardo, you have received discipline, try to see past the embarrassment, accept the counsel, and make the needed adjustments.* (Prov. 8:33; 22:4) If you do, you can be sure that Jehovah will reward you for loyally sticking to him and his organization.

WHEN WE STRUGGLE TO ADAPT TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

¹⁰ Organizational changes can test our loyalty. If we are not careful, we could even allow them to separate us from Jehovah. For example, consider how an organizational change under the Mosaic Law may have affected some Israelites. Before the Law was instituted, family heads performed priestly duties. They built altars and sacrificed to Jehovah on behalf of their families. (Gen. 8:20, 21; 12:7; 26:25; 35:1, 6, 7; Job 1:5) But when the Law was instituted, family heads had to let go of that privilege. Jehovah

appointed priests from Aaron's family to offer sacrifices. After that organizational change was put into effect, if a family head who was not one of Aaron's descendants began acting as a priest, he could be put to death.* (Lev. 17:3-6, 8, 9) Was this change perhaps one of the reasons why Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and 250 chieftains challenged Moses' and Aaron's authority? (Num. 16:1-3) We cannot say for sure. Whatever the case, Korah and his associates failed to remain loyal to Jehovah. If organizational changes test your loyalty, what can you do?

¹¹ **Fully support organizational changes.** During their travels in the wilderness, the Kohathites cared for a prominent assignment. Each time the Israelites moved camp, some of the Kohathites carried the ark of the covenant before all the people. (Num. 3:29, 31; 10:33; Josh. 3:2-4) What a privilege! However, things changed for them when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land. The Ark no longer needed to be moved regularly. So by the time Solomon ruled as king, some Kohathites were assigned to work as singers, some served as gatekeepers, and others cared for storehouses. (1 Chron. 6:31-33; 26:1, 24) There is no record that the Kohathites complained or demanded a more prominent role because of their rich heritage. What lesson can we learn? Wholeheartedly support changes that Jehovah's organization makes,

* You may find further helpful suggestions in the article "Did You Once Serve? Can You Serve Again?" in the August 15, 2009, issue of *The Watchtower*, p. 30.

10. What organizational change may have tested the loyalty of some Israelite men?

* The Law required that family heads who wanted to slaughter a domestic animal for meat take the animal to the sanctuary. Exceptions were made for family heads who lived too far away from the sanctuary.—Deut. 12:21.

11. What do we learn from the example of some of the Kohathite Levites?



When the Kohathites received a change of assignment, they willingly served as singers, as gatekeepers, or as workers in storehouses (See paragraph 11)

including any that affect your assignment. Find joy in whatever assignment you are given. Remember that your assignment does not reflect your worth as a person. Jehovah values your obedience far more than any assignment.

—1 Sam. 15:22.

¹² Consider the example of Zaina, a sister in the Middle East, who received a change of assignment and lost a cherished privilege. She was reassigned to the field after serving at Bethel for more than 23 years. She says: “My change of assignment was a big shock. I felt useless and kept asking myself, ‘Where did I fail?’” Sadly, some brothers and sisters in the congregation added to her pain by telling her: “Had you been good enough, the organization would not have let you go.” For some time, Zaina felt so downhearted that she cried every night. But she says: “I never allowed myself to doubt the organization or Jehovah’s love.” How was Zaina able to keep her senses?

12. How did Zaina feel when she was reassigned from Bethel?

¹³ Zaina was able to overcome her negative feelings. How? She read articles in our publications that addressed her personal challenge. The article “You Can Cope With Discouragement!” in the February 1, 2001, issue of *The Watchtower* helped her a lot. That article explains how the Bible writer Mark may have struggled with similar feelings when he received assignment changes. Zaina recalls, “Mark’s example was my medicine for overcoming discouragement.” Zaina also stayed close to her friends. She did not isolate herself; nor did she give in to feelings of self-pity. She concluded that Jehovah’s spirit operates through his organization and that those taking the lead cared for her deeply. But she also realized that God’s organization must do what is best to get Jehovah’s work done.

