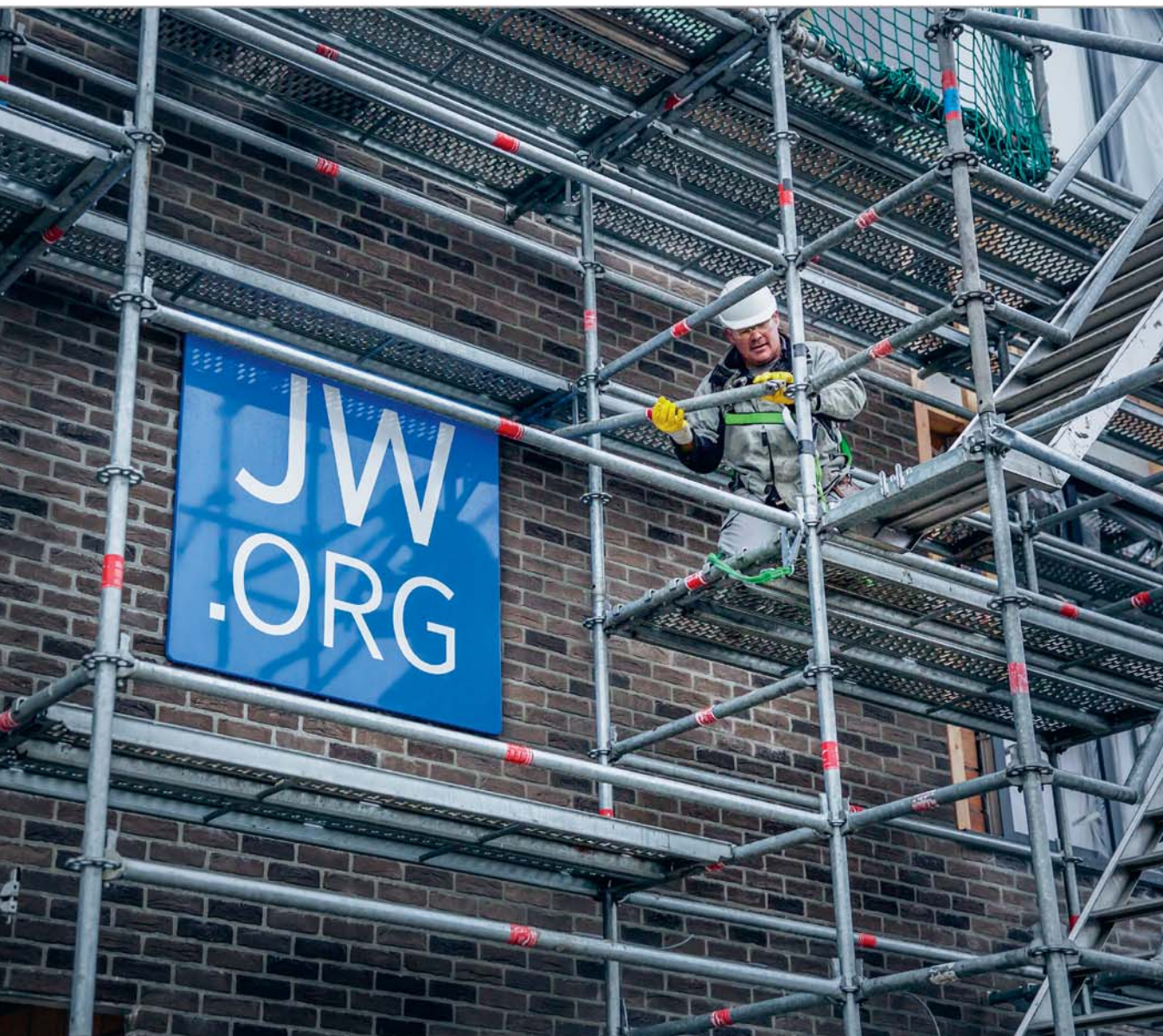


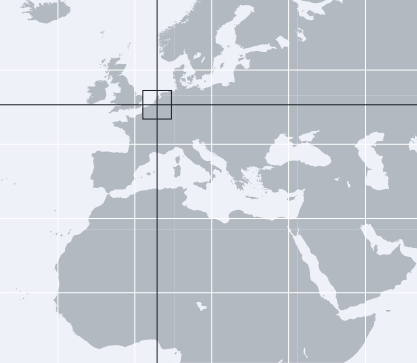
MARCH 2016

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
MAY 2-29, 2016



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Young Ones Are You Ready to Get Baptized?

“Who of you wanting to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the expense to see if he has enough to complete it?”—LUKE 14:28.

The following two articles are addressed to young people who are considering baptism

“I HAVE known you since you were born,” said a Christian elder to 12-year-old Christopher, “and I’m happy to hear that you want to get baptized. I would like to ask you, ‘Why do you want to take that step?’” The elder’s question was valid. Of course, it gives all of us much joy to see that every year thousands of young people around the world get baptized. (Eccl. 12:1) At the same time, Christian parents and elders in the congregation want to make sure that such young ones make a decision that is not only voluntary but also well-founded.

² God’s Word indicates that the steps of dedication and

1, 2. (a) What gives God’s people joy today? (b) How can Christian parents and elders help young ones to understand the meaning of baptism?

SONGS: 120, 64

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

What is maturity, and how did Daniel display that quality?

How can you tell if the decision to get baptized comes from your heart?

What is dedication, and how is it related to baptism?



A mature young person does not act
like a friend of God at the Kingdom Hall but a friend of the world at school
(See paragraph 8)

baptism are the start of a life during which Christians will experience blessings from Jehovah but also opposition from Satan. (Prov. 10:22; 1 Pet. 5:8) Therefore, Christian parents take time to teach their children what is involved in being a disciple of Christ. In the case of young ones who have no Christian parents, the elders in the congregation will lovingly help them to count the cost of discipleship. **(Read Luke 14:27-30.)** Just as it takes planning to complete a building project successfully, so it requires preparation to serve Jehovah faithfully “to the end.” (Matt. 24:13) But what can young ones themselves do to become determined to serve Jehovah for the rest of their life? Let us see.

³ Are you a young person who is considering baptism? If so, you are to be commended! It is a great privilege to get

3. (a) What do the words of Jesus and Peter teach us about the importance of baptism? (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Pet. 3:21) (b) What questions will we consider, and why?

baptized as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Moreover, baptism is a requirement for Christians, and it is a vital step toward gaining salvation. (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Pet. 3:21) Because it is your heartfelt desire to keep the promise you will make to Jehovah, you want to be prepared for this important step. You do well, therefore, to consider three questions that may help you to see if you are ready for baptism. The questions are as follows: (1) Am I mature enough to make the decision? (2) Do I have a personal desire to do so? (3) Do I understand what it means to be dedicated to Jehovah? Let us examine those questions.

WHEN YOU ARE MATURE ENOUGH

⁴ The Bible does not suggest that baptism is a step to be taken only by those who are older or who have reached at least an age at which certain legal rights

4, 5. (a) Why is baptism not for older people only? (b) What does it mean for a Christian to be mature?

may be granted. We read at Proverbs 20: 11: “Even a child is known by his actions, whether his behavior is pure and right.” One who is somewhat younger can realize what it means to do what is right and to be dedicated to his Creator. Thus, baptism is an important and appropriate step for a young person who has manifested considerable maturity and has made a dedication to Jehovah. —Prov. 20:7.

⁵ What does it mean to be mature? Maturity involves more than physical growth. The Bible says that mature people “have their powers of discernment trained to distinguish both right and wrong.” (Heb. 5:14) Thus, mature people know what is right in Jehovah’s eyes and *are resolved in their heart to stick to it*. As a result, they are not easily swayed to do what is wrong; nor do they always have to be prodded to do what is right. Really, it is only reasonable to expect that a young person who gets baptized will uphold God’s standards even when parents or other adults are not present. —Compare Philippians 2:12.

