

DECEMBER 15, 2000

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS
Are They Christian?

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

December 15, 2000

Average Printing Each Issue: 22,398,000

Vol. 121, No. 24

THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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Publication of *The Watchtower* is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations.

The Bible translation used is the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*, unless otherwise indicated.

The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; Milton G. Henschel, President; Lyman A. Swingle, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589.

Changes of address should reach us 30 days before your moving date.
Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label).

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Semimonthly

ENGLISH

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CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Are They Christian?

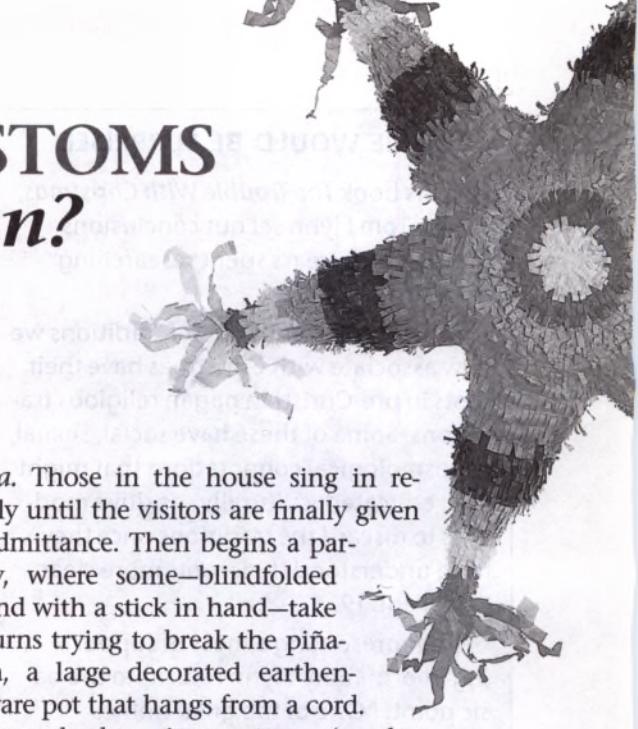
THE Christmas season is here. What does that mean to you, your family, and your associates? Is it a spiritual occasion, or is it only a festive and merry period? Is it a time to reflect on the birth of Jesus Christ or not to be concerned about Christian norms?

In considering those questions, bear in mind that Christmas traditions may differ according to where you live. For instance, in Mexico and other Latin-American countries, even the name is different. One encyclopedia points out that the English name Christmas "is derived from the medieval *Christes Masse*, the Mass of Christ." However, *La Navidad*, or the Nativity, as it is called in these Latin-American lands, refers to the nativity, or birth, of Christ. Take a moment to consider some details from Mexico. This may help you to shape your own opinion about this holiday season.

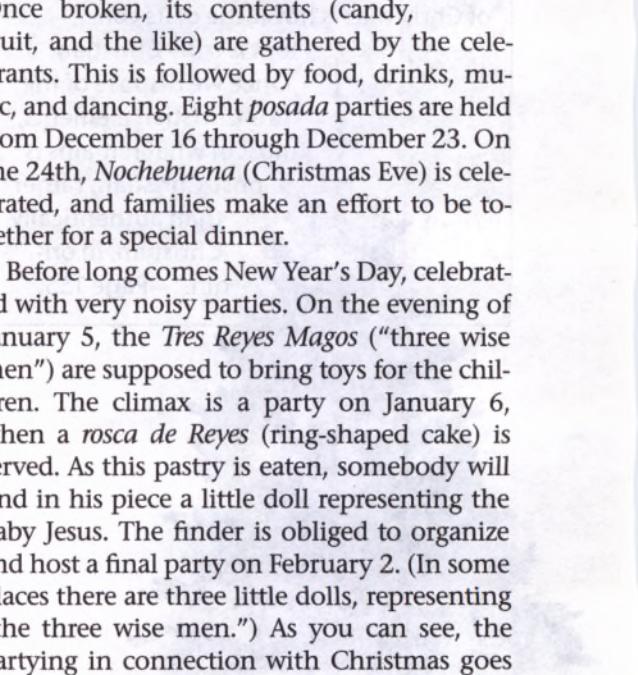
The Posadas, "the Three Wise Men," and the *Nacimiento*

The festivities begin on December 16 with the *posadas*. The book *Mexico's Feasts of Life* comments: "It is the time of the *posadas*, nine magical days leading up to Christmas Eve, which commemorate the lonely wandering of Joseph and Mary in the city of Bethlehem and the moment when they at last found kindness and shelter. Families and friends gather together nightly to reenact the days preceding the birth of Christ."

Traditionally, a group of people carries images of Mary and Joseph to a home and in song asks for shelter, or *posa-*



da. Those in the house sing in reply until the visitors are finally given admittance. Then begins a party, where some—blindfolded and with a stick in hand—take turns trying to break the piñata, a large decorated earthenware pot that hangs from a cord. Once broken, its contents (candy, fruit, and the like) are gathered by the celebrants. This is followed by food, drinks, music, and dancing. Eight *posada* parties are held from December 16 through December 23. On the 24th, *Nochebuena* (Christmas Eve) is celebrated, and families make an effort to be together for a special dinner.



Before long comes New Year's Day, celebrated with very noisy parties. On the evening of January 5, the *Tres Reyes Magos* ("three wise men") are supposed to bring toys for the children. The climax is a party on January 6, when a *rosca de Reyes* (ring-shaped cake) is served. As this pastry is eaten, somebody will find in his piece a little doll representing the baby Jesus. The finder is obliged to organize and host a final party on February 2. (In some places there are three little dolls, representing "the three wise men.") As you can see, the partying in connection with Christmas goes on and on.

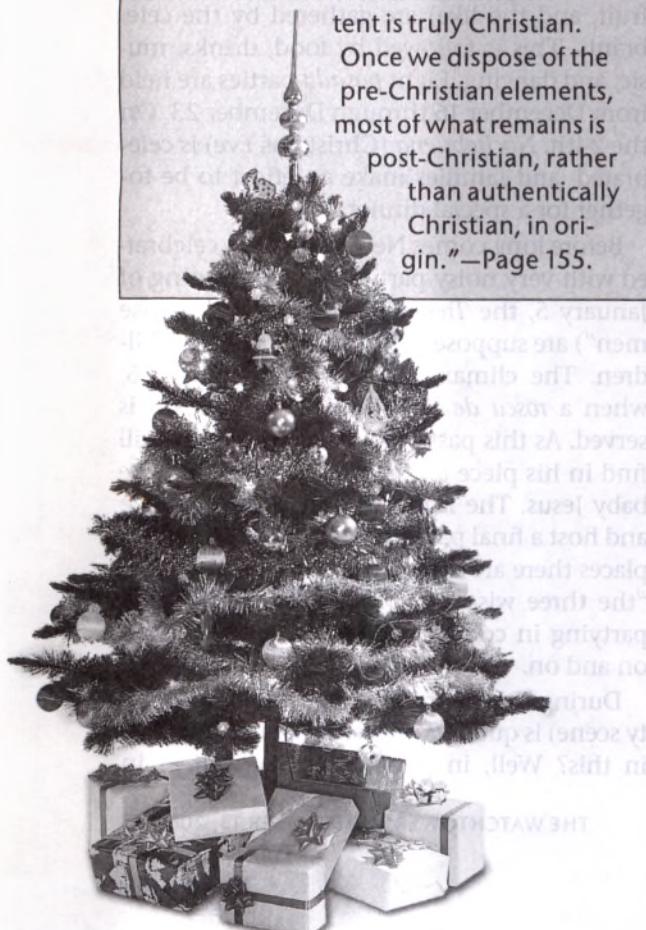
During this period, the *nacimiento* (Nativity scene) is quite prominent. What is involved in this? Well, in public areas as well as in

SOME WOULD BE SURPRISED

In his book *The Trouble With Christmas*, author Tom Flynn set out conclusions reached after years spent researching Christmas:

"An enormous number of traditions we now associate with Christmas have their roots in pre-Christian pagan religious traditions. Some of these have social, sexual, or cosmological connotations that might lead educated, culturally sensitive moderns to discard the traditions once they have understood their roots more clearly."—Page 19.

After presenting a mass of supporting information, Flynn returns to the basic point: "One of the great ironies of Christmas is how little of its content is truly Christian. Once we dispose of the pre-Christian elements, most of what remains is post-Christian, rather than authentically Christian, in origin."—Page 155.



churches and homes, scenes are set up with figures (large or small) made out of ceramic, wood, or clay. They represent Joseph and Mary kneeling before a manger that holds a newborn baby. Often there are shepherds and *Los Reyes Magos* ("the wise men"). The setting is a stable, and some animals may round out the scene. The central figure, however, is that of a newborn baby, called in Spanish *el Niño Dios* (the Child God). This key figure may be placed there on Christmas Eve.

A Closer Look at Nativity Traditions

Concerning the Christmas celebration as it is generally known all over the world, *The Encyclopedia Americana* says: "Most of the customs now associated with Christmas were not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church. Saturnalia, a Roman feast celebrated in mid-December, provided the model for many of the merry-making customs of Christmas. From this celebration, for example, were derived the elaborate feasting, the giving of gifts, and the burning of candles."

In Latin America, those basic Nativity customs may be followed, along with additional ones. 'From what source,' you might wonder. Frankly, many who want to adhere to the Bible recognize that some customs are nothing but Aztec rites. *El Universal*, a newspaper in Mexico City, commented: "Friars from different orders took advantage of the fact that festivities of the Indian ritual calendar coincided with the Catholic liturgical calendar, so they used this to support their evangelizing and missionary work. They replaced the commemorations to the pre-Hispanic divinities with festivities to Christian divinities, introduced European festivities and activities, and also took advantage of the Indian festivities, which resulted in a cultural syncretism from which authentically Mexican expressions have arisen."

The Encyclopedia Americana explains: "Nativity plays early became a part of the Christmas celebration . . . The representation in church of the crèche [the manger scene] is said to have been begun by Saint Francis." These plays featuring the birth of Christ were performed in the churches during the beginning of the colonization of Mexico. They were organized by Franciscan monks in order to teach the Indians about the Nativity. Later the *posadas* became more popular. Whatever the original intention behind them, the way the *posadas* are held today speaks for itself. If you are in Mexico during this season, you can see or sense something that a writer for *El Universal* highlighted in his comment: "The *posadas*, which were a way to remind us of the pilgrimage of Jesus' parents looking for a shelter where the Child God could be born, are today only days of drunkenness, excesses, gluttony, vanities, and more and more crime."