¹⁴ Vlado, a 73-year-old elder in Slovenia, struggled when his congrega-

13. What did Zaina do to overcome her negative feelings?

14. Vlado struggled to adapt to what organizational change, and what helped him?

tion merged with another congregation and the Kingdom Hall that he attended was closed. He says: “I did not understand why such a beautiful Kingdom Hall would be closed. I felt hurt because we had recently renovated the hall. I am a carpenter, and I had built some of the new furniture. Also, the reorganization required many adjustments that were not easy for us older publishers.” What helped Vlado to support the direction? He explains: “Adapting to changes made by Jehovah’s organization always brings blessings. These refinements are preparing us for even greater changes in the future.” Are you struggling with the adjustments that come with a congregation merge or an assignment change? Be assured that Jehovah understands your feelings. When you support such changes and loyally stick to Jehovah and the organization that he is using, you will surely be blessed.—Ps. 18:25.

KEEP YOUR SENSES IN ALL THINGS

15 As we get closer to the end of this system of things, we can expect chal-

15. How can we keep our senses when we face challenges from within the congregation?

lenges to come from within the congregation. Those challenges could test our loyalty to Jehovah. So we must keep our senses. If you feel mistreated by a fellow Christian, do not allow yourself to become bitter. If you receive discipline, look beyond the embarrassment, accept the counsel, and make the needed adjustments. And when Jehovah’s organization makes changes that affect you personally, wholeheartedly accept them and obey the direction.

16 You can maintain your trust in Jehovah and his organization when your loyalty is tested. But to do so, you need to keep your senses, that is, to stay calm, think clearly, and see matters from Jehovah’s perspective. Be determined to study about Bible characters who successfully coped with similar issues and meditate on their examples. Pray to Jehovah for help. And never isolate yourself from the congregation. Then, come what may, Satan will not be able to separate you from Jehovah or His organization.—Jas. 4:7.

16. How can you maintain your trust in Jehovah and his organization?

HOW CAN WE STAY LOYAL TO JEHOVAH AND HIS ORGANIZATION . . .

- when we feel mistreated by a fellow Christian?
- when we receive discipline?
- when we struggle to adapt to organizational changes?

SONG 126

Stay Awake, Stand Firm, Grow Mighty



“I Wanted to Work for Jehovah”

AS TOLD BY DANIEL VAN MARL

WE WAVED goodbye to a small group of people we had visited near the village of Granburi, located deep in the rain forest of Suriname. Then we set off in a dugout boat along the Tapanahoni River. Later, as we passed through river rapids, the propeller of the outboard motor hit a rock. Immediately, the nose of the boat plunged into the river, and we went underwater. My heart raced. Although I had been traveling in riverboats for years as a circuit overseer, I did not know how to swim!

Before I relate what happened next, let me tell you how I got started in full-time service.

I was born in 1942 on the beautiful Caribbean island of Curaçao. My father was originally from Suriname, but he moved to the island for work. A couple of years before I was born, he was among the first of Jehovah’s Witnesses to get baptized in Curaçao.* He studied the Bible with us children every week, even though we would not always make it easy for him. When I was 14 years old, my father moved our family to Suriname to look after his aging mother.

GOOD ASSOCIATION MADE A DIFFERENCE

In Suriname, I started associating with young ones in the congregation who were actively serving Jehovah. They were a few years older than I was and served as regular pioneers. When they would talk about the experiences they had in the field ministry, their faces would radiate with happiness. After congregation meetings, my friends and I also had conversations about Bible topics—at times, while sitting outside under the starry heavens. These friends helped me to realize what I wanted in life; I wanted to work for Jehovah. So I got baptized when I was 16 years old. Later, at age 18, I started regular pioneering.

LEARNING VALUABLE LESSONS

I learned many lessons as a pioneer, and these have helped me throughout my career in full-time service. For example, one of the first lessons I learned was the importance of training others. When I started pioneering, a missionary named Willem van Seijl took me under his wing.[#] He taught

* See the 2002 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, p. 70.