⁶ Can young people really demonstrate such maturity? Well, consider the Bible example of Daniel. He may have been in his early teens when he was forcibly taken from his parents into exile in Babylon. Suddenly, Daniel found himself living among a people who had a completely different concept of right and wrong. In addition, there was another challenge to Daniel’s situation: He was treated as someone special in Babylon. In fact, Daniel was one of a number of young people carefully chosen to stand

before the king! (Dan. 1:3-5, 13) Daniel seemingly had opportunities in Babylon that he might never have had in Israel.

⁷ How did young Daniel react to all of this? Was he seduced by the glitter and glamour of Babylon? Did he allow his new surroundings to change his identity or sabotage his faith? Not at all! The Bible says that while in Babylon, Daniel “*resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself*” with anything associated with false worship. (Dan. 1:8) Daniel showed remarkable maturity!

⁸ What can you learn from Daniel’s example? For one thing, a mature young person is stable in his convictions. He is not like a chameleon, which changes colors to fit its surroundings. He does not act like a friend of God at the Kingdom Hall but a friend of the world at school. Rather than getting tossed about, he remains unmovable even during tests of faith.—**Read Ephesians 4:14, 15.**

⁹ Of course, no one is perfect; young people as well as adults make mistakes from time to time. (Eccl. 7:20) Still, as you are considering baptism, it would be wise to analyze to what extent you are resolved in your heart to stick to Jehovah’s standards. How could you measure the strength of your resolve? Ask yourself, ‘What is my track record of adhering to God’s standards?’ Give thought to the way you have reacted to recent tests of faith. Have you demonstrated that you have the discernment needed to distinguish right from wrong? What if, like Daniel, you are treated as special by

8. What can you learn from Daniel’s example?

9, 10. (a) How might a young person benefit from thinking about how he or she has reacted to recent tests of faith? (b) What does baptism mean?

6, 7. (a) Describe the challenges Daniel had when he was in Babylon. (b) How did Daniel prove to be mature?

someone in Satan's world? Are you able to "keep perceiving what the will of Jehovah is" even when God's will conflicts with what you are tempted to do?—Eph. 5:17.

¹⁰ Why do we raise these frank questions? They are meant to help you put baptism in the right perspective. As mentioned earlier, baptism symbolizes that you made a solemn promise to Jehovah himself. You promise that you will love him and serve him forever with your whole heart. (Mark 12:30) Everyone who gets baptized should be determined to follow through on his promise. —**Read Ecclesiastes 5:4, 5.**

IS IT YOUR PERSONAL DESIRE?

¹¹ The Bible says that Jehovah's people, including young ones, "will offer themselves willingly" for his service. (Ps. 110:3) So a person who is contemplating baptism needs to be sure that this is his or her *personal* desire. That might call for self-scrutiny on your part. Why? Because your circumstance as a youth may be somewhat special. For example, you may have been raised in the truth.

¹² Over the years, you have likely seen many people get baptized—including some of your peers and perhaps even your siblings. If that is indeed your situation, what should you be careful about? Be alert that you do not come to view baptism as little more than a coming-of-age custom that all young people follow sooner or later. What can you do to make sure that you will keep the right view of Jehovah's arrangement of baptism?

11, 12. (a) A person who is thinking about getting baptized needs to be sure of what? (b) What will help you to keep the right view of Jehovah's arrangement of baptism?

Take time often to stop and think about the reasons *why* getting baptized is so important. In fact, you can find several good reasons in this article and in the next.

¹³ There are ways in which you will be able to discern whether your decision to get baptized comes from your heart. For example, your heartfelt desire to serve Jehovah will be reflected in your prayers. How often you pray and how specific your prayers are may well reveal how close your relationship with Jehovah is. (Ps. 25:4) An important way that Jehovah answers our prayers is by directing our attention to his Word. Thus, our effort to study the Bible is yet another indication that we really want to draw closer to Jehovah and serve him from the heart. (Josh. 1:8) So ask yourself: 'How specific are my prayers? How regular is my personal study of the Bible?' And if your Christian family has a Family Worship evening, ask yourself: 'Do I willingly share in that family arrangement?' Your answers to these questions will help you to see whether your decision to get baptized is your personal desire.

THE MEANING OF DEDICATION

¹⁴ Some might be confused about the difference between dedication and baptism. For example, some young people say that they have made a dedication to Jehovah but are not ready to get baptized. Does that make sense? Making a dedication means telling Jehovah that you will serve him forever. At baptism, a

13. How can you tell whether the decision to get baptized comes from your heart?

14. Describe the difference between dedication and baptism.

person shows others that he is dedicated. Therefore, baptism is a public expression of a private dedication that you have already made in prayer to Jehovah. Before you get baptized, you need to be sure that you understand what dedication means.

¹⁵ Simply stated, when you dedicate your life to Jehovah, you give up ownership of yourself. You promise Jehovah that you will put the doing of his will ahead of everything else in your life. **(Read Matthew 16:24.)** Any promise should be taken seriously, but how much more so a promise made to Jehovah God! (Matt. 5:33) How, though, can you demonstrate that you have really disowned yourself and that you now belong to Jehovah?—Rom. 14:8.

¹⁶ To illustrate, imagine that a friend gives you a car as a gift. He hands you the title and says: “The car is yours.” But suppose your friend adds: “I will keep the keys. And I will be the one who drives the car, not you.” How would you feel about this “gift”? How would you feel about the giver?

¹⁷ Now think about what Jehovah rightfully expects of a person who makes a dedication to him, a person who tells him: “I am giving you my life. I *belong* to you.” What if that person were to start living a double life, perhaps secretly dating an unbeliever? What if he were to accept employment that crippled his whole-souled service in the ministry or attendance at Christian meetings? Would that not be like keeping the keys to the car? A person who dedicates

himself to Jehovah is, in effect, saying: “My life belongs to *you* more than to me. If there is ever a conflict between what you want and what I am inclined to want, what you want will win—every time.” That would reflect the thinking of Jesus, who while on earth stated: “I have come down from heaven to do, not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.” —John 6:38.

¹⁸ Clearly, baptism is a sobering step that neither you nor anyone else should take lightly. At the same time, it is a great privilege to be dedicated and baptized. Young ones who love Jehovah and who understand what dedication means do not hold back from getting baptized; nor do they at any time regret their decision. “I love Jehovah, and I couldn’t be happier doing anything but serving him,” says a baptized teenager named Rose. “I have never been more sure about anything in my life than my decision to get baptized.”

¹⁹ And what about Christopher, mentioned at the outset of this article? Did his decision to get baptized at age 12 prove to be well-founded? Christopher looks back on his dedication and baptism with fond appreciation. He began serving as a regular pioneer at age 17 and was appointed as a ministerial servant at 18. Today he is serving at Bethel. He says: “Baptism was the right decision. My life is filled with satisfying work for Jehovah and his organization.” If you are considering baptism, how can you prepare for it? The following article will address that question.

15. What does dedication mean?

16, 17. (a) Illustrate what it means to disown yourself. (b) What is a person who makes a dedication really saying?

18, 19. (a) How do the expressions of Rose and Christopher illustrate that being baptized is a privilege that leads to blessings? (b) How do you feel about the privilege of baptism?



Young Ones

How Can You Prepare for Baptism?

“To do your will, O my God, is my delight.”—PS. 40:8.

SONGS: 51, 58

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What does it mean to be “persuaded to believe”?

What are “holy acts of conduct” and “deeds of godly devotion”?

How can meditating on the ransom help you build your appreciation for Jehovah?

ARE you a young person who is considering baptism? If so, what lies before you is the greatest privilege any human could have. As the preceding article pointed out, however, baptism is a serious step. It symbolizes your dedication—a solemn promise you make to Jehovah that you will serve him forever by putting his will above everything else in your life. Understandably, you should get baptized only when you are qualified to make that decision, you have a personal desire to do so, and you understand the meaning of dedication.