The idea of the *nacimiento* emerged during Colonial times from the original live representations in churches. While some find it attractive, does it correctly represent what the Bible says? That is a valid question. When the so-called three wise men—who in fact were astrologers—visited, Jesus and his family were no longer living in a stable. Time had passed, and the family was living in a house. You will find it interesting to note this detail in the inspired record at Matthew 2:1, 11. You can also note that the Bible does not say how many astrologers there were.*

In Latin America, the three wise men replace the idea of Santa Claus. Still, as is done in other lands, many parents hide toys in the home. Then on the morning of January 6, the chil-

* Another detail should not be ignored: In the Mexican *nacimiento*, the baby is referred to as "the Child God" with the idea that it was God himself who came to earth as a baby. However, the Bible presents Jesus as being the Son of God who was born on earth; he was not the same as or equal to Jehovah, the almighty God. Consider the truth about this, presented at Luke 1:35; John 3:16; 5:37; 14:1, 6, 9, 28; 17:1, 3; 20:17.

dren look for them, as if the three wise men brought them. This is a money-making time for toy sellers, and some have made a fortune on what many honesthearted people recognize is just a fantasy. The myth of the three wise men is losing credibility among a goodly number, even among little children. Though some are displeased that this myth is losing believers, what can anyone expect of a fantasy maintained only for the sake of tradition and for commercial convenience?

Christmas, or the Nativity, was not celebrated by early Christians. One encyclopedia says about this: "The celebration was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth." The Bible links the celebration of birthdays with pagans, not with God's true worshipers.—Matthew 14:6-10.

This does not, of course, mean that it is not beneficial to learn and remember the actual events involved in the birth of the Son of God. The factual Bible account provides important insights and lessons for all those who want to do God's will.

Birth of Jesus According to the Bible

You will find reliable information about Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and



Luke. They show that the angel Gabriel visited a young unmarried woman by the name of Mary in the Galilean town of Nazareth. What message did he deliver? "Look! you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call his name Jesus. This one will be great and will be called Son of the Most High; and Jehovah God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule as king over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of his kingdom." —Luke 1:31-33.

Mary was very surprised by this message. Not being married, she said: "How is this to be, since I am having no intercourse with a man?" The angel answered: "Holy spirit will come upon you, and power of the Most High will overshadow you. For that reason also what is born will be called holy, God's Son." Mary, recognizing that this was the will of God, said: "Look! Jehovah's slave girl! May it take place with me according to your declaration." —Luke 1:34-38.

An angel told Joseph about the miraculous birth so that he would not divorce Mary, which he was planning to do after he learned of her pregnancy. He was then willing to assume the responsibility of taking care of the Son of God. —Matthew 1:18-25.

Then a decree from Caesar Augustus forced Joseph and Mary to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea, the city of their forefathers, to be registered. "While they were there, the days came to the full for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her son, the firstborn, and she bound him with cloth bands and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the lodging room." —Luke 2:1-7.

Luke 2:8-14 describes what followed: "There were also in that same country shepherds living out of doors and keeping watches in the night over their flocks. And suddenly Jehovah's angel stood by them, and Jehovah's glory gleamed around them, and they became

very fearful. But the angel said to them: 'Have no fear, for, look! I am declaring to you good news of a great joy that all the people will have, because there was born to you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, in David's city. And this is a sign for you: you will find an infant bound in cloth bands and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there came to be with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, praising God and saying: 'Glory in the heights above to God, and upon earth peace among men of goodwill.' "

The Astrologers

Matthew's account mentions that astrologers from the East came to Jerusalem looking for the place where the King of the Jews was born. King Herod was very interested in this—but not with good intentions. "Sending them to Bethlehem, he said: 'Go make a careful search for the young child, and when you have found it report back to me, that I too may go and do it obeisance.'" The astrologers found the young child and "opened their treasures and presented it with gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." But they did not go back to Herod. "They were given divine warning in a dream not to return to Herod." God used an angel to warn Joseph of Herod's intentions. Joseph and Mary then fled to Egypt with their son. Next, in an effort to eliminate the new King, cruel King Herod ordered the killing of boys in the Bethlehem area. Which boys? Those two years of age and under. —Matthew 2:1-16.

What Can We Learn From the Account?

The visiting astrologers—however many of them there were—did not worship the true God. The Bible version *La Nueva Biblia Latinoamérica* (1989 Edition) states in a footnote: "The Magi were not kings, but fortune-tellers and priests of a pagan religion." They came in line with their knowledge of the stars to which they were devoted. Had God wanted to guide them to the young child, they would

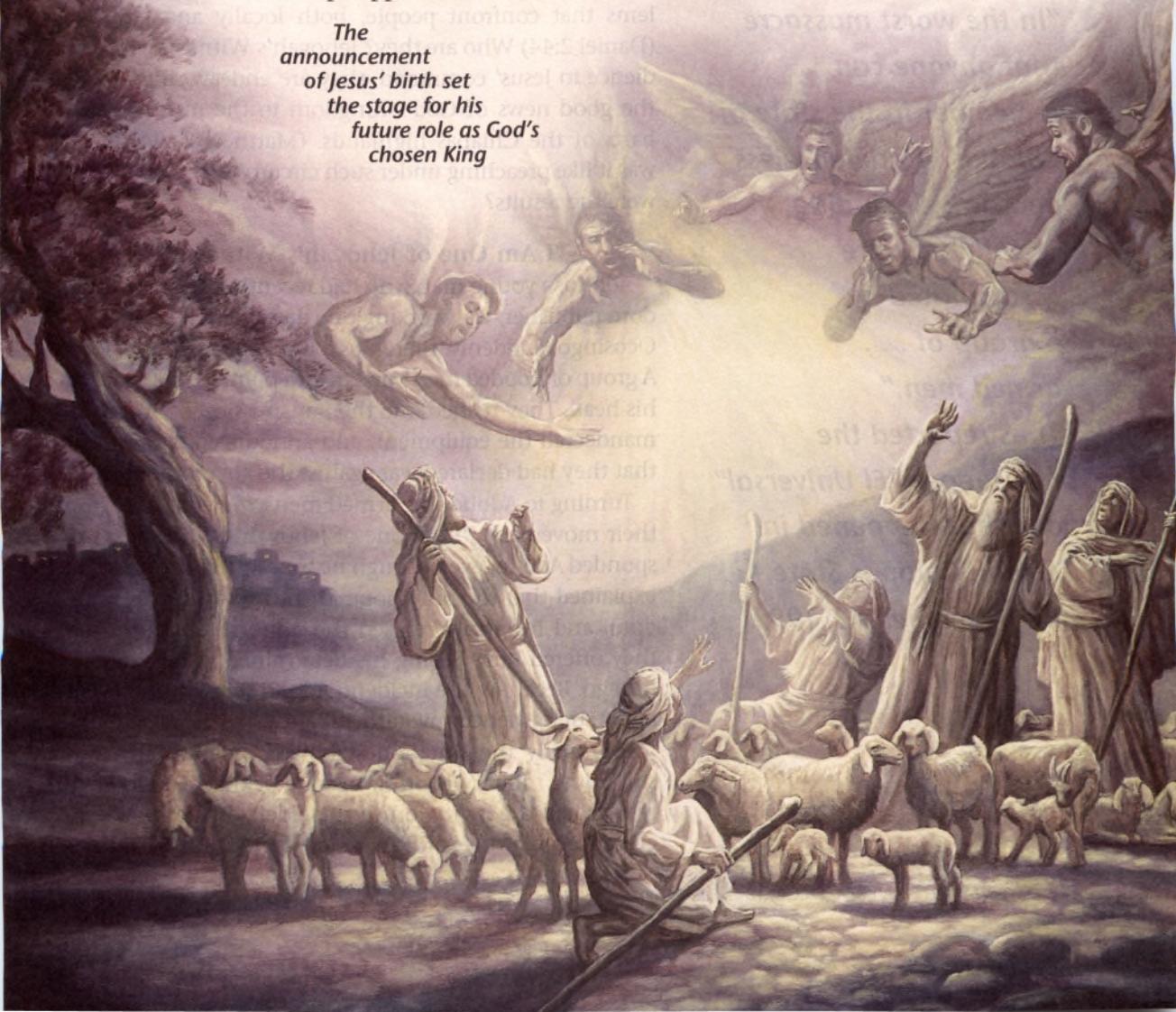
have been led to the exact place without needing to go first to Jerusalem and to Herod's palace. Later on, God did intervene to alter their course to protect the child.

At Christmastime this account is often surrounded by a mythical and romantic atmosphere that obscures the most important thing: that this baby was born to be a magnificent King, as was announced to Mary and to the shepherds. No, Jesus Christ is not a baby anymore, or even a child. He is the ruling King of God's Kingdom, which very soon will eliminate all rulerships opposed to God's

will, and he will solve all problems of mankind. That is the Kingdom we ask for in the Lord's Prayer.—Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10.

Through the angels' declaration to the shepherds, we learn that the opportunity for salvation is open to all who are willing to hear the message of the good news. Those who gain the favor of God become "men of goodwill." There are marvelous prospects for peace in all the world under the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, but people must be willing to do God's will. Is the Christmas season conducive to this, and does it reflect that desire? Many sincere people who want to follow the Bible feel that the answer is obvious.—Luke 2:10, 11, 14.

*The
announcement
of Jesus' birth set
the stage for his
future role as God's
chosen King*



Good News of Peace Reaches the Chiapas Highlands

*"In the worst massacre
that anyone can
remember in the state of
Chiapas, 45 defenseless
peasants, including
13 infants, were
assassinated by
a group of . . .
armed men."
Thus reported the
newspaper "El Universal"
on what happened in
Acteal, Chiapas State,
on December 22, 1997.*

CHIAPAS is the southernmost state of Mexico, bordering on Guatemala. With a long history of poverty and deprivation, a group of indigenous Maya Indians staged an armed uprising in January 1994, under the banner of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, National Liberation Zapatista Army). Negotiations for a peaceful solution have dragged. Raids and attacks, both by the rebels and by the government troops, have resulted in bloodshed and death. The turmoil caused many of the peasants in the area to flee to safety.

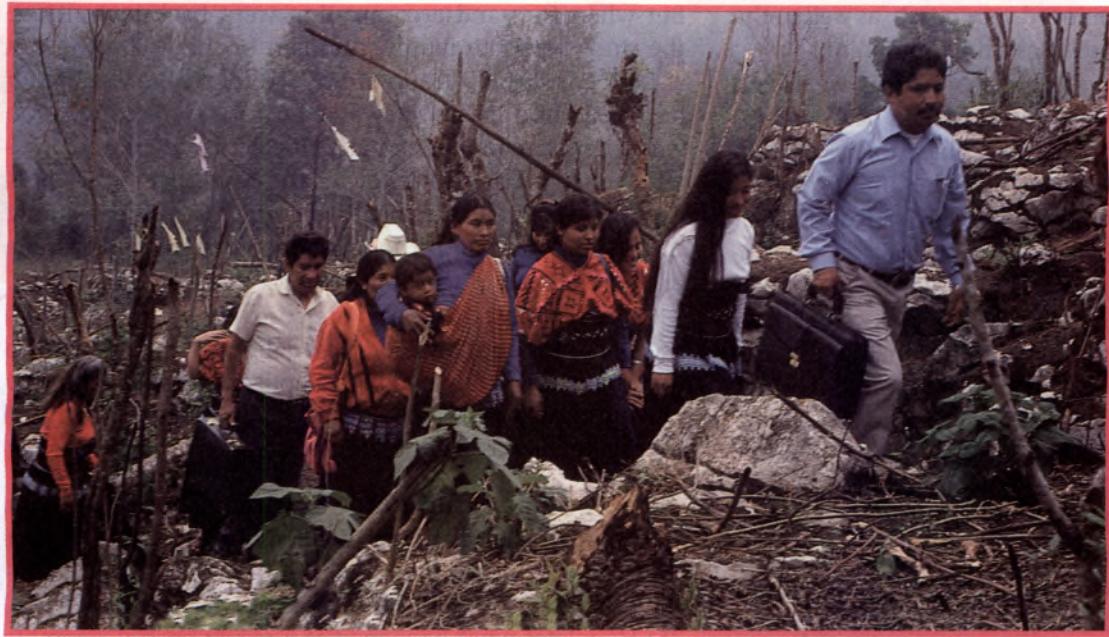
In the midst of such uncertain conditions, there is one group of peace lovers who have remained neutral as to the political struggle. Zealously, they direct attention to God's Kingdom as the only hope for resolving the problems that confront people, both locally and globally. (Daniel 2:44) Who are they? Jehovah's Witnesses. In obedience to Jesus' command, they are endeavoring to take the good news of God's Kingdom to the most isolated parts of the Chiapas highlands. (Matthew 24:14) What was it like preaching under such circumstances, and what were the results?