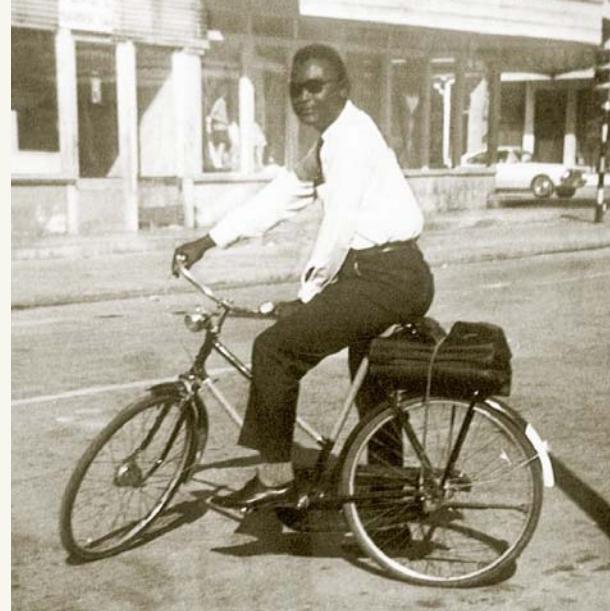
[#] Willem van Seijl’s life story, “Reality Has Exceeded My Expectations,” is published in the October 8, 1999, issue of *Awake!*

me a lot about how to handle theocratic assignments. At the time, I had no idea that I needed the training so badly. The following year I was appointed as a special pioneer and thereafter started taking the lead in isolated groups located deep in the rain forest of Suriname. How I appreciate the timely training the brothers gave me! Since then, I have sought to follow their example by taking the time to train others.

A second lesson I learned was the advantage of living a simple but well-planned life. At the beginning of each month, my special pioneer partner and I would plan out our material needs for the upcoming weeks. Then one of us would make the long journey to the capital and purchase what we needed. We had to spend our monthly reimbursement carefully and ration our supplies so that they would last the whole month. If we ran out of something while in the rain forest, few people, if any, could help us. I believe that having learned at a young age to live simply but to be well-organized helped me keep focused on Jehovah's work throughout my life.

A third lesson I learned was the benefit of teaching people in their native language. I grew up speaking Dutch, English, Papiamento, and Sranantongo (also known as Sranan), the common language of Suriname. But in the rain forest, I saw that people responded better to the good news when we preached in their native tongue. I found it difficult to speak some of these languages, such as Saramaccan, which uses high and low tones. However, the effort was worth it. Over the years, I have been able to teach the truth to many more people because I could speak their native language.

Of course, I had my share of embarrassing experiences. For example, on one occasion I meant to ask a Saramaccan-speaking Bible student how she was feeling, since she



While pioneering in Paramaribo

had been having abdominal pains. But what I really asked her was if she was pregnant! Needless to say, she did not appreciate my inquiry. Despite mishaps like this, I always exerted myself to speak the native language of the people in my assignments.

ACCEPTING ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

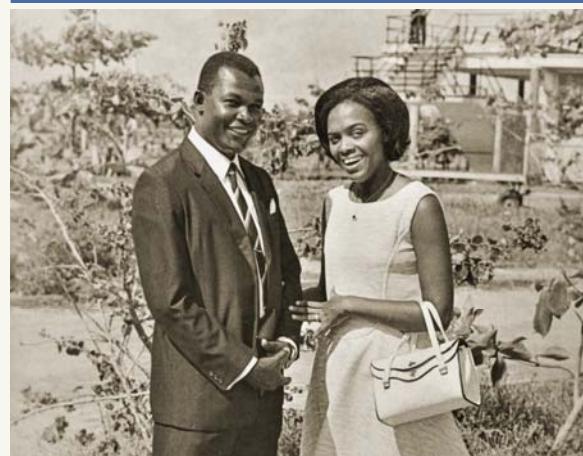
In 1970, I was appointed as a circuit overseer. That year I presented the slide program "Visiting the World Headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses" to many isolated groups in the rain forest. To reach them, a crew of brothers and I would navigate the rivers of the rain forest in a long, slender wooden boat. Our riverboat was loaded down with a generator, a portable gasoline tank, petrol lamps, and slide projection equipment. On reaching our destination, we would transport all that equipment inland to where we would hold the slide program. What I remember most about those trips, though, is how much people in isolated areas loved those programs. I was so happy to help others learn about Jehovah and the

earthly part of his organization. The spiritual rewards far outweighed any physical sacrifices I made while doing Jehovah's work.