² What if you are not sure that you are ready for baptism? Or what if you want to get baptized but your parents feel that you should wait, perhaps until you gain more experience in Christian living? In either case, do not be discouraged. Instead, use this opportunity to make progress so that, before long, you *can* get baptized. With that objective in mind, consider how you can set goals regarding (1) your convictions, (2) your actions, and (3) your appreciation.

1, 2. (a) Explain why baptism is a serious step. (b) What should a person be sure of before getting baptized, and why?

YOUR CONVICTIONS

³ Think about how you would respond to these questions: Why do I believe that God exists? What convinces me that the Bible is God's inspired Word? Why do I feel that living by God's moral standards is better than adopting the lifestyle of the world? Those questions are not designed to create doubts in your mind. Rather, they can help you to follow the apostle Paul's admonition: "Prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom. 12:2) But why did Christians in Rome need to prove to themselves something that they had already accepted?

⁴ Consider a Bible example. Timothy knew the Scriptures well. He had been taught "from infancy" by his mother and grandmother. Nevertheless, Paul urged Timothy: "Continue in the things that you learned *and were persuaded to believe*." (2 Tim. 3:14, 15) According to one reference work, the original-language word for "persuaded" has the sense "to be convinced and certain of the truth of something." Timothy had made the truth his own. He accepted it, not because his mother and grandmother told him to do so, but because he had reasoned on it for himself and had been persuaded.—**Read Romans 12:1.**

⁵ What about you? Perhaps you have known Bible truths for a long time. If so, why not make it a goal to examine more closely the *reasons* for your beliefs? That will strengthen your conviction and will help you to avoid being driven by the

winds of peer pressure, the world's propaganda, or even your own feelings.

⁶ Learning to use your "power of reason" early in life will prepare you to give reasonable answers to your peers when they raise such questions as: 'How do you know for sure that there is a God? Why does a loving God permit evil? How can it be that God has always existed?' When you are prepared, such questions will not weaken your faith but will spur you on to do additional personal study.

⁷ Diligent personal study can help you answer questions, resolve any doubts, and strengthen your convictions. (Acts 17:11) We have been provided with a number of tools that can help you to do that. Many have found it helpful to consider the brochure *The Origin of Life—Five Questions Worth Asking* and the book *Is There a Creator Who Cares About You?* In addition, many youths have enjoyed and benefited from the online feature "What Does the Bible Really Teach?" This series of study guides can be found on jw.org. Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS. Each study guide in this series is designed to help you strengthen your conviction about a Bible topic.

⁸ You are already familiar with the Bible, so you might quickly respond to some of the questions presented on those study guides. But why are you *sure* of your answers? The study guides invite you to reason on a number of scriptures and then to write down your thoughts about them. They can help you plan how you would explain your Bible-based belief to others. The online feature "What

3, 4. What lesson can young ones learn from the example of Timothy?

5, 6. Why is it important for you to learn to use the "power of reason" early in life?

7-9. Describe how the online series of study guides, "What Does the Bible Really Teach?," can help you strengthen your conviction.

Does the Bible Really Teach?” is helping many young ones strengthen their convictions. If you have access to it, why not make this series a part of your personal study program?

⁹ By strengthening your convictions, you take an important step toward baptism. One teenage sister said: “Before I decided to get baptized, I studied the Bible and saw that this is the true religion. And each day that I live, that conviction gets stronger.”

YOUR ACTIONS

¹⁰ The Bible says: “Faith by itself, without works, is dead.” (Jas. 2:17) If you have strong conviction, it is reasonable to expect that you will show it by your actions. What kind of actions? The Bible speaks of “holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion.”—**Read 2 Peter 3:11.**

¹¹ To manifest “holy acts of conduct,” you must be morally clean. How are you doing in that regard? For example, think about the past six months. How have you demonstrated that your “powers of discernment” have been trained to distinguish right from wrong? (Heb. 5:14) Can you think of specific occasions when you resisted temptation or peer pressure? Does your conduct at school speak well of your faith? Do you stand up for your faith rather than try to blend in with your classmates just to avoid ridicule? (1 Pet. 4:3, 4) Admittedly, no one is perfect. Even longtime servants of Jehovah may at times feel tim-

id about taking a public stand for their faith. However, a person who is dedicated to Jehovah will rightly be proud to bear God’s name, and he shows this by his conduct.

¹² What about “deeds of godly devotion”? These include your activities in the congregation, such as your meeting attendance and participation in the ministry. Also included are spiritual activities that others do not see, such as your private prayers and your personal study. A person who has dedicated his life to Jehovah will not consider these deeds to be chores. Rather, he will reflect the attitude of King David, who said: “To do your will, O my God, is my delight, and your law is deep within me.”—Ps. 40:8.

¹³ To help you set goals, we have a worksheet on pages 308 and 309 of the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 2. This worksheet invites you to write your responses to such questions as “How specific are your prayers, and what do they reveal about your love for Jehovah?” “What do you include in your personal study?” “Do you engage in the ministry even if your parents do not?” The worksheet also provides space for you to write down any goals you would like to set regarding your prayers, personal study, and ministry.

¹⁴ Many young ones contemplating baptism have found this worksheet to be a valuable tool. A young sister named Tilda said: “I used the worksheet to set

10. Why is it reasonable to expect that a baptized Christian would have actions in line with his faith?

11. Explain the expression “holy acts of conduct.”

12. What are some “deeds of godly devotion,” and how should you view them?

13, 14. What provision can help you to perform “deeds of godly devotion,” and how have some young ones benefited from this provision?

Would you continue
to serve Jehovah even if
your parents did not?
(See paragraph 15)



goals. One by one I reached those goals, and I was ready for baptism about a year later.” A young brother named Patrick benefited in a similar way. “I already knew what my goals were,” he noted, “but writing them down made me work harder to reach them.”

¹⁵ One of the most thought-provoking questions on the worksheet is this: “Would you serve Jehovah even if your parents and friends stopped doing so?” Remember, as a dedicated and baptized Christian, you will stand before Jehovah on your own. Your service to him should not depend on others—not even your parents. Your holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion give evidence that you have made the truth your own and that you are progressing toward baptism.

YOUR APPRECIATION

¹⁶ A man well-versed in the Mosaic Law asked Jesus: “Which is the greatest commandment?” Jesus answered: “You

must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.” (Matt. 22:35-37) Jesus there identified what should be the motive behind Christian works, including baptism—wholehearted love for Jehovah. One of the best ways that you can grow in your love for Jehovah is to meditate on the greatest gift Jehovah has provided—the ransom sacrifice of his Son. (**Read 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; 1 John 4:9, 19.**) Thinking about the ransom and what it means for you will motivate you to respond appreciatively.

¹⁷ Your response to the ransom might be illustrated this way: Imagine that someone rescued you from drowning. Would you simply go home, dry yourself off, and forget about what was done for you? Of course not! You would certainly feel indebted to the person who rescued you. The fact is, you would owe that person your life! We owe Jehovah God and Jesus Christ much more. Without the ransom, each of us would, in a sense, drown in sin and death. But because of this great act of love, we now have the incomparable prospect of living forever on a paradise earth!

15. Explain why dedication should be a personal decision.

16, 17. (a) What should motivate a person to become a Christian? (b) How can appreciation for the ransom be illustrated?

¹⁸ Do you appreciate what Jehovah has done for you? Then it would be fitting to dedicate your life to Jehovah and get baptized. Remember, dedication involves a solemn promise to Jehovah to do his will forever, no matter what happens. Should you be afraid to make such a commitment? Not at all! Bear in mind that Jehovah has your best interests at heart, and he is “the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him.” (Heb. 11:6) Dedicating yourself to Jehovah and getting baptized do not make your life worse. On the contrary, serving Jehovah will make your life better. A 24-year-old brother who got baptized before he was a teenager says: “I may have had a deeper understanding if I had been older, but making the decision to dedicate myself to Jehovah protected me from worldly pursuits.”