"I Am One of Jehovah's Witnesses"

Adolfo, a young man who had recently become a Kingdom publisher, was working one day at a radio station in Ocosingo. Suddenly, there was a loud knock on the door. A group of hooded men burst in and pointed their guns at his head. They rushed into the transmission booth, commandeered the equipment, and announced over the air that they had declared war against the government.

Turning to Adolfo, the armed men ordered him to join their movement. "I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses," responded Adolfo, even though he was not yet baptized. He explained that the only hope for peace was God's Kingdom, and he firmly refused the uniform and gun that they offered him. Seeing his determined stand, they let him go. Recalling the incident, Adolfo states: "That event really strengthened my faith."

Eventually the situation stabilized, but the area was still under military control. In spite of that, Adolfo gladly accepted the invitation of the elders of the local congregation to work with an isolated group of Christians



Witnesses going into the ministry in the Chiapas highlands

in the area. At the checkpoints that he had to pass through, the soldiers showed him respect when he identified himself as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. He was later baptized and has had the satisfaction of helping that isolated group become a congregation of Jehovah's

Witnesses. "Now that I am baptized," Adolfo declared, "I can say with full conviction that I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses!"

"Jehovah Strengthened Us"

Shortly after the EZLN declared war against the government over the radio, the townspeople fled. Francisco, a full-time minister, or pioneer, explained how Jehovah strengthened him and his wife in what they had to go through.

"We decided to take refuge in an area three hours away on foot. A congregation was there, so we would be with the brothers. Soon it was time for our circuit assembly to be held in Palenque. My wife and I did not want to miss the special meeting for pioneers, but we learned that the way to the assembly was blocked by the EZLN. We decided to go by way of the jungle, which took us nine hours. We arrived in time to attend the pioneer meeting, which we



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enjoyed very much, as well as the entire assembly program.

"Upon our return, we found that our home had been burned and our animals stolen. All that was left was a small bag of clothes. We felt sad about our loss, but the brothers in Ocosingo kindly took us into their homes. They also showed us how to work at things that we as farmers had never done before. One brother taught me to take photographs, another to repair shoes. That is how my wife and I have been able to support ourselves until now, without having to discontinue the pioneer service. Reflecting on what had happened, we can see that while it was not easy for us to endure, Jehovah strengthened us."

Fruitage of the Preaching Work

The Witnesses in Chiapas State did not allow the hardship and danger to deter them from taking part in a special effort to take the good news to the people in the area. For example, back in April and May 1995, they joined their fellow Christians worldwide in a campaign to distribute *Kingdom News* No. 34, with the most appropriate title *Why Is Life So Full of Problems?*

During the campaign—in a place called Pueblo Nuevo—Ciro, a regular pioneer, found a family who showed interest. Returning three days later, he was able to start a Bible study with them.

But when Ciro and a companion went back to continue the study with the family, the man of the house was not at home. Instead, a group of hooded men were waiting for him to do him harm. They asked Ciro and his companion what they were looking for and threatened to kill them. After silently praying to Jehovah, the two Christians courageously explained that they had come to teach the family the Bible. With that the hooded men let them go. For some reason, the man of the house never came home that day.

One day almost three years later, Ciro was surprised to have the man show up at his door. How delighted Ciro was to learn that the entire family had been baptized and that they were now associated with a congregation in Guatemala! One of the daughters was even serving as a regular pioneer.

Appreciation for Spiritual Food

In spite of the continued hardship in Chiapas, a district overseer reports that the Witnesses in the area truly appreciate the importance of meeting together. (*Hebrews 10:24, 25*) He relates what happened at a recent special assembly day, which was scheduled to start early in the morning so



that those attending could return home in the relative safety of daylight. Even though most of them had to walk more than three hours through the jungle to get to the assembly site, everyone was in his seat by 7:00 a.m. In the audience were six members of the EZLN group, listening and applauding, apparently enjoying the program. They too walked three hours to attend the assembly. Twenty of them also came to the Memorial of Christ's death, held in a local Kingdom Hall.

Another young man with the guerrilla movement was assigned by his superiors to patrol a certain jungle area. Upon arriving at that community, he found that all the inhabitants, the majority of whom were Jehovah's Witnesses, had fled. So he settled down in one of the abandoned homes. Not having much to do, he picked up some books that he found around the house and started to read. These turned out to be Watch Tower publications left behind by the Witnesses. In his solitude, the young man had time to meditate on what he was reading. He decided that he must change his life and put down his weapons. As soon as he could, he found the Witnesses and began a Bible study. Within six months, he was telling others the good news. He and three other members of his family who used to be sympathizers with the guerrilla movement are now baptized Christians.

Seeing a Positive Side

Even though it meant a great deal of hardship, the conflict actually had a positive influence on people's attitude toward the preaching work. An elder in the very city where the struggle started relates: "About five days after the fighting broke out, we got the preaching work organized both inside and outside the city. People were eager to listen to us. We placed much Bible literature and started several Bible studies. In one area, many had been

opposed to the truth, but because of the strife, they now listen, study the Bible, and attend meetings and assemblies."

The brothers are happy that they have been able to keep their theocratic activities going in spite of the very unstable conditions. With the knowledge of both the government forces and the EZLN, they continue to hold their assemblies, which strengthen them spiritually. Visits by traveling overseers have also been a powerful stimulus to continue in the preaching work. Interestingly, encouragement comes even from those engaged in the confrontation, who often urge the Witnesses to keep on in their preaching work.

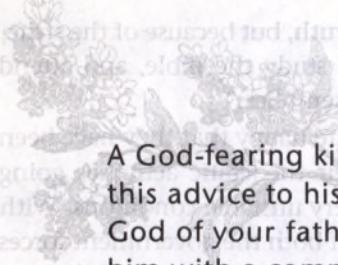
Although the trials and hardships that people in Chiapas have had to endure have lessened somewhat over time, they have not ended. Regardless, one thing is certain—Jehovah's Witnesses are determined to continue without letup in their efforts to bring to the people the good news of peace from God's Word, the Bible. (Acts 10:34-36; Ephesians 6:15) They recognize, as the prophet Jeremiah stated, that "to earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10:23) Only God's Kingdom in the hands of his Son, Jesus Christ, can bring the solution to the injustice and poverty in the world.—Matthew 6:10.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Healing the Wounds of War

How Far-Reaching Is Your Love?

"Run in Such a Way"



A God-fearing king once gave this advice to his son: "Know the God of your father and serve him with a complete heart and with a delightful soul." (1 Chronicles 28:9) Clearly, Jehovah wants his servants to serve him with grateful, appreciative hearts.

AS Jehovah's Witnesses, we readily admit that when the Bible's promises were first explained, our hearts swelled with gratitude. Every day, we learned something new about God's purposes. The more we learned about Jehovah, the stronger our desire became to serve him "with a complete heart and with a delightful soul."

Many who become Jehovah's Witnesses continue to serve Jehovah with boundless joy throughout their lives. However, some Christians start out well, but in time, they lose sight of the compelling reasons that motivate us to serve God. Has that happened to you? If it has, do not despair. Lost joy can be retrieved. How?

Count Your Blessings

First, meditate on the daily blessings that you receive from God. Think about Jehovah's good gifts: his manifold works of creation—accessible to all irrespective of social or economic status—his natural provisions of food and drink, the measure of health that you enjoy, your knowledge of Bible truth, and chiefly, the gift of his Son. His death paved the way for you to serve God with a clean conscience. (John 3:16; James 1:17) The more you meditate on God's goodness, the more your appreciation for him will grow. Your heart will then move you to serve him out of gratitude for all that he has done. No doubt you will be-

Why Do You Serve God?

gin to feel again as did the psalmist who wrote: "Many things you yourself have done, O Jehovah my God, even your wonderful works and your thoughts toward us; there is none to be compared to you. . . . They have become more numerous than I can recount."—Psalm 40:5.

These words were written by David, a man whose life was far from trouble free. As a young man, David spent much of his time on the run as wicked King Saul and his bodyguards sought him out to kill him. (1 Samuel 23:7, 8, 19-23) David also had personal weaknesses with which to contend. He acknowledged this in the 40th Psalm: "Calamities encircled me until there was no numbering of them. More errors of mine overtook me than I was able to see; they became more numerous than the hairs of my head." (Psalm 40:12) Yes, David had troubles, but he was not completely overwhelmed by them. He focused on the ways in which Jehovah was blessing him, despite his problems, and he found that those blessings far outweighed his woes.

When you feel engulfed by personal problems or by feelings of inadequacy, it is good to stop and count your blessings, as David did. Undoubtedly, appreciation for such blessings moved you to dedicate yourself to Jehovah; such thoughts can also help you rekindle lost joy and help you to serve God from an appreciative heart.

Congregation Meetings Can Help

In addition to meditating privately on Jehovah's goodness, we need to associate with fellow Christians. It is encouraging to meet regularly with men, women, and young people who love God and who are determined to serve him. Their example can stimulate us to whole-souled activity in Jehovah's service. Our presence at the Kingdom Hall can encourage them as well.



Admittedly, when we come home after a hard day's work or when we are discouraged because of some problem or weakness, it may not be easy to think about attending a meeting at the Kingdom Hall. At such times, we may have to be firm with ourselves, 'pummeling our body,' as it were, so that we will obey the command to gather with fellow Christians.—1 Corinthians 9:26, 27; Hebrews 10:23-25.

If that becomes necessary, should we conclude that we do not truly love Jehovah? Not at all. Mature Christians of the past whose love

for God was indisputable had to put forth vigorous effort to do God's will. (Luke 13:24) The apostle Paul was one such Christian. He openly described his feelings in this way: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells nothing good; for ability to wish is present with me, but ability to work out what is fine is not present. For the good that I wish I do not do, but the bad that I do not wish is what I practice." (Romans 7:18, 19) And he told the Corinthians: "If, now, I am declaring the good news, it is no reason for me to boast, for necessity is laid upon me. . . . If I perform this willingly, I have a reward; but if I do it against my will, all the same I have a stewardship entrusted to me."—1 Corinthians 9:16, 17.