WEAVING A THREEFOLD CORD

Although I could see how singleness was an advantage in my service, I still felt the need for a lifelong partner. So I started praying specifically to find a wife who would joyfully endure the rigors of full-time service in the rain forest. About a year later, I started courting Ethel, a special pioneer who had a self-sacrificing spirit. From a young age, Ethel deeply admired the apostle Paul and wanted to give of herself in the Christian ministry as he had. We married in September 1971 and started serving in the circuit work as a couple.

Ethel had been raised without many material comforts, so she adjusted well to the traveling work in the rain forest. For example, when preparing to visit congregations deep in the forest, we packed light. We washed clothes and bathed in rivers. We also got used to eating whatever our hosts served us—iguanas, piranhas, or anything else they may have hunted in the for-

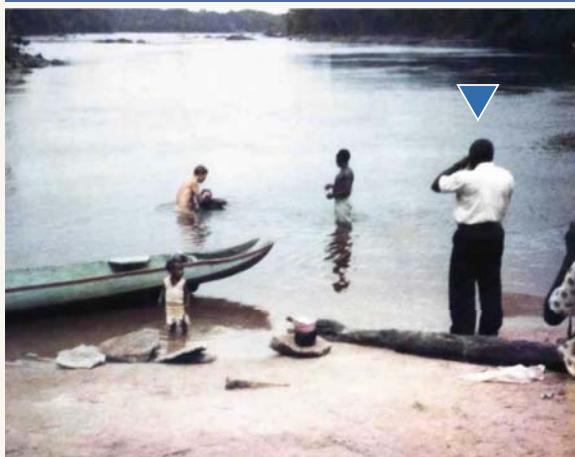


Ethel and I were married in September 1971

est or caught in the rivers. When there were no plates, we ate off banana leaves. When there were no utensils, we ate with our fingers. Ethel and I feel that making sacrifices together while working for Jehovah has drawn us into a tightly woven threefold cord. (Eccl. 4:12) We would not trade those experiences for anything!

It was on a return trip from an isolated area in the forest that we had the experience I related at the outset. As the boat entered the rapids, it briefly went underwater but quickly popped to the surface. Thankfully, we were wearing life jackets and did not fall out of the boat. But our boat was filled with water. We emptied the contents





Attending a baptism in the Tapanahoni River near Godo Holo in Eastern Suriname—1983

of our food pots into the river and then used those pots to bail out the boat.

Since we had lost our food, we started fishing as we continued down the river. But we were not catching anything. So we prayed to Jehovah and asked him to give us our food for that day. Right after we prayed, one of the brothers threw out a fishing line and caught a fish large enough for the five of us to eat that night and be satisfied.

HUSBAND, FATHER, AND TRAVELING OVERSEER

After five years in the traveling work together, Ethel and I received an unexpected blessing—we were going to be parents. I was happy to hear the news, although I was not sure what the future would hold. Ethel and I strongly desired to stay in full-time service if at all possible. In 1976 our son Ethniël was born. Our second son, Giovanni, came along two and a half years later.

Because of the needs in Suriname at the time, the branch office arranged for me to continue serving as a circuit overseer while we raised our children. When our sons were young, I was assigned to oversee circuits with fewer congregations. Normally, that

allowed me to serve a couple of weeks each month as a traveling overseer and spend the rest of the month as a pioneer in the congregation where we were assigned. Ethel and our boys would accompany me when I served congregations near our home. However, I traveled alone when I served congregations and assemblies in the rain forest.

I had to organize my affairs carefully to fulfill all my responsibilities. I made sure that we held our family study every week. When I was away visiting congregations in the forest, Ethel would conduct the family study with our boys at home. As often as possible, though, we did things together as a family. Ethel and I also regularly shared in wholesome recreation with our boys—be it games or simple outings. I would often stay up very late at night, preparing for theocratic assignments. And Ethel, being the capable wife described at Proverbs 31:15, would get up before dawn to make sure that we could read the daily text as a family and have breakfast together before our sons went to school. How grateful I am to

In the circuit work, I often traveled by boat to visit isolated congregations





From left to right: With my wife, Ethel
Our older son, Ethniël, with his wife, Natalie
Our son Giovanni with his wife, Christal

have such a self-sacrificing wife who has always helped me fulfill my Scriptural responsibilities!