¹⁹ How different Jehovah is from Sa-

18, 19. (a) Why should you not fear belonging to Jehovah? (b) How does serving Jehovah make your life better?

tan, whose interest in you is only selfish! Satan offers no lasting reward to those who side with him. And really, how could he? Satan himself has no good news to contemplate, no bright hope on the horizon. How can he give you something that he does not possess? Satan can offer you nothing more than a dismal future, like the future that is ahead for him!—Rev. 20:10.

²⁰ Clearly, dedicating your life to Jehovah is the right thing to do. Are you ready to take that step? If so, do not hold back. On the other hand, if you need more time, use the suggestions in this article to keep moving forward. Paul wrote to the Philippians: “To the extent we have made progress, let us go on walking orderly in this same course.” (Phil. 3:16) If you follow that advice, you will soon want to dedicate your life to Jehovah and get baptized.

20. What can a young person do in order to progress toward dedication and baptism? (See also the box “To Help You Grow Spiritually.”)

TO HELP YOU GROW SPIRITUALLY

From the *Awake!* series “Young People Ask”

- “How Can I Improve in My Prayers?”
—November 2008
- “How Can I Make Bible Reading Enjoyable?”—April 2009
- “Who Am I?”—October 2011
- “How Can I Enjoy Studying the Bible?”
—February 2012
- “Why Go to Christian Meetings?”
—April 2012

From *Questions Young People Ask* —*Answers That Work*

VOLUME 1

- “How Can I Make Worship of God Enjoyable?”
—chap. 38
- “Why Am I Afraid to Share My Faith at School?”
—chap. 17

VOLUME 2

- “Why Live by Bible Standards?”—chap. 34
- “How Can I Become God’s Friend?”—chap. 35
- “Should I Get Baptized?”
—chap. 37



You Can Share in Strengthening Our Christian Unity—How?

“From him all the body is harmoniously joined together and made to cooperate.”—EPH. 4:16.

FROM the beginning of creation, unity of purpose was evident. As wisdom personified, God’s first creation said: “I was beside [Jehovah] as a master worker. I was the one he was especially fond of day by day.” (Prov. 8:30) Father and Son collaborated, and they produced the variety of life we observe today. Cooperation continued to mark God’s works. We see this quality in the building of the ark in Noah’s day; the erecting, dismantling, and moving of the tabernacle as God’s people journeyed in the wilderness; and even in the playing of music and blending of voices in harmonious praise to Jehovah at his temple. All those endeavors depended on cooperation.—Gen. 6:14-16, 22; Num. 4:4-32; 1 Chron. 25:1-8.

² This pattern of working together characterized the early Christian congregation under its head, Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul explained that, even though individual anointed

1. From the beginning, what has characterized God’s works?
2. (a) What was noteworthy about the early Christian congregation?
(b) What questions will we address?

SONGS: 53, 107

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How are we united as we preach the good news?

What are some things we can do to help our congregation to be united?

How can a husband and wife stay united?

Christians had “different gifts” and shared in “different ministries” and “different activities,” all were part of “one body.” (**Read 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6, 12.**) But what of today? How can we remain harmoniously joined together in preaching the good news? And how can we cooperate in the congregation as well as in the family?

COOPERATE IN PREACHING

³ Toward the end of the first century C.E., the apostle John received a vision of seven angels, each of whom sounded a trumpet blast. When the fifth angel blew his trumpet, John saw “a star” fall from heaven to earth. The “star” had a key in his hand with which he opened the shaft of an abyss. Thick smoke poured out, and from this came a plague of locusts. Rather than ravage vegetation, the symbolic locusts swarm against “those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” (Rev. 9:1-4) John no doubt knew how devastating a locust swarm could be. Had not locusts plagued ancient Egypt in Moses’ day? (Ex. 10:12-15) The figurative locusts that John saw well illustrate anointed Christians proclaiming Jehovah’s powerful judgment messages. They are joined now by millions of companions with an earthly hope. Little wonder that our united preaching undermines the authority Satan exercises through his worldwide empire of false religion!

⁴ Jehovah’s people have the enormous task of preaching the “good news”

worldwide before the end of this system. (Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20) This includes inviting “anyone thirsting” to drink “life’s water free.” (Rev. 22:17) As members of the Christian congregation, how can we succeed in doing this? Only by being “harmoniously joined together and made to cooperate.”—Eph. 4:16.

⁵ To share the message of the Kingdom good news with as many people as possible, we need to carry out our preaching work in an organized manner. Therefore, we receive directions. The guidance given through congregations around the globe prepares us for a united effort. After we meet for field service, we go forth to proclaim the Kingdom message to mankind. By word of mouth and through millions of copies of Bible-based publications, we spread the message. Do you strive to follow the direction to share in special preaching campaigns? By doing so, you are joining millions of others in unitedly heralding the message of the “angel flying in mid-heaven,” mentioned at Revelation 14:6.

⁶ What a thrill it is to read in the *Yearbook* the combined results of our activity! Think, too, of how we are united as we distribute invitations to regional, special, and international conventions. At these gatherings, we listen to motivating Scriptural talks and give attention to dramas and demonstrations. These parts often highlight God’s loving appeal to serve him with all our being. The commemoration of Jesus’ death also unites us. With appreciation for God’s undeserved kindness and in obedience to Jesus’ direction, we gather

3. What vision did the apostle John receive?

4. What work do God’s people have to do, and what is the only way that they can do this?

5, 6. How are we united as we preach the good news?

for that event yearly, after sundown on Nisan 14. (1 Cor. 11:23-26) And attendance is not restricted to baptized Witnesses. In the weeks before the Memorial, we cover as much of our congregation's territory as possible, inviting others to join us for that important occasion.

⁷ A solitary locust does not have a great impact. In a somewhat similar way, our individual efforts might seem insignificant. But by working together, we are able to direct the attention of millions of people to the one who deserves all praise and honor, Jehovah! However, this is not the only way that our cooperation contributes to the unity of God's people.

COOPERATE IN THE CONGREGATION

⁸ In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul outlined both the organization of the congregation and the need to "grow up in all things." (**Read Ephesians 4:15, 16.**) What will help us individually to progress toward that goal? Using the example of the human body, Paul focused on unity under the head of the congregation, Jesus Christ. The apostle spoke of cooperating "through every joint that gives what is needed." How can each of us, whether young or old, strong or frail, contribute to the unity and spirituality of the congregation?

⁹ A key is to submit ourselves to and respect those whom Jesus has designated to provide direction in the congregation, the elders. (Heb. 13:7, 17) We may

not always find this easy to do. However, we can with confidence request God's guidance. His active force can help us to support the congregation arrangements wholeheartedly. So if we on occasion do not feel inclined to follow the direction given, we should reflect on how our humbly cooperating will contribute to the unity in the congregation. Furthermore, cooperating in matters like these will likely help all of us to grow in love.

¹⁰ Ministerial servants make a much-appreciated contribution to the unity of a congregation. These brothers, whatever their age, selflessly render services that benefit all. For example, they assist the elders by making sure that we have supplies of publications for the ministry. Additionally, they often care for regular cleaning and maintenance of the Kingdom Hall, and they welcome visitors who attend our meetings. As we cooperate with these brothers, we contribute to the smooth operation of the congregation.—Compare Acts 6:3-6.

¹¹ Many mature brothers have shouldered congregation responsibilities for years. But advancing age may now limit what they can do, so adjustments become necessary. Younger brothers can be of great assistance. Though they have yet to gain experience, through training they can be helped to take on more responsibility. How fine it is when ministerial servants reach out to qualify as elders! (1 Tim. 3:1, 10) Some younger elders have progressed to the

7. As we work together, what are we able to do?

8, 9. (a) What illustration did Paul use to teach Christians to stay united? (b) How can we cooperate in the congregation?