Like many of us, Paul had sinful tendencies that got in the way of his desire to do what was right. However, he put up a hard fight against those tendencies, and most of the time, he was successful. Of course, Paul did not accomplish this in his own strength. He wrote: "For all things I have the strength by virtue of him who imparts power to me." (Philippians 4:13) Jehovah, the one who imparted power to Paul, will also empower you to do what is right if you ask him for his help. (Philippians 4:6, 7) So put up "a hard fight for the faith," and Jehovah will bless you.—Jude 3.

You do not have to wage this fight on your own. In congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses, mature Christian elders, who are persevering in the "fight for the faith" themselves, stand ready to help you. If you approach an elder for help, he will endeavor to "speak consolingly" to you. (1 Thessalonians 5:14) His goal will be to act "like a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rainstorm."—Isaiah 32:2.

"God is love," and he wants his servants to serve him out of love. (1 John 4:8) If your love for God needs to be rekindled, take appropriate steps to do so, as outlined above. You will be glad that you did.

HELP OTHERS WALK WORTHILY OF JEHOVAH

"We . . . have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may . . . walk worthily of Jehovah to the end of fully pleasing him as you go on bearing fruit in every good work."—COLOSSIANS 1:9, 10.

“WE LIVE in a trailer on a farm. By keeping our life simple, we have more time to reach people with the good news. We have been richly blessed with the privilege of helping many to dedicate their lives to Jehovah.”—A married couple, full-time ministers in South Africa.

² Would you not agree that helping others brings joy? Some try regularly to help the sick, deprived, or lonely—drawing satisfaction from doing so. True Christians are certain that their sharing with others a knowledge of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ constitutes the greatest help they can offer. Only this can lead others to accept Jesus' ransom, develop a good relationship with God, and then come in line for everlasting life.—Acts 3:19-21; 13:48.

³ However, what about helping ones who are already serving God, who are following “The Way”? (Acts 19:9) Your interest in them is no doubt as great as ever, but you may not see how you can do more or extend ongoing help. Or your situation may seem to limit you as to helping them, thus limiting the satisfaction you could get. (Acts 20:35) Regarding both aspects, we can learn from the book of Colossians.

⁴ When the apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Colossae, he was in Rome under house arrest,

1. What in particular can be a source of joy and satisfaction?

3. What sort of help merits our attention?

4. (a) Under what circumstances did Paul write to the Colossians? (b) How was Epaphras involved?

though he could have visitors. As you would expect, Paul utilized his limited freedom to preach about God's Kingdom. (Acts 28:16-31) Fellow Christians could visit Paul, perhaps some even being confined with him at times. (Colossians 1:7, 8; 4:10) One was the zealous evangelizer Epaphras from the city of Colossae in Phrygia, in the plateau country east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Epaphras had been instrumental in forming a congregation in Colossae, and he labored for the congregations in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. (Colossians 4:12, 13) Why did Epaphras travel to see Paul in Rome, and what can we learn from Paul's response?

Effective Help for Colossians

⁵ In order to consult with Paul about conditions in the Colossian congregation, Epaphras made the arduous trip to Rome. He reported on the faith, love, and evangelizing efforts of those Christians. (Colossians 1:4-8) Yet, he must also have shared his concern about negative influences threatening the spirituality of the Colossians. Paul responded with an inspired letter that countered some of the views that false teachers were spreading. He focused particularly on the central role Jesus Christ should play.*

* See *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 1, pages 490-1, and “All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial,” pages 226-8, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

5. Why did Paul write what he did to the Colossians?

Was his help limited to stressing key Bible truths? How else could he help the Colossians, and what lessons can we learn about helping others?

⁶ Early in his letter, Paul provided insight into a form of help that we might overlook. It was a means of giving help that was effective from a distance, Paul and Epaphras being far away from Colossae. Paul affirmed: "We thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ always when we pray [footnote, "praying always"] for you." Yes, these were specific prayers for Christians in Colossae. Paul added: "That is also why we, from the day we heard of it, have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the accurate knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual comprehension."—Colossians 1:3, 9.

⁷ We know that Jehovah is the "Hearer of prayer," so we can trust his readiness to hear our prayers offered in harmony with his will. (Psalm 65:2; 86:6; Proverbs 15:8, 29; 1 John 5:14) When it comes to our praying for others, though, what are our prayers like?

⁸ We may often think and pray about 'the entire association of our brothers in the world.' (1 Peter 5:9) Or we may approach Jehovah about Christians and others in a region hit by a disaster or tragedy. When first-century disciples elsewhere heard of the famine in Judea, they must have offered a multitude of prayers for their brothers even before sending relief funds. (Acts 11:27-30) In our day, prayers about the entire brotherhood or about a large group of brothers are often heard at Christian meetings, where many need to understand and be able to say "Amen."—1 Corinthians 14:16.

6. To what did Paul give emphasis in his letter to the Colossians?

7, 8. Our personal and congregational prayers often touch on what matter?



Be Specific in Prayer

⁹ Yet, the Bible provides us with examples of prayers for others that were more specific, individualized. Reflect on Jesus' comment recorded at Luke 22:31, 32. He was surrounded by 11 faithful apostles. All of them would need God's support in the difficult times ahead, and Jesus prayed for them. (John 17:9-14) Still, Jesus singled out Peter, making unique supplication

for that one disciple. Other examples: Elisha prayed that God help one specific man, his attendant. (2 Kings 6:15-17) The apostle John prayed that Gaius continue well physically and spiritually. (3 John 1, 2) And other prayers focused on limited groups.—Job 42:7, 8; Luke 6:28; Acts 7:60; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2.

¹⁰ Paul's letters bring to the fore the matter of very specific prayers. He asked that prayer be offered for him or for him and his associates. Colossians 4:2, 3 reads: "Be persevering in prayer, remaining awake in it with thanksgiving, at the same time praying also for us, that God may open a door of utterance to us, to speak the sacred secret about the Christ, for which, in fact, I am in prison bonds." Consider, too, these other examples: Romans 15:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1; Hebrews 13:18.

¹¹ The same was true of Paul's associate in Rome. "Epaphras, who is from among you, . . . sends you his greetings, always exerting himself in your behalf in his prayers." (Colossians 4:12) The word rendered "exerting" can suggest "struggling," as by a gymnast in the ancient games. Was Epaphras fervently praying simply about the worldwide body of believers or even about true worshipers all over Asia

9, 10. (a) What examples show that praying about specific individuals is fitting? (b) How was Paul the subject of specific prayer?

11. When in Rome, for whom was Epaphras praying?



Minor? Paul indicated that Epaphras was praying specifically for those in Colossae. Epaphras knew their situation. We do not know them all by name, nor do we know what problems confronted them, but imagine some possibilities. Perhaps young Linus was battling the influence of prevailing philosophies, and Rufus may have needed strength to resist the draw of his former practices in Judaism. Having an unbelieving husband, did Persis need endurance and wisdom to rear her children in the Lord, and did Asyncritus, who suffered from a terminal illness, require extra comfort? Yes, Epaphras knew those in his home congregation, and he earnestly prayed about them because both he and Paul wanted such devoted ones to walk worthily of Jehovah.

¹² Do you see the pattern for us—a way for us to help others? As noted, public prayers at Christian meetings are often broader, in view of the diverse audience. But our personal or family prayers can be quite specific. While we may at times ask God to guide and bless all traveling overseers or spiritual shepherds, can we not sometimes be precise? For instance, why

12. How might we be more specific in our private prayers?

not pray by name for the circuit overseer visiting your congregation or the conductor of your Congregation Book Study? Philippians 2:25-28 and 1 Timothy 5:23 show Paul's individualized concern about the health of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Can we similarly reflect such interest in sick ones we know by name?

¹³ Granted, we must avoid meddling in others' private matters, but it is proper for our prayers to manifest genuine interest in those we know and care for. (1 Timothy 5:13; 1 Peter 4:15) A brother may have lost his job, and we cannot give him another one. Yet, we can mention him by name and focus on his difficulty in our personal prayers. (Psalm 37:25; Proverbs 10:3) Are we aware of a single sister who has grown older without a husband and children because she is determined to marry "only in the Lord"? (1 Corinthians 7:39) In your private prayers, why not ask Jehovah to bless her and to help her continue loyal in her service? As another example, two elders may have given counsel to a brother who erred. Why could not each of them mention him by name in their private prayers from time to time?

¹⁴ The possibilities abound for you to include in your personal prayers individuals you know who need Jehovah's support, consolation, wisdom, and holy spirit, or any of its resulting fruits. Because of distance or other circumstances, you may feel limited in what material or direct help you can provide. But do not forget to pray for your brothers and sisters. You know that they want to walk worthily of Jehovah, yet they may truly need help to do that lastingly. A key to helping is your prayers.—Psalm 18:2; 20:1, 2; 34:15; 46:1; 121:1-3.

Work to Strengthen Others

¹⁵ Fervent, specific prayer is not, of course, the only way to help others, especially those

13. What sort of situations are appropriate matters for us to include in personal prayers?
14. How are specific prayers related to helping others?
15. Why should we be interested in the concluding part of Colossians?

near and dear to you. The book of Colossians makes that clear. Many scholars hold that after Paul supplied doctrinal direction and practical counsel, he appended mere salutations or personal greetings. (Colossians 4:7-18) On the contrary, we already have found that this final portion of the book contains noteworthy counsel, and there is more to learn from this section.

¹⁶ Paul wrote: "Aristarchus my fellow captive sends you his greetings, and so does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, (concerning whom you received commands to welcome him if ever he comes to you,) and Jesus who is called Justus, these being of those circumcised.

Only these are my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and these very ones have become a strengthening aid to me."—Colossians 4:10, 11.