As parents, we worked hard to help our boys love Jehovah and the Christian ministry. We wanted our sons to choose full-time service as their careers, not because it was what we wanted them to do, but because it was *their* choice. We always emphasized to them the joys of full-time service. Without ignoring the difficulties, we highlighted how Jehovah helped and blessed us as a family. We also made sure that our sons were surrounded by fellow Witnesses, who put Jehovah first in their lives.

Jehovah provided for all our needs as we raised a family. Of course, I always tried to do my part. My experience in the rain forest as a single special pioneer taught me to plan ahead for our material needs. But at times, even our best efforts could not meet the demands of the circumstances. On those occasions, I believe that Jehovah stepped in to help us. For example, during the late 1980's and the early 1990's, there was an uprising in Suriname. In those years, it was at times hard to obtain even basic items. Even so, Jehovah provided for us.—Matt. 6:32.

LOOKING BACK

Throughout our life, Jehovah has always cared for us and has given us deep happiness and satisfaction. Our children have been a great blessing to us, and raising them to serve Jehovah has been a privilege. We are delighted that they also chose to make full-time service their career in life. Ethniël and Giovanni both have graduated from theocratic schools and are now serving at the branch office in Suriname along with their wives.

Ethel and I are much older now, but we are still busy working for Jehovah as special pioneers. In fact, we are so busy that I have yet to find the time to learn how to swim! But I have no regrets. Looking back, I honestly feel that deciding at a young age to make full-time service my life's work was one of the best decisions I could ever have made.

DID YOU KNOW?

Was Mordecai a historical figure?

A JEW named Mordecai plays a major role in the events of the Bible book of Esther. He was a Jewish exile who worked in the royal Persian palace. This was during the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E. “in the days of [King] Ahasuerus.” (That king is commonly identified today with Xerxes I.) Mordecai put a stop to the plot to assassinate the king. Out of gratitude, the king arranged that Mordecai be honored publicly. Later, after the death of Haman, an enemy of Mordecai and of the other Jews, the king promoted Mordecai to the position of prime minister. That position allowed Mordecai to issue a decree that rescued the Jews in the Persian Empire from genocide.—Esther 1:1; 2:5, 21-23; 8:1, 2; 9:16.

Some early 20th-century historians claimed that the book of Esther is fiction and that Mordecai never existed. However, in 1941, archaeologists found what may be evidence that supports the Biblical report about Mordecai. What did they find?

Researchers discovered a Persian cuneiform text that mentions a man named *Marduka* (English Mordecai). He worked as an administrator, possibly an accountant, in Shushan. Arthur Ungnad, an expert in Oriental history, reported that this cuneiform was “the only extra-Biblical reference to Mordecai” at the time.

Since Ungnad’s report, scholars have translated thousands of other Persian cuneiforms. Among these are the Persepolis tablets, which were found in the ruins of the Treasury, near the city walls. These tablets date back to the reign of Xerxes I. They are in



The name Mordecai (Marduka) as it appears in Persian cuneiform writing

the Elamite language and contain several names found in the book of Esther.*

Several Persepolis tablets mention the name *Marduka*, who served as a royal scribe at the palace in Shushan during the reign of Xerxes I. One tablet describes *Marduka* as a translator. That detail fits the Bible’s description of Mordecai. He was an official who served in the court of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) and who spoke at least two languages. Mordecai regularly sat in the king’s gate of the palace in Shushan. (Esther 2:19, 21; 3:3) This royal gate stood as an imposing building and was the workplace of palace officials.

There are remarkable similarities between *Marduka* mentioned in the tablets and Mordecai mentioned in the Bible. They lived at the same time and in the same place and served in official positions at the same place of work. All these similarities together suggest that the archaeological discoveries may relate to the Mordecai described in the book of Esther.

* In 1992, Professor Edwin M. Yamauchi published ten names from the Persepolis texts that are also found in the book of Esther.

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COVER PICTURE:

Ezekiel sees a vision of Jehovah's celestial chariot, which strengthens his conviction that Jehovah will help him to accomplish his ministry (See study article 45, paragraph 7)

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