10. How do ministerial servants help the congregation to be united? (See opening picture.)

11. What may younger ones do to help their congregation be united?

point that they qualify for circuit work, serving brothers and sisters in many congregations. Are we not grateful for the willing support that younger people provide?—**Read Psalm 110:3; Ecclesiastes 12:1.**

COOPERATE IN THE FAMILY

¹² Taking our discussion of cooperation a step further, let us see how we can promote cooperation in our family. Many have found that having a productive Family Worship session each week helps to cement the bond between young and old. During these pleasant times, we focus on spiritual matters, and this contributes to the unity of the family. Practicing for the field ministry can equip the family to be better prepared to preach effectively. And it is not hard to see that when members of a family share comments about God's Word, they are drawn closer together—all love the same God and all are interested in doing his will.

¹³ What can married couples do to cooperate to Jehovah's praise? When both mates are faithful servants of Jehovah, they can rejoice in the unity that this affords them. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Elkanah and Hannah—all expressed their love for their mate. We should make it a point to do the same. (Gen. 26:8; 1 Sam. 1:5, 8; 1 Pet. 3:5, 6) That will unite us with our mate and draw us closer to our heavenly Father.—**Read Ecclesiastes 4:12.**

¹⁴ Christians are to avoid becom-

12, 13. What can help all in the family to cooperate with one another?

14. If your husband or wife is not serving Jehovah, what can you do to keep your marriage strong?

ing unevenly yoked with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6:14) What of our brothers and sisters who live in religiously divided households? Some now serving God were married when they learned the truth, and their mate is not a Witness. Still, applying Bible principles can contribute to harmony in the family. That involves cooperating to the greatest extent possible without compromising. This may be challenging, but think of the possible reward. Applying Bible principles can also become challenging when a marriage mate drifts away from the congregation. This happened to a Christian sister named Mary. She and her husband, David, served Jehovah together, but then, some 25 years ago, he stopped attending congregation meetings. Mary faithfully went to meetings and conventions and strove to apply Bible principles at home, including teaching their six children. When the children became adults and left home, Mary felt very much alone. Then David began to read the magazines that she left out for him. In time, he returned to the Kingdom Hall, where his six-year-old grandson would save a seat for him. If David did not come, the boy would later say, "I missed you at the meeting today, Grandpa." David is now happily serving Jehovah, and Mary is filled with joy that they are doing so together.

¹⁵ In view of Satan's attack on the family today, it is vital for all of God's servants to maintain good cooperation in their marriage. No matter how long you have been married, give thought to what you personally can say or do to

15. How can older married ones help younger ones?



Family worship strengthens the bond between young and old
(See paragraphs 12, 15)

strengthen your marriage. Older ones can even assist younger members of the congregation in this regard. You might on occasion invite a younger couple to your home to share in family worship with you and your mate. While the younger ones are with you, they can observe that affection and harmony are important no matter how long one has been married.—Titus 2:3-7.

“LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF JEHOVAH”

¹⁶ Picture the Israelites in Bible times praising Jehovah during a festival at his temple in Jerusalem. They would have prepared for the journey, cared for one another’s needs en route, and then been united in worship at the temple. All of

this called for cooperation. (Luke 2:41-44) As we continue our journey toward the new world, we too need to be harmoniously joined together and cooperating. This takes regular, conscientious effort. Do you need to give this matter more attention?

¹⁷ Think of what blessings await us! We have already left behind the disunity and confusion marking the present system of things. We now see being fulfilled what both Isaiah and Micah foretold—God’s people are unitedly going up to “the mountain of Jehovah.” (Isa. 2:2-4; **read Micah 4:2-4.**) Indeed, how elevated our form of worship is in “the final part of the days.” But how great will be our happiness and joy when we live at the time when all mankind will be harmoniously joined together and cooperating!

16, 17. What do God’s united servants look forward to?



Jehovah Guides His People in the Way of Life

“This is the way. Walk in it.”—ISA. 30:21.

SONGS: 65, 48

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

Jehovah provided what guidance in the days of Noah and Moses?

What new guidance did God provide for Christians?

How can we show that we are looking to God for guidance?

“STOP, LOOK, LISTEN.” Those words have saved countless lives. More than 100 years ago, large signs bearing those words were posted at railroad crossings in North America. For what reason? So that vehicles on the road would not be crossing railroad tracks at the wrong moment and be struck by a speeding train. Yes, paying attention to that warning has saved lives.

² Jehovah does something better than posting safety signs. He stands before his people, as it were, pointing them toward everlasting life, away from dangers. More than that, he acts like a loving shepherd to his flock, calling out to the sheep proper direction and warnings so that they can avoid dangerous paths.—**Read Isaiah 30:20, 21.**

JEHOVAH HAS LONG GUIDED HIS PEOPLE

³ Down through history, Jehovah has provided specific in-

- 1, 2. (a) Many lives have been saved by what warning? (See opening picture.) (b) God’s people have what guidance that can save their lives?
3. How did the human family get on a path leading to death?

structions or directions. For example, in the garden of Eden, Jehovah gave clear instructions that could guide the human family to everlasting life and happiness. (Gen. 2:15-17) Had Adam and Eve obeyed his direction, they would have been spared tragic consequences—a life filled with pain and ending in their death with no hope. But rather than obey, Eve listened to advice that seemed to come from a lowly animal. Adam, in turn, listened to her voice, the voice of a mortal human. Both of them turned their backs on their loving Father’s guidance. Consequently, the human family in general was on a fatal path.

⁴ During Noah’s lifetime, God gave guidance that led to preservation. After the Flood, Jehovah issued a specific prohibition about blood. Why the need for that? There were new circumstances. Jehovah was going to permit animal flesh to be a source of food for humans. Hence, new guidelines were required: “Only flesh with its life—its blood—you must not eat.” (Gen. 9:1-4) The changed circumstances clearly revealed God’s thinking about what belongs to him, namely, life. As Creator and Life-Giver, he has the right to make rules about life. For example, he decreed that humans were not to take the life of their fellow man. God considers life and blood to be sacred, and he will hold accountable anyone who misuses either.—Gen. 9:5, 6.

⁵ Let us look at a few examples of how God continued to provide guidance

4. (a) Why were additional guidelines needed after the Flood? (b) How did new circumstances reveal God’s thinking?

5. What will we now examine, and why?

through the centuries. This review will bolster our resolve to follow Jehovah’s lead into the new world.

NEW NATION, NEW GUIDELINES

⁶ In Moses’ day, clear guidelines on proper conduct and manner of worship were needed. Why? Again, changed circumstances were involved. For more than two centuries, Jacob’s descendants lived under Egyptian rule in a land saturated with worship of the dead, use of idols, and other God-dishonoring beliefs and practices. When God’s people escaped the tyranny of Egypt, new directions were needed. God’s people would be living, not as a captive group of people, but as a freed nation solely under Jehovah’s Law. Some reference works say that the Hebrew word for “law” is related to a root word having the sense of “direct, guide, instruct.” The Mosaic Law acted as a protective wall against the degraded moral and religious acts of other nations. When Israel listened to God, the nation received his blessing. When they ignored him, they suffered dire consequences.—**Read Deuteronomy 28:1, 2, 15.**

⁷ Directions were needed for another reason. The Law pointed to an important development as to Jehovah’s will. That was the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Law made it clear as never before that the Israelites were imperfect. It also impressed on them the need

6. Why was it necessary for God’s people to obey the laws given through Moses, and what attitude did the Israelites need to have?