¹⁷ Paul there identified certain brothers who were worthy of special note. He said that they were among the circumcised, of Jewish background. There were many circum-

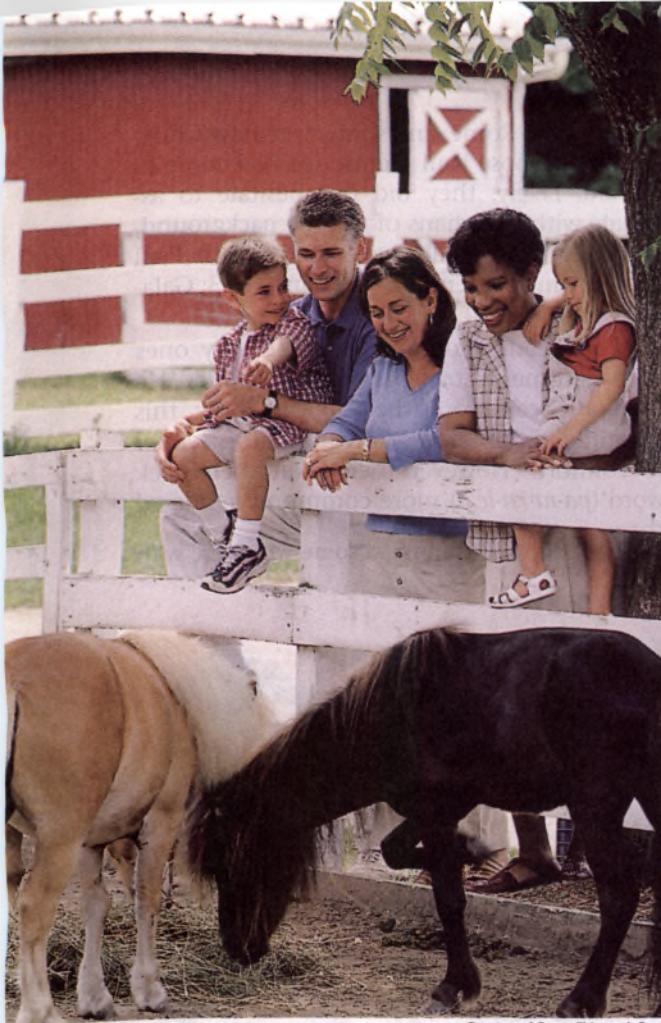
16, 17. What can we say about the brothers mentioned at Colossians 4:10, 11?

cised Jews in Rome, and some were now Christians. Still, those Paul mentioned had come to his aid. Likely, they did not hesitate to associate with Christians of Gentile background, and they must gladly have shared with Paul in preaching to Gentiles.—Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:16; 2:11-14.

¹⁸ Note Paul's comment: "These very ones have become a *strengthening aid to me*." He used a Greek word that appears only this one time in the Bible. Many translators render it "comfort." However, there is another Greek word (*pa-na-ka-le'o*) more commonly rendered

18. How did Paul commend some who were with him?





**Can you include another Christian
in your family outings?**

"comfort." Paul used such elsewhere in this very letter but not at Colossians 4:11.—Matthew 5:4; Acts 4:36; 9:31; 2 Corinthians 1:4; Colossians 2:2; 4:8.

¹⁹ Those Paul named must have done more than give verbal solace. The Greek term rendered "strengthening aid" at Colossians 4:11 was sometimes used in secular texts for a medicine to relieve distress. The *New Life Version*

^{19, 20. (a)} What is the sense of the expression that Paul applied to the brothers aiding him in Rome? (b) In what ways might those brothers have helped Paul?

reads: "What a help they have been to me!" *Today's English Version* uses the phrase: "They have been a great help to me." What might those Christian brothers near Paul have done to aid him?

²⁰ Paul could have visitors, but there were many things that he could not do, such as purchase his basic needs—food and clothing for the winter. How would he obtain scrolls for study or buy writing supplies? (2 Timothy 4:13) Can you not imagine those brothers helping Paul with his needs, doing such basic things as shopping or running errands for him? He might want to check on and buildup a certain congregation. Being confined, he could not, so those brothers may have made visits for Paul, carrying messages, bringing back reports. How strengthening!

²¹ What Paul wrote about being "a strengthening aid" provides insight into how we might help others. They may be walking worthily of Jehovah as to his moral standards, attending Christian meetings, and sharing in the preaching work. For that they merit our words of appreciation. Could we, though, do more, being 'strengthening aids' as were those with Paul?

²² If you know a sister who wisely held to 1 Corinthians 7:37 but who now lacks a family close to her, could you include her in some

21, 22. (a) Why should the words at Colossians 4:11 interest us? (b) What are some ways that we can apply the example of those with Paul?

Did You Note?

- How might we become more helpful in our private prayers?
- In what sense were some Christians 'strengthening aids' to Paul?
- In what types of situations can we be 'strengthening aids'?
- What is the goal behind our praying for and seeking to strengthen our brothers and sisters?

family activities, perhaps inviting her to share a meal or to attend a small gathering of friends or relatives? What of urging her to travel with your family to a convention or on vacation? Or ask her to join you at a convenient time when you shop for food. Much the same could be said of widows or widowers, or perhaps those now unable to drive. You could find it rewarding to hear their experiences or to tap their knowledge of things as normal as choosing fruit or selecting children's clothes. (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31) A corollary effect might be increased closeness. Thus they may feel freer to ask for your help if they need some medicine from the pharmacy, or the like. The brothers with Paul in Rome must have given practical, strengthening aid, as yours can be. Both then and now an added blessing is that the bonds of love are strengthened, and we are firmly resolved to serve Jehovah together loyally.

²³ Each of us can reflect on situations men-

23. It would be good for each of us to spend time doing what?

tioned in this article. They are simply examples, but these can remind us of real situations in which we can become more of "a strengthening aid" to our brothers and sisters. The point is not that we develop the inclinations of humanitarians. That was not the goal of the brothers mentioned at Colossians 4:10, 11. They were "fellow workers for the kingdom of God." The strengthening effect related directly to that. May it be the same in our case.

²⁴ We mention others by name in our private prayers and make efforts to strengthen them because of this: We believe that our brothers and sisters want to "walk worthily of Jehovah to the end of fully pleasing him." (Colossians 1:10) That fact is connected to something else that Paul mentioned when writing about Epaphras' prayers concerning the Colossians, that they might "stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God." (Colossians 4:12) How can we personally achieve that? Let us see.

24. What is at the core of our praying for and seeking to strengthen others?

STAND COMPLETE WITH FIRM CONVICTION

"[He is] always exerting himself in your behalf in his prayers, that you may finally stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God."—COLOSSIANS 4:12.

JESUS' followers were deeply interested in fellow worshipers. Tertullian (writer of the second and third centuries C.E.) told of the kindness that they showed toward orphans, the poor, and the elderly. Those evidences of love in action so impressed unbelievers that some

1, 2. (a) Outsiders noted what about the early Christians? (b) How does the book of Colossians reflect loving interest?

said of Christians, 'See how they love one another.'

² The book of Colossians reflects such loving interest by the apostle Paul and his companion Epaphras for the brothers and sisters in Colossae. Paul wrote to them: Epaphras is "always exerting himself in your behalf in his prayers, that you may finally stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God." During

2001, Jehovah's Witnesses will have as their yeartext these words of Colossians 4:12: "Stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God."

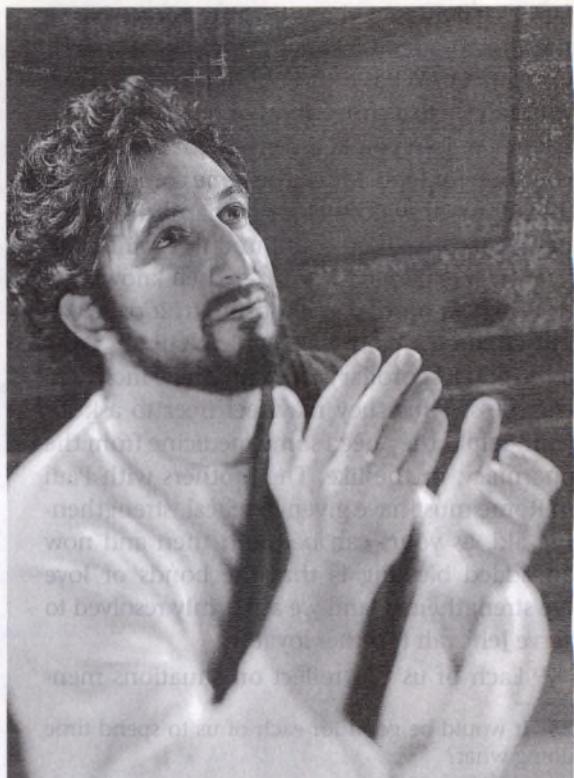
³ You can see that Epaphras' prayers for his loved ones had two aspects: (1) that they "finally stand complete" and (2) that they stand "with firm conviction in all the will of God." This information was included in the Scriptures for our benefit. So ask yourself, 'What do I personally need to do finally to stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God? And as I do so, what will be the effect?' Let us see.

Strive to "Stand Complete"

⁴ Epaphras keenly desired that his spiritual brothers and sisters in Colossae "finally stand complete." The term Paul used, here rendered "complete," can have the sense of perfect, full-grown, or mature. (Matthew 19:21; Hebrews 5:14; James 1:4, 25) You likely know that someone's being a baptized Witness of Jehovah does not of itself mean that he is a full-grown Christian. Paul wrote the Ephesians, living to the west of Colossae, that shepherds and teachers try to help "all attain to the oneness in the faith and in the accurate knowledge of the Son of God, *to a full-grown man*, to the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of the Christ." Elsewhere Paul urged Christians to become "full-grown in powers of understanding."—Ephesians 4:8-13; 1 Corinthians 14:20.

⁵ If some in Colossae were not yet spiritually full-grown, or mature, that needed to be their goal. Should not the same be true today? Whether we were baptized decades ago or recently, can we see that we clearly have progressed in our reasoning ability and viewpoints? Do we consider Bible principles before

3. For what two things did Epaphras pray?
4. The Colossians needed to be "complete" in what sense?
5. How can we make completeness a key goal?



Epaphras prayed that his brothers stand complete, with firm conviction about Christ and their hope

we make decisions? Are matters related to God and congregational interests gaining an ever greater role in our life, rather than being incidental? We cannot here illustrate all the ways in which we may reflect such growth toward completeness, but consider two examples.

⁶ Example one: Suppose we grew up in a climate marked by prejudice or hostility toward people of another race, nationality, or region. We now know that God is not partial and that we should not be. (Acts 10:14, 15, 34, 35) In our congregation or circuit, there are individuals from that other background, so we are around them. Yet, to what extent do we interact with them? (See page 16.) Example two: What is an area in which one may be able to progress toward being perfect, as Jehovah is?

wardly retain some negative feelings or suspicions toward people of that background? Do we have 'a chip on our shoulder,' being quick to think something negative if one from that background errs or slight us in some minor way? Ask yourself, 'Do I need to make more progress toward having God's impartial view?'

⁷ Example two: According to Philippians 2:3, we should do "nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with lowliness of mind considering that the others are superior." How are we progressing in this regard? Each person has weaknesses and strengths. If in the past we were quick to note others' weak points, have we progressed, no longer expecting them to be almost "perfect"? (James 3:2) Now, more so than before, are we able to see—even look for—ways in which others are superior? I must admit that this sister is superior to me in being patient.' 'That one reflects a more optimistic faith.' 'Frankly, he is a better teacher than I am.' 'She is superior in controlling her temper.' Perhaps some Colossians needed to progress in this regard. Do we?

⁸ Epaphras prayed that the Colossians "stand complete." Clearly, Epaphras was praying to God that to the extent that the Colossians were complete, mature, full-grown Christians, they would "stand," or remain such.

⁹ We cannot assume that each one who becomes a Christian, even a mature one, will persist as such. Jesus said that an angelic son of God "did not stand fast in the truth." (John 8:44) And Paul reminded the Corinthians about some in the past who had served Jehovah for a time but then failed. He warned spirit-anointed brothers: "Let him that thinks he is standing beware that he does not fall." (1 Corinthians 10:12) This adds force to the prayer that the Colossians "finally stand complete."

7. Becoming complete as a Christian may involve gaining what view of others?

8, 9. (a) In what sense did Epaphras pray for the Colossians to "stand" complete? (b) 'Standing complete' implied what concerning the future?

Once they became complete, full-grown, they needed to persist, not shrinking back, growing weary, or drifting away. (Hebrews 2:1; 3:12; 6:6; 10:39; 12:25) Thus they would be "complete" in the day for their inspection and final approval.—2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 2:12.

¹⁰ We have already discussed the importance of praying for others by name, being specific in asking that Jehovah help them, console them, bless them, and give them holy spirit. Epaphras' prayers for the Colossians were of that sort. And we can—in fact we should—find in those words a valuable suggestion about what we bring up to Jehovah in prayer about ourselves. Unquestionably, we ought to ask for Jehovah's help to the end that we individually will "finally stand complete." Do you?

¹¹ Why not mention your situation in prayer? Talk to God about the degree to which you have advanced toward being "complete," full-grown, mature. Implore him to help you recognize areas where you yet need to grow spiritually. (Psalm 17:3; 139:23, 24) Without question, you have some such areas. Then, rather than being discouraged over this, supplicate God clearly, pointedly for help to progress. Do this more than once. In fact, why not resolve that *this coming week you will pray at some length that you will "finally stand complete."* And plan to do it more as you consider the yeartext. In your prayers, focus on tendencies you may have to shrink back, grow weary, or drift away from God's service and how you can avoid doing that.—Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14, 18.

Pray for Firm Conviction

¹² Epaphras also prayed for another thing that was vital if the Colossians were to be found finally standing acceptable to God. It is equally necessary for us. What was it?

10, 11. (a) Epaphras set what pattern for us as to prayer? (b) In line with what Epaphras did, what resolve would you like to make?

12. Why especially did the Colossians need "firm conviction"?

He prayed that they would stand “with firm conviction in all the will of God.” They were surrounded by heresy and corrosive philosophies, some of which had a deceptive veneer of true worship. For example, they were pressured to observe special days with fasting or feasting, as once was needed in Jewish worship. False teachers focused on angels, those powerful spirits used to deliver the Law to Moses. Imagine being subjected to pressures of that sort! There was a confusing array of conflicting ideas.—Galatians 3:19; Colossians 2:8, 16-18.

¹³ Paul countered by stressing the role of Jesus Christ. “As you have accepted Christ Jesus the Lord, go on walking in union with him, rooted and being built up in him and being stabilized in the faith, just as you were taught.” Yes, there was a need (by the Colossians and by us) for full conviction about the Christ’s role in God’s purpose and in our life. Paul explained: “It is in him that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily. And so you are possessed of a fullness by means of him, who is the head of all government and authority.”—Colossians 2:6-10.

¹⁴ The Colossians were spirit-anointed Christians. They had a distinct hope, life in the heavens, and they had every reason to keep that hope bright. (Colossians 1:5) It was “the will of God” that they have firm conviction about the certainty of their hope. Should any of them have doubted that hope? Not at all! Should it be different today for all who have the God-given prospect of life in an earthly paradise? No, indeed! That valid hope is clearly part of “the will of God.” Now consider these questions: If you are striving to be one of the “great crowd” who will survive “the great tribulation,” how real is *your* hope? (Revelation 7:9, 14) Is it part of your “firm conviction in all the will of God”?

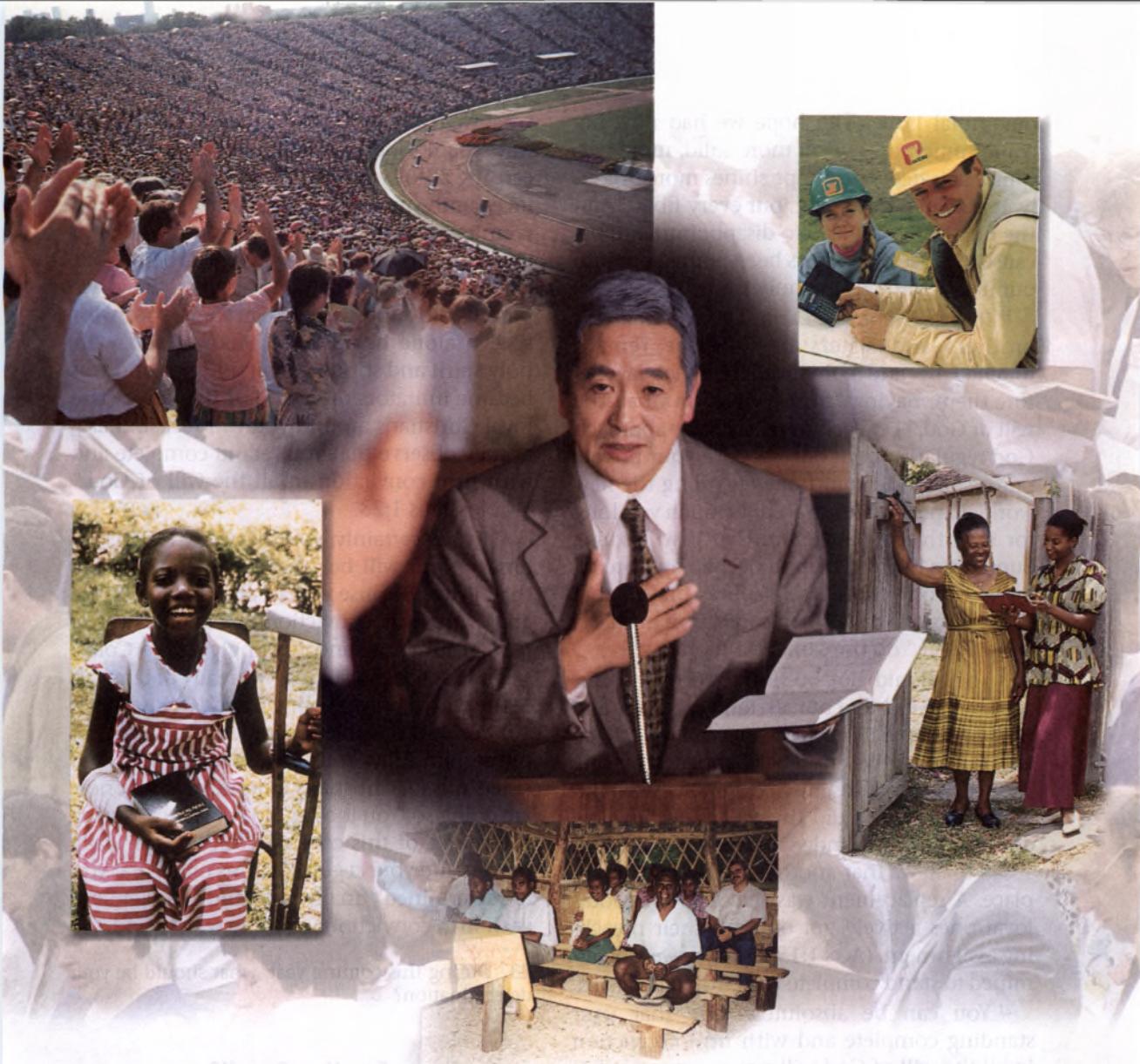
13. Recognizing what factor could help the Colossians, and how can such help us?
14. Why was hope a real thing for those in Colosse?

¹⁵ By “hope” we do not mean a vague wish or daydream. We can see this from the series of points Paul presented earlier to the Romans. In that series, each thing mentioned is linked to or leads to the next. Give attention to where Paul puts “hope” in his reasoning: “Let us exult while in tribulations, since we know that tribulation produces endurance; endurance, in turn, an approved condition; the approved condition, in turn, hope, and the hope does not lead to disappointment; because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit.”—Romans 5:3-5.

¹⁶ When Jehovah’s Witnesses first shared the Bible’s message with you, a certain truth may have caught your attention, such as the condition of the dead or the resurrection. For many, the primary new realization was the Bible-based possibility of life in an earthly paradise. Recall when you first heard that teaching. What a marvelous hope—sickness and old age will be no more, you can live on to enjoy the fruits of your labor, and there will be peace with the animals! (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Isaiah 65:17-25; John 5:28, 29; Revelation 21:3, 4) You acquired a wonderful hope!

¹⁷ In time, you likely faced some opposition or persecution. (Matthew 10:34-39; 24:9) Even in recent times, Witnesses in various lands have had their homes plundered or have been forced to become refugees. Some have been physically assaulted, have had their Bible literature confiscated, or have been the object of lying reports in the media. Whatever form of persecution you may have faced, as Romans 5:3 says, you could exult in the tribulation, and it brought a fine result. Even as Paul wrote, the tribulation produced in you endurance.

15. Paul outlined what series that included hope?
16. As you learned Bible truth, what hope did you gain?
- 17, 18. (a) How did the series that Paul presented to the Romans lead up to hope? (b) What sort of hope is meant at Romans 5:4, 5, and do you have such?



Your sure hope and firm conviction are shared by millions of others

Then endurance led to an approved condition. You knew that you were doing what was right, doing the will of God, so you felt sure that you had his approval. In Paul's words, you sensed being in "an approved condition." Continuing, Paul wrote that "the approved condition, in turn, [produces] hope." That may seem a bit strange. Why did Paul list "hope" so far along

in the series? Did you not have hope long before, when you first heard the good news?

¹⁸ Clearly, Paul is not here referring to our initial feeling of hope of perfect life. What he refers to goes beyond that; it is deeper, more motivating. When we endure faithfully and thus realize that we have God's approval, this has the profound effect of adding to and strengthening

our initial hope. The hope we had now becomes much more real, more solid, more personal. This deepened hope shines more brightly. It pervades our being, our every fiber. "And the hope does not lead to disappointment; because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit."

¹⁹ It was Epaphras' earnest prayer that his brothers and sisters in Colossae remain touched by and convinced of what lay before them, having "firm conviction in all the will of God." Let each of us similarly approach God regularly about our hope. In your private prayers, include your hope regarding the new world. Express to Jehovah how much you long for it, with full conviction that it will come. Supplicate him for help to deepen and broaden your conviction. As Epaphras prayed that the Colossians have "firm conviction in all the will of God," do the same. Do it often.

²⁰ You should not be distracted or discouraged by the fact that not all stand complete and with firm conviction. Some may fail, be deflected, or simply give up. That happened among those closest to Jesus, his apostles. But when Judas turned traitor, did the other apostles slow down or quit? No, indeed! Peter applied Psalm 109:8 to show that another would take Judas' place. A replacement was selected, and God's loyal ones actively got on with their preaching assignment. (Acts 1:15-26) They were determined to stand complete with firm conviction.

²¹ You can be absolutely sure that your standing complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God will not go unnoticed. It will be observed and appreciated. By whom?