7. (a) Explain why Jehovah gave directions to his people. (b) How was the Law a guardian for Israel?

for a ransom, a perfect sacrifice that would fully cover sin. (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 10:1-10) Furthermore, the Law helped to preserve the genealogical line leading to the Messiah and to identify him when he appeared. Yes, the Law acted as a temporary tutor, or “guardian,” leading to Christ.—Gal. 3:23, 24.

⁸ As Christians, we too can benefit from the guidelines that were given in the Law to the nation of Israel. How so? We can stop and look at the underlying principles of the Law. Even though we are not under those laws, we can view many of them as trustworthy guides in our daily lives and our worship of our holy God, Jehovah. He had those laws recorded in the Bible so that we could learn from them, be guided by the principles, and appreciate the higher moral standards for Christians. Listen to what Jesus said: “You heard that it was said: ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who keeps on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Thus, we need to avoid not only the act of adultery but also the sexual craving to share in immorality.—Matt. 5:27, 28.

⁹ The arrival of Jesus as the Messiah made it necessary to have new divine direction and a further revealing of Jehovah’s purpose. This was because, once again, new circumstances arose. In 33 C.E., Jehovah switched his favor from the congregation of natural Israel to the Christian congregation.

8. Why should we be guided by the principles of the Mosaic Law?

9. What new circumstances made new direction from God necessary?

GUIDANCE FOR A NEW SPIRITUAL NATION

¹⁰ During the first century, God’s people who came into the Christian arrangement received new or expanded instructions on worship and conduct. These devoted servants of God were under a new covenant. The Mosaic Law was given to one nation—fleshly Israel. In contrast, spiritual Israel would be made up of people from many nations and backgrounds. Truly, “God is not partial, but in every nation the man who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34, 35) The Mosaic Law governed fleshly Israel in the Promised Land with laws carved on stone. For spiritual Israel, “the law of the Christ” was mainly based on principles inscribed on hearts. “The law of the Christ” would apply to and benefit Christians wherever they lived.—Gal. 6:2.

¹¹ Spiritual Israel would benefit greatly from guidance from God through his Son. Just prior to the establishment of the new covenant, Jesus gave two significant commands. One dealt with the preaching work. The other focused on the conduct of Jesus’ followers and how they were to treat fellow believers. These directives were for all Christians; thus they apply to all true worshippers today, whether their hope is heavenly or earthly.

¹² Consider the preaching of the good news that Jesus would have his followers do. The method and the scope of the

10. Why were new laws given to the Christian congregation, and how were these different from those given to the Israelites?

11. What are two aspects of Christian life that would be affected by “the law of the Christ”?

12. What was new about the preaching work?

preaching work were new. In earlier centuries, people of the nations were welcomed *when they came to Israel* to serve Jehovah. (1 Ki. 8:41-43) That was before Jesus gave the command that we find at **Matthew 28:19, 20. (Read.)** Jesus' disciples were told to "*go*" to *all* people. On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., there was an early evidence of Jehovah's changed strategy—that of a global evangelizing work. His holy spirit empowered about 120 members of the new congregation to speak miraculously in different tongues to Jews and proselytes. (Acts 2:4-11) Next, the territory expanded to the Samaritans. Then, in the year 36 C.E., it was further expanded to include the world of uncircumcised Gentiles. You might say that the field of preaching enlarged from a "pond" of Jews to an "ocean" of mankind.

¹³ Now let us look at the way we treat fellow believers. Jesus introduced "a new commandment." **(Read John 13:34, 35.)** That commandment involves a call not just to love one another in normal aspects of everyday life but to be willing even to surrender our life in behalf of our brother. That was something that the Mosaic Law did not stipulate. —Matt. 22:39; 1 John 3:16.

¹⁴ Jesus set the foremost example. He loved his disciples in a self-sacrificing way. Such love meant that he had to die in behalf of his disciples, and Jesus was prepared to do so. And he expected his disciples, including us, to be willing to do as much. In behalf of our fellow Christians, we may have to travel down a road involving pain and perhaps even death.—1 Thess. 2:8.

13, 14. (a) What is involved in Jesus' "new commandment"? (b) What do we learn from the example that Jesus set?

DIRECTIONS FOR MODERN TIMES AND BEYOND

¹⁵ Especially since the appointment of "the faithful and discreet slave," Jesus has provided his people with spiritual food at the proper time. (Matt. 24:45-47) This food has included vital directions in response to new circumstances.

¹⁶ We are living in what the Bible calls "the last days," and straight ahead is a tribulation like nothing that has occurred before. (2 Tim. 3:1; Mark 13:19) Furthermore, Satan and his demons have been cast out of heaven and are confined to the vicinity of the earth, resulting in intense woe for earth's inhabitants. (Rev. 12:9, 12) We have also been commissioned to carry out a historic and unprecedented preaching campaign that is reaching peoples and language groups as never before!

¹⁷ We need to employ the preaching tools provided by God's organization. Do you desire to do that? Are you alert to the guidance given at our meetings on how we can use these tools and how to do so most effectively? Do you view these directions as guidance from God?

¹⁸ Indeed, to keep receiving God's blessing, we need to pay attention to all the directions provided through the Christian congregation. Having an obedient spirit now will help us to follow directions during the "great tribulation," which will eliminate Satan's entire evil system. (Matt. 24:21) Thereafter, we will need new directions for new world living on an earth totally free of any satanic influence.

15, 16. What new circumstances do we now have, and how does God guide us?

17, 18. How should we respond to the guidance being given?



In the earthly Paradise,
scrolls will be opened to give us
directions in new world living
(See paragraphs 19, 20)

¹⁹ New directions were needed by the nation of Israel under Moses and later by the Christian congregation under “the law of the Christ.” Likewise, the Bible informs us that scrolls will be opened to give us directions in new world living. **(Read Revelation 20:12.)** These scrolls will most likely set forth Jehovah’s requirements for mankind at that time. By studying these, all people, including resurrected ones, will be able to know God’s will for them. These scrolls will surely give us further insight into Jehovah’s mind. Guided by an ever-increasing understanding of God’s inspired Word along with what will be revealed in the new scrolls, inhabitants of the earthly

19, 20. What scrolls will be opened, and with what result?

Paradise will certainly treat their fellow man with love, respect, and dignity. (Isa. 26:9) Imagine the educational program that will be carried out under the direction of the King, Jesus Christ!

²⁰ Everlasting life awaits those who respond favorably to the “things written in the scrolls.” Those who maintain integrity to God through the final test will have their name written permanently by Jehovah in “the scroll of life.” That can be our lot! So if we STOP to consider God’s Word, LOOK to understand its meaning for us, and LISTEN by obeying God’s guidance now, we can look forward to surviving the great tribulation and enjoying an eternity of learning about our all-wise and loving God, Jehovah.—Eccl. 3:11; Rom. 11:33.