²² Well, your brothers and sisters, who know and love you, will notice. Even if most do not put it in words, the effect will be similar to

19. How should your hope be part of your regular prayers?

20. If a relatively few deflect from the Christian way, why need this be no cause for discouragement?

21, 22. In what sense will your standing complete with firm conviction be noticed?

what we read at 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6: "We always thank God when we make mention concerning all of you in our prayers, for we bear incessantly in mind your faithful work and your loving labor and your endurance due to your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father. For . . . the good news we preach did not turn up among you with speech alone but also with power and with holy spirit and strong conviction . . . ; and you became imitators of us and of the Lord." The loyal Christians around you will feel similarly as they observe that you "stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God."

—Colossians 1:23.

²³ Just as certainly, your heavenly Father will observe and will be pleased. Be confident of that. Why? Because you are standing complete and with firm conviction "*in all the will of God.*" Paul wrote encouragingly to the Colossians about their walking "worthily of Jehovah to the end of fully pleasing him." (Colossians 1:10) Yes, it is possible for imperfect humans to please him fully. Your Colossian brothers and sisters did so. Christians around you right now are doing so. You too can do so! Hence, during the course of this coming year, let your daily prayers and your regular actions prove that you are determined "finally [to] stand complete and with firm conviction in all the will of God."

23. During this coming year, what should be your determination?

Can You Recall?

- What is involved in your 'standing complete'?
- What things about yourself should you include in prayer?
- As suggested at Romans 5:4, 5, what type of hope do you want to have?
- Our study has stimulated you to have what goal during the coming year?

MOTIVATED TO SERVE



WHAT would move 24 married couples in the prime of life to leave their families, friends, and familiar surroundings to take up missionary work in foreign lands? Why would they be delighted to go to such places as Papua New Guinea and Taiwan, as well as African and Latin-American countries? Could it be love of adventure? No. Rather, they are motivated by a genuine love of God and neighbor.—Matthew 22:37-39.

Who are these people? They are the graduates of the 109th class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. On Saturday, September 9, 2000, a total of 5,198 gathered at the Watchtower Educational Center—located at Patterson, New York—and at satellite locations to listen to loving counsel that could help the graduates to be successful missionaries.

The chairman of the program was Stephen Lett, a member of the Teaching Committee of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. He built his opening remarks on Matthew 5: 13, "You are the salt of the earth." Brother Lett explained that Jesus' words certainly apply to the graduating students. For instance, salt has the property of making things palatable. So, too, by their effective preaching work, missionaries are like salt in a figurative way.

Parting Encouragement

Brother Lett then introduced some longtime servants of Jehovah who gave short but potent Scriptural talks. The first was John Wischuk, who serves in the Writing Department. His theme, "The Shortest Psalm Promotes the Missionary Spirit," was based on Psalm 117. Today, there is a worldwide need for giving a witness to the "nations" and "clans" concerning Jehovah and his Kingdom. The students were encouraged to fulfill what Psalm 117 says by urging others to "Praise Jah."

The chairman next introduced Guy Pierce of the Governing Body. He spoke on the subject "Be Flexible, yet Firm." God's Word is solid. Jehovah God is called the Rock at Deuteronomy 32:4, yet his Word allows for flexibility in that it was written

for all language groups and cultures—yes, for all mankind. The students were admonished to preach God's Word, allowing its message to touch the heart and conscience of people. (2 Corinthians 4:2) "Be firm for right principles, but be flexible. Do not look down on those in your assignment because their culture is different," Brother Pierce exhorted.

Karl Adams, one of the Gilead instructors, who has been serving at the world headquarters for close to 53 years, spoke on the thought-provoking theme "Where Will You Go From Here?" True, the

CLASS STATISTICS

Number of countries represented: 10

Number of countries assigned to: 20

Number of students: 48

Average age: 33.7

Average years in truth: 16.2

Average years in full-time ministry: 12.5



109th Graduating Class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead

In the list below, rows are numbered from front to back, and names are listed from left to right in each row.
(1) Collins, E.; Miles, L.; Alvarado, A.; Lake, J. (2) Van Dusen, L.; Biharie, A.; Heikkinen, H.; Koós, S.; Smith, H.
(3) Ashford, J.; Ashford, C.; Boor, C.; Richard, L.; Wilburn, D.; Lake, J. (4) Chichii, K.; Chichii, H.; Ramirez, M.; Baumann, D.; Becker, G.; Biharie, S.; Ramirez, A. (5) Van Dusen, W.; Lemâtre, H.; Pisko, J.; Cutts, L.; Russell, H.; Johnson, R. (6) Becker, F.; Baumann, D.; Johnson, K.; Pifer, A.; Madsen, C.; Lemâtre, J.; Heikkinen, P. (7) Smith, R.; Russell, J.; Collins, A.; Pisko, D.; Wilburn, R.; Koós, G. (8) Cutts, B.; Boor, J.; Madsen, N.; Pifer, S.; Richard, E.; Miles, B.; Alvarado, R.

24 couples received missionary assignments in 20 different countries around the world, but the question was raised, Once you are there and you have seen it, then what? We live in a world that has a restless spirit. People want to go to new places and to do new things in an effort to please themselves. On the other hand, the students received an assignment from Jehovah to the place where he wants them to be to care unselfishly for his "sheep." They should not be like those in ancient Israel who because of selfishness missed out on the opportunity to be used by Jehovah to bless all mankind. Rather, they should imitate Jesus

Christ, who always did his Father's will unselfishly and who was obedient in every circumstance he faced.—John 8:29; 10:16.

"Treasure the Deep Things of God" was the theme of Wallace Liverance, the registrar of Gilead School. Repeatedly, the Scriptures speak of God's Word in terms of riches, valuable gems, precious metals, and things that are highly prized and sought after. Proverbs 2:1-5 shows that to find "the very knowledge of God," we must search for it as for "hid treasures." The speaker encouraged the students to keep digging into the deep things of God as they serve in their new assignments. Broth-

er Liverance reasoned: "This is practical, for it builds faith and confidence in Jehovah and will fortify your determination to stick to your assignment. It will help you to speak with conviction and to be a more effective teacher as you explain God's purposes to others."

By way of a classroom setting, another instructor of Gilead School reviewed how Jehovah blessed the students' field service activity over the past five months. Lawrence Bowen pointed out the apostle Paul's words at Acts 20:20 regarding his public ministry in Ephesus, highlighting that Paul took advantage of all opportunities to give a witness. The students' experiences illustrated that, like the apostle Paul, those impelled by love for God and neighbor in our time never hold back from speaking the truth and letting the power of God's Word work in others. This results in Jehovah's rich blessing.

Voices of Experience Speak

During their school term, students in this Gilead class were especially benefited by being able to associate with Branch Committee members from 23 lands, who were also at the Patterson Educational Center for special training. Leon Weaver and Merton Campbell of the Service Department conducted interviews with various Branch Committee members, some of whom were Gilead graduates themselves. It was reassuring for the students and their families and friends to hear from these seasoned missionaries.

The advice to the graduating class to help them adjust to their foreign assignments included such remarks as these: "Be positive. If you experience something that is very strange to you or that you can't understand, don't give up. Rely on Jehovah"; "learn to be happy with what is available, and trust that Jehovah will supply you with life's necessities." Other comments focused on helping the students maintain joy in their assignment. A few expressions were: "Don't compare the assign-

ment you have with the place you came from"; "learn the local language and speak it properly so that you can communicate with people"; "learn the customs and culture of the people, for this will help you to stick to your assignment." These comments were of great encouragement to the new missionaries.

Following the interviews, David Splane, a former missionary and a graduate of the 42nd class of Gilead who is now serving as a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, developed the principal talk around the attention-arousing theme "Students or Graduates—Which?" He asked the graduating class: "How are you going to view yourselves as you go to your missionary assignment? As graduates who know everything about missionary work or as students who still have a lot to learn?" Brother Splane pointed out that the wise graduate views himself as a student. The missionaries should take the view that everyone they meet in their missionary assignment has the potential for teaching them something. (Philippians 2:3) The students were encouraged to cooperate closely with their fellow missionaries, the branch office, and the local congregation. "You have passed your final exams, but you have not stopped being students. Make it clear to everyone that you are there to learn," urged Brother Splane.

After this talk, the students received their diplomas, and their assignments were announced to the audience. It was a touching moment for the graduating students as a class representative next read a resolution that spoke of the graduates' determination to allow what they have learned from God's Word to impel them to greater acts of sacred service.

All in attendance would agree that the counsel received fortified the graduates' resolve to show love of God and neighbor. It also made them more determined than ever to help people spiritually in their missionary assignment.

Questions From Readers

To what extent need a faithful Christian wife resist a divorce action brought by her mate?

When human marriage began, God said that a husband and wife should "stick" together. (Genesis 2:18-24) Humans became imperfect, with resulting problems in many marriages, but God's desire is that mates should still stick together. The apostle Paul wrote: "To the married people I give instructions, yet not I but the Lord, that a wife should not depart from her husband; but if she should actually depart, let her remain unmarried or else make up again with her husband; and a husband should not leave his wife." —1 Corinthians 7:10, 11.

Those words acknowledge that among imperfect humans a mate sometimes decides to leave. For example, Paul said that if a mate departed, both parties were to "remain unmarried." Why? Well, the mate departed, but the two continued bound to each other in God's eyes. Paul could say this because Jesus had set out the standard for Christian marriage: "Whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of fornication [Greek, *por-nei'a*], and marries another commits adultery." (Matthew 19:9) Yes, the only basis for divorce that Scripturally ends a marriage is "fornication," that is, sexual immorality. Evidently, in the case Paul referred to, neither mate had been immoral, so when the husband or wife departed, the marriage did not end in God's sight.

Paul then spoke of the situation in which a true Christian has a mate who is an unbeliever. Consider Paul's directions: "If the unbelieving one proceeds to depart, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not in servitude under such circumstances, but God has called you to peace." —(1 Corinthians 7:12-16) What could a faithful wife do if her unbelieving husband left her, even seeking a legal divorce from her?

She may prefer that he remain with her. She may still love him, sense their mutual emotional and sexual needs, and know that she and any minor children need material support. She

might also hope that, in time, her husband would become a believer and be saved. Yet, if he took steps to end the marriage (on some unscriptural ground), the wife could "let him depart," as Paul wrote. The same would apply if a believing husband disregarded God's view of marriage and insisted on departing.

In such a situation, though, she might need to protect herself and the children. How so? She would want to retain custody of her beloved children so that she could continue to show them motherly love, give them moral training, and instill in them faith based on fine Bible teachings. (2 Timothy 3:15) The divorce could endanger her rights. Hence, she might take steps to be represented properly before the authorities in order to protect her right to have access to her children and to be sure that her husband was obliged to support the family that he was abandoning. In some places, a woman contesting a divorce can sign legal documents that set out provisions for child custody and financial support, without agreeing to the divorce her husband is seeking. Elsewhere, the wording of the documents indicates that she agrees with the divorce; thus, if her husband was guilty of adultery, the wife's signing these would mean that she rejects him.

Most in the community and in the congregation would not know the details, such as whether the divorce was obtained on Scriptural grounds. So before things advanced that far, it would be advisable for the wife to inform the presiding overseer and another elder in the congregation (preferably in writing) of the facts. In that way those facts would be available in case any question arose—then or later.

Let us return to Jesus' comment: "Whoever divorces his wife, except on the ground of fornication, and marries another commits adultery." If a husband was actually guilty of sexual immorality but wanted to remain married to his wife, she (the innocent one in Jesus' example) must

choose whether to forgive him and continue sharing the marital bed or to reject him. If she is willing to forgive and continue with her legal husband, she is not morally stained in doing so.—Hosea 1:1-3; 3:1-3.

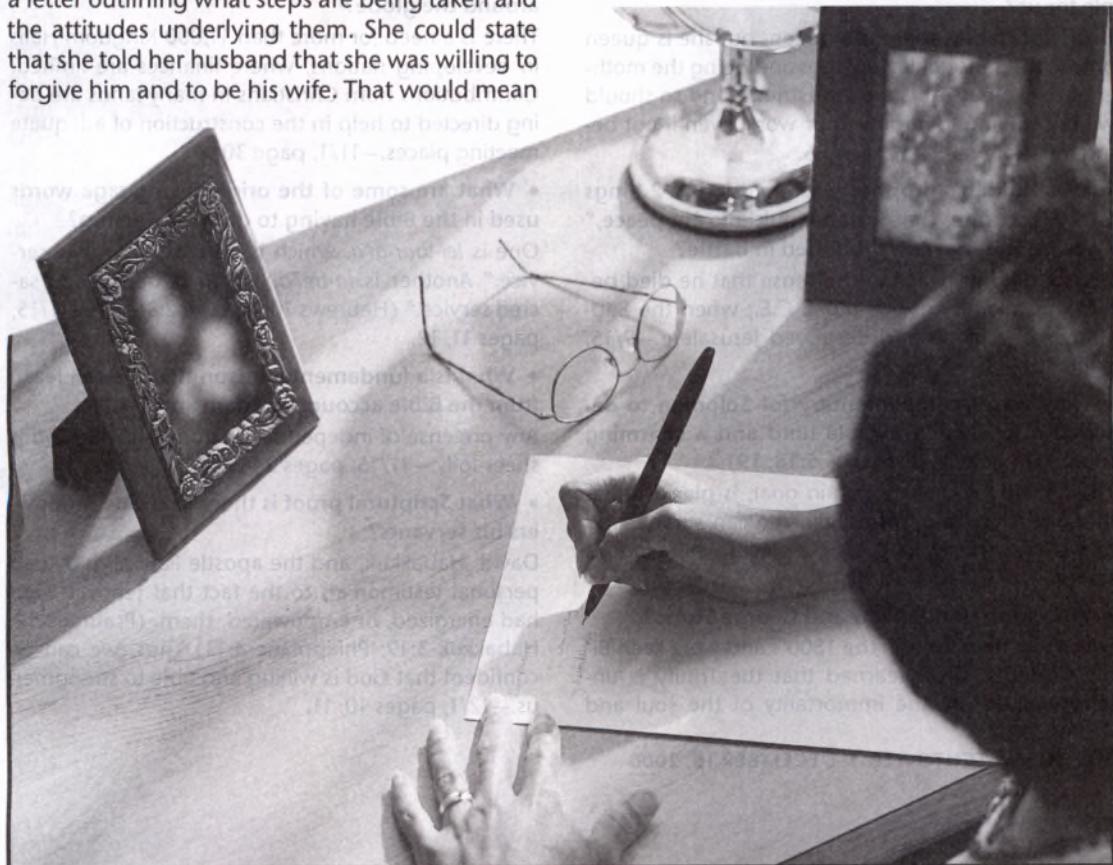
In a case where an immoral husband seeks a divorce, the wife still may be willing to forgive, hoping to have him back. It is up to her to determine, based on her conscience and situation, whether to contest his divorce action. In some places a woman contesting a divorce might be able to sign documents that stipulate custody of the children and financial support without indicating that she agrees with the divorce; her signing such papers would not in itself indicate that she was rejecting him. However, elsewhere a wife contesting a divorce might be asked to sign documents that indicate that she agrees with the divorce; signing such would expressly show that she rejects her guilty husband.

To avoid the possibility of misunderstanding, it would be advisable in this case as well for the wife to give representatives of the congregation a letter outlining what steps are being taken and the attitudes underlying them. She could state that she told her husband that she was willing to forgive him and to be his wife. That would mean

that the divorce was being obtained against her wishes; rather than rejecting her husband, she was still ready to forgive. After thus making it clear that she was willing to forgive and remain married, her signing papers that merely indicate how financial and/or custody matters are to be settled would not indicate that she was rejecting her husband.*

Having established her willingness to forgive even after a divorce, neither she nor her husband would be free to marry another. If she, the innocent mate whose offer of forgiveness was refused, later decides to reject him because of his immorality, both would then be free. Jesus showed that the innocent mate has a right to make such a decision.—Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18.

* Legal procedures and papers vary from place to place. The terms of the divorce set out in legal documents should be examined closely before signing. If an innocent mate signs papers that indicate that she (or he) does not object to a divorce that the mate is getting, that amounts to rejecting the mate.—Matthew 5:37.



Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*?

Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

- What is fundamental to our resolving a difference with someone?

We first ought to recognize that we all are susceptible to wrong thoughts and attitudes. Then we should seriously consider whether we are the source of the problem rather than the other person.—8/15, page 23.

- When will be “the times of restoration of all things,” mentioned at Acts 3:21?

The restoration comes in two stages. First, there is the restoration to a spiritual paradise under way since 1919. A further restoration will come when our earth is restored to a physical paradise.—9/1, pages 17, 18.

- How does the ant have no commander, as noted at Proverbs 6:6-8, and yet provides a good example for us?

In an ant colony, there is a queen, but she is queen only in the sense of laying eggs and being the mother of the colony. Ants are industrious, and so should we be, striving to improve our work, even if not being monitored.—9/15, page 26.

- Was Huldah’s prophecy, as recorded at 2 Kings 22:20, accurate, that Josiah would die “in peace,” since he was mortally wounded in battle?

Yes, he died in peace in the sense that he died before the calamity of 609-607 B.C.E., when the Babylonians besieged and destroyed Jerusalem.—9/15, page 30.

- How was it complimentary for Solomon to describe a wife as “a lovable hind and a charming mountain goat”? (Proverbs 5:18, 19)

The female ibex, or mountain goat, is placid of nature and elegant in form. Still, she can survive and give birth in rocky, inaccessible places where food is scarce.—10/1, pages 30, 31.

- Who were Henry Grew and George Storrs?

These two men lived in the 1800’s and were keen Bible students. Grew learned that the Trinity is unscriptural, as are the immortality of the soul and

the hellfire doctrines. Storrs discerned that some will gain endless life on earth. Both were predecessors of Charles Taze Russell, who started publishing this magazine in 1879.—10/15, pages 26-30.

- How do Jehovah’s Witnesses view medical procedures using one’s own blood?

Basing their beliefs on the Bible, they do not deposit their own blood and later accept it as a transfusion. Each Christian decides for himself how his own blood will be handled in the course of a surgical procedure, medical test, or current therapy. He should consider what the Bible says about blood and remember that he is wholly dedicated to God.—10/15, pages 30, 31.

- A survey conducted early this year revealed what significant need among Jehovah’s Witnesses around the globe?

There is a need for more than 11,000 Kingdom Halls in developing nations, where finances are limited. Contributions from Christians in many lands are being directed to help in the construction of adequate meeting places.—11/1, page 30.

- What are some of the original-language words used in the Bible having to do with worship?

One is *lei-tour-g’ia*, which is translated “public service.” Another is *la-trei’ia*, which is translated “sacred service.” (Hebrews 10:11; Luke 2:36, 37)—11/15, pages 11, 12.

- What is a fundamental lesson that we can learn from the Bible account of Adam and Eve?

Any pretense of independence from Jehovah God is sheer folly.—11/15, pages 24-7.

- What Scriptural proof is there that God empowers his servants?

David, Habakkuk, and the apostle Paul all provided personal testimonials to the fact that Jehovah God had energized, or empowered, them. (Psalm 60:12; Habakkuk 3:19; Philippians 4:13) Thus, we can be confident that God is willing and able to strengthen us.—12/1, pages 10, 11.

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RESURRECTION HOPE IS SURE!

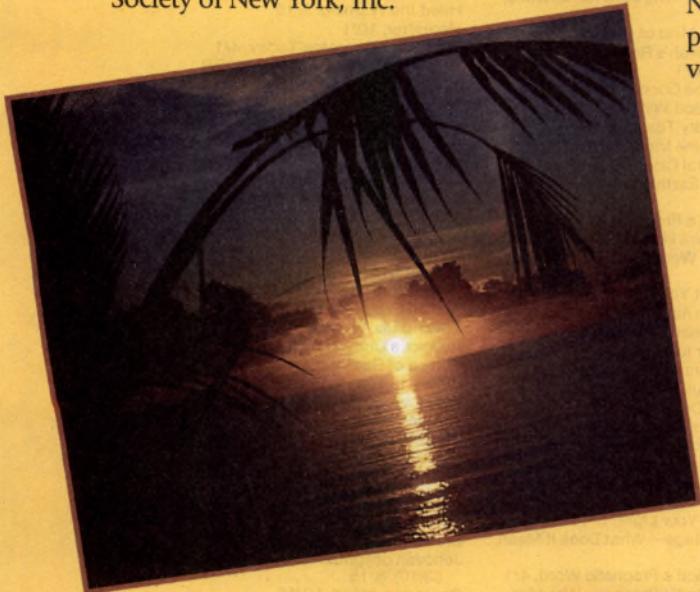
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"Something That Should Bring Joy to Everyone"

TUVALU, a beautiful country made up of nine islands in the South Pacific, has a population of some 10,500. Still, realizing that God's "will is that all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth," local Jehovah's Witnesses yearned to have Bible publications in their own language. (1 Timothy 2:4) This posed a challenge, as no dictionary was available in the language. In 1979, a missionary of Jehovah's Witnesses serving in Tuvalu took up the challenge. He and his wife lived with a local family, learned the language, and gradually built up a glossary of Tuvaluan words. By 1984, the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* was published in Tuvaluan by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.



THE SUNSET OVER THE CALM SEA OF TUVALU
ISLANDS IS BEAUTIFUL AND MAGNIFICENT.

Dr. T. Puapua, the former prime minister of Tuvalu, wrote a letter expressing appreciation for the *Live Forever* book. He wrote: "This book is yet another new and vital addition to the essential 'riches' of Tuvalu. You should be very happy with the part that you have played—an excellent part in the building up of the spiritual life of the people of this nation. It is my belief that this work will be written into the history of Tuvalu with regard to the printing of educational books. . . . This [accomplishment] is something that should bring joy to everyone."

The translator's accumulated word list led to the publication of a Tuvaluan-English dictionary in 1993. It was the first dictionary for the general public in that language. Recently, the National Language Board of Tuvalu asked for permission to use it in developing their first vernacular dictionary.