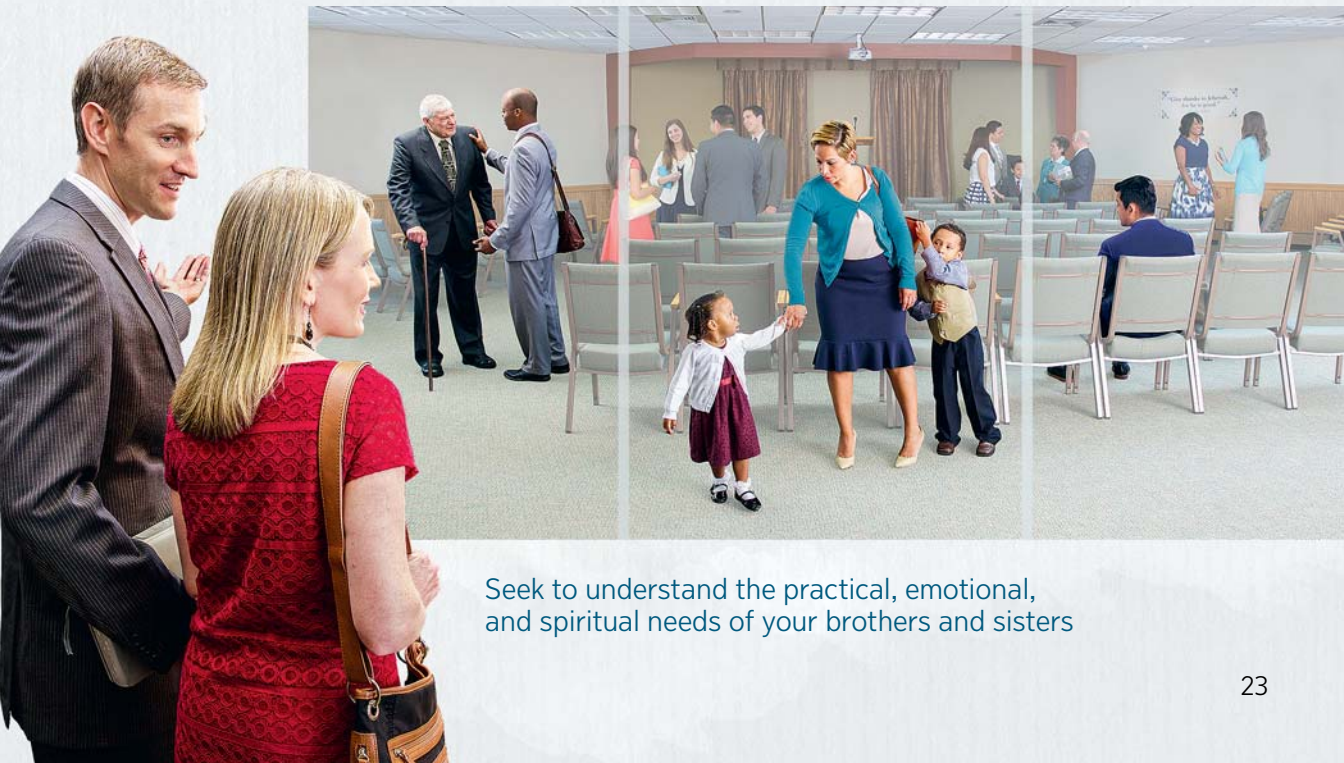
Can You Help in *Your* Congregation?

BEFORE he ascended to heaven, Jesus told his disciples: “You will be witnesses of me . . . to the most distant part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) How was it possible for the early Christians to meet that challenge?

Martin Goodman, professor at Oxford University, observes that the “sense of mission set Christians apart from other religious groups, including Jews, in the early Roman empire.” Jesus had traveled from place to place to carry out his ministry. Following his example, true Christians would have understood that spreading “the good news of the Kingdom of God” would involve finding people who desired to know Bible truth. (Luke 4:43) This is one of the reasons why the first-century Christian congregation had “apostles,” a term that literally refers to those sent forth, envoys. (Mark 3:14) Je-

sus commanded his followers: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of people of all the nations.”—Matt. 28:18-20.

We do not have any of the 12 apostles of Jesus with us on earth today, but many servants of Jehovah manifest a missionary spirit. To the invitation to expand their preaching work, they respond: “Here I am! Send me!” (Isa. 6:8) Some, such as thousands of graduates of Gilead School, have moved to faraway lands. Others have moved to a different area of their native country. Many have learned a new language in order to be part of congregations and groups looking after the needs of those speaking that language. These brothers and sisters who move to where there is a particular need or who learn a new language may not have had the most favorable circumstances and may not have had an



Seek to understand the practical, emotional,
and spiritual needs of your brothers and sisters

easy time. They needed a spirit of self-sacrifice to manifest their love for Jehovah and for their neighbor. Having calculated the cost, they gave of themselves to help. (Luke 14:28-30) Brothers and sisters taking such steps are filling a real need.

However, circumstances differ. Not every Witness is in a position to move to where the need is greater or to take up a new language. So can we show a missionary spirit even in our own congregation?

BE A MISSIONARY IN YOUR CONGREGATION

First-century Christians had an evident missionary spirit, but it is likely that most of them stayed in their hometown. Still, the exhortation that was given to Timothy was as valid for them as it is for all of God's servants: "Do the work of an evangelizer, fully accomplish your ministry." (2 Tim. 4:5) The command to preach the Kingdom message and to make disciples applies to all Christians wherever they are. Moreover, many aspects of missionary work can be applied in our home congregation.

For example, a missionary in a foreign land has to adapt to new circumstances. Many things are

very different in his or her new assignment. What about us if we cannot move to where the need is greater? Should we conclude that we know everything about our congregation's territory? Or could we try to find innovative ways to reach people? For example, in 1940, brothers were encouraged to schedule a day each week to do street witnessing. Is that something that you can have a share in doing? Or what about the initiative to use literature display carts? The point is: Have you personally considered such ways of presenting the good news, ways that may be new to you?

Having a positive attitude will help us to be zealous and enthusiastic for the ministry. In many cases, those who make themselves available to move to where the need is greater or to serve in another language field are very qualified publishers. Thus they can be a blessing to many, such as when they take the lead in the field ministry. Moreover, missionaries often take the lead in the congregation arrangements until qualified local brothers are available. If you are a baptized male Witness, are you "reaching out," being willing to serve fellow believers in your congregation?—1 Tim. 3:1.

Make good use of your current circumstances to fill a real need . . .

- by encouraging others to "do the work of an evangelizer"



BECOME “A STRENGTHENING AID”

In addition to participating zealously in the field ministry and being available to take on responsibilities in the congregation, there are other areas in which we can help our congregation. Anybody—young or old, male or female—can become “a strengthening aid” to fellow believers in need. —Col. 4:11, ftn.

To be of help to our fellow believers, we need to get to know them well. The Bible exhorts us to “consider one another” when we meet together. (Heb. 10:24) These words suggest that while we do not pry into other people’s affairs, we should seek to know and understand our brothers and their needs. Those needs may be of a practical, emotional, or spiritual nature. Helping fellow believers is not the responsibility of just the elders and ministerial servants. True, there may be occasions when it would be particularly appropriate for one of those brothers to provide assistance. (Gal. 6:1) Yet, all of us may be able to assist elderly brothers and sisters, or entire families, who are facing problems.

■ by giving practical assistance



For instance, when Salvatore experienced a financial crisis that made it necessary for him to sell his business, his home, and many of the family’s belongings, he wondered how his family could cope. Another family in the congregation saw the need. They provided financial assistance, helped both Salvatore and his wife to find work, and spent many evenings listening to and encouraging the whole family. A friendship was forged that has lasted many years. Despite the real anxiety that marked the earlier period, both families can now look back with happy memories on the time they spent together.

For true Christians, religion is not something private. As demonstrated by Jesus, we need to let everyone know about the wonderful Bible promises. Whether we are in a position to move or not, we can do our best to work what is good toward all. And we certainly can do so in the congregation where we are already serving. (Gal. 6:10) By doing this, we will experience the joy of giving and will be helped to “go on bearing fruit in every good work.” —Col. 1:10; Acts 20:35.

■ by offering emotional support to those who struggle with the anxieties of life





Imitate the Spirit of the Prophets

DO YOU have anything in common with the prophets of old? The 2013 edition of the *New World Translation* in its “Glossary of Bible Terms” gives this definition of a prophet: “One through whom divine purposes are made known. Prophets acted as spokesmen for God, conveying not only predictions but also Jehovah’s teachings, commands, and judgments.” Though you are not uttering predictions, you speak for God, proclaiming what is found in the Word of God.—Matt. 24:14.

What a wonderful privilege it is for us to tell others about our God, Jehovah, and to teach them what his will is for mankind! We are participating in this work together with the “angel flying in midheaven.” (Rev. 14:6) Yet, we may face challenges that could cause us to lose sight of such a wonderful privilege. What are some of the challenges? We may face fatigue, discouragement,

or feelings of worthlessness. The faithful prophets of old were no different, but they did not give up. And Jehovah helped them to fulfill their assignments. Consider some examples, and see how we can imitate them.

THEY EXERTED THEMSELVES VIGOROUSLY

We may at times be tired because of our day-to-day activities and may not feel up to sharing in the ministry. Granted, we do need to get rest; even Jesus and the apostles did. (Mark 6:31) But think of **Ezekiel** in Babylon and his mission among Israelites taken captive from Jerusalem. God once told Ezekiel to take a brick and engrave the city of Jerusalem on it. Then Ezekiel was to lay a figurative siege against the miniature city by lying on his left side for 390 days and then on his right for 40 days. Jehovah told Ezekiel: “Look! I will tie you with ropes so that you can-

Ezekiel willingly acted out a siege against Jerusalem

not turn from your one side to your other side until you have completed the days of your siege.” (Ezek. 4:1-8) That must have attracted the attention of the exiled Israel-

ites. For over a year, Ezekiel was to go through this physically taxing routine. How could the prophet fulfill his assignment?

Ezekiel understood why he was sent as a prophet. When sending Ezekiel, God had told him: “Whether [the Israelites] listen or refuse to listen . . . , they will certainly know that a prophet was among them.” (Ezek. 2:5) He kept in mind the purpose of his commission. So he willingly acted out the figurative siege of Jerusalem. He proved to be a true prophet. A report reached him and his fellow exiles: “The city has been struck down!” Yes, the Israelites came to realize that a prophet had been among them.—Ezek. 33:21, 33.

Today, we warn people about the coming destruction of Satan’s entire system of things. Although we may be tired physically, we use our energy to preach God’s Word, make return visits, and conduct Bible studies. As the prophecies about the conclusion of this system come true, we have the satisfaction of being “one through whom divine purposes are made known.”

THEY COPED WITH DISCOURAGEMENT

We exert ourselves vigorously with the help of Jehovah’s spirit; still, we may at times be discouraged because of the way people react to our message. We do well to recall the example of the prophet **Jeremiah**. He experienced ridicule, insults, and jeering because he proclaimed God’s message to the Israelites. At one point, Jeremiah even said: “I am not going to make mention of him, and I will speak no more in his name.” Jeremiah was a man with feelings like ours. Nonetheless, he kept delivering God’s message. Why? The prophet added: “But in my heart it became like a

burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was tired of holding it in; I could no longer endure it.” —Jer. 20:7-9.

Similarly, if we are discouraged because of people’s response to our message, we can fight off that feeling by meditating on the message we proclaim. It can be like ‘a burning fire shut up in our bones.’ Making Bible reading a daily habit can keep that fire burning within us.

THEY OVERCAME NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Some Christians have felt lost when they were given an assignment that they did not readily understand. The prophet **Hosea** may have felt that way. Jehovah commanded him: “Go, marry a woman of prostitution and have children of prostitution.” (Hos. 1:2) Imagine how you would feel if you were going to get married but God told you that your bride would be a prostitute! Hosea accepted the assignment. He took Gomer as his wife, and she bore a son. Later, she bore a daughter and then another son. Apparently, these latter two children resulted from her adultery. Jehovah had told Hosea that his wife-to-be would “chase after her passionate lovers.” Note the plural—“lovers.” And then she would try to return to Hosea. Now, if you were the prophet, would you have taken your wife back? That was exactly what Jehovah told Hosea to do! The prophet even purchased her back at significant cost.—Hos. 2:7; 3:1-5.

Hosea might have wondered what good would be accomplished by his fulfilling this assignment. Yet, in faithfully acting out the drama in real life, Hosea helps us to realize the pain that the Almighty must have felt when Israel betrayed him. And the fact is that some honesthearted Israelites did return to God.

God tells no one today to “marry a woman of prostitution.” Still, can we learn a lesson from Hosea’s willingness to take on such an assignment? One lesson is for us to be willing, even if we personally find it challenging, to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom



Our young ones imitate the spirit of the prophets—they boldly defend Jehovah as our Creator

“publicly and from house to house.” (Acts 20:20) Possibly, some features of the Kingdom-preaching work are not easy for you. Not a few who study with Jehovah’s Witnesses have commented that they enjoy studying the Bible but

would never go from door to door to spread the message. Many of them later began to do what they once thought would be impossible for them to do. Do you see a lesson there?

We can learn another lesson from Hosea’s accepting a difficult assignment. He could have begged off from playing a role in the symbolic drama involving his wife. What other human would have been aware of this commission unless Hosea had written this account? We too may face a situation where we have a chance to tell someone about Jehovah and no one else would know of that opportunity. This happened to Anna, a high school student in the United States. Her teacher asked the class to write an essay on some topic or issue about which they felt strongly and

then to try to persuade the class. Anna could have passed up this opportunity to give a witness. However, she felt that it was an opportunity from God. Realizing the possible reaction, she prayed to Jehovah, and a desire welled up in her to seize this opportunity. She wrote an essay entitled “Evolution: Consider the Evidence.”

When Anna presented the essay to the class, a girl known to believe in evolution fired questions at her. Anna successfully defended her position. Her teacher was impressed and gave Anna the award for the most persuasive essay. Anna has since had more discussions about creation with the girl who challenged her. As a result of accepting this “assignment” from Jehovah, Anna says, “I now confidently preach the good news without fear.”

Although we are not prophets in the absolute sense, by imitating the self-sacrificing spirit of such prophets as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Hosea, we too can successfully accomplish Jehovah’s will for us today! During family worship or as a personal study project, why not read about other prophets of old and meditate on how you can imitate their examples?

When were God's people held captive by Babylon the Great?

■ That spiritual captivity lasted from the second century C.E. to 1919. Why is this adjusted view warranted?

All the evidence indicates that this captivity ended in 1919 when anointed Christians were gathered into the restored congregation. Consider: God's people were tested and refined during the years following the establishment of God's Kingdom in the heavens in 1914.* (Mal. 3:1-4) Then, in 1919, Jesus appointed "the faithful and discreet slave" over God's cleansed people to give them spiritual "food at the proper time." (Matt. 24:45-47) This was the year that God's people started to return to their God-given spiritual estate. It was also the time when they were released from symbolic captivity to Babylon the Great. (Rev. 18:4) But when did that captivity actually begin?

For a number of years, we explained that this captivity began in 1918 and involved a brief period of time when God's people came under the control of Babylon the Great. For example, *The*

Watchtower of March 15, 1992, stated: "Yet, as God's ancient people were taken into Babylonian captivity for a time, in 1918 Jehovah's servants came into a measure of bondage to Babylon the Great." However, further research has shown that this captivity began much earlier than 1918.

For example, let us consider one of the prophecies that foretold this captivity and release of God's people. It is recorded at Ezekiel 37:1-14. In a vision, Ezekiel sees a valley filled with bones. Jehovah explains to Ezekiel that these bones represent "the whole house of Israel." In its larger fulfillment, this restoration prophecy applies to "the Israel of God." (Gal. 6:16; Acts 3:21) Next, Ezekiel sees the bones come to life and become a large army. What a fitting way to describe the spiritual resurrection of God's people that culminated in the events of 1919! But what does this vision reveal to us concerning the length of time involved?

First, we note that the bones are described as either "dry" or "very dry." (Ezek. 37:2, 11) This indicates that those to whom the bones belonged

* See *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2013, pp. 10-12, pars. 5-8, 12.

Warnings were given by Jesus, Paul, and John —yet, apostasy came to flourish

SECOND CENTURY C.E.
Christian congregation entered captivity to Babylon the Great

MORE RECENT CENTURIES
"A rattling sound" was heard as Bible translations were made in common languages

CAPTIVITY TO BABYLON THE GREAT

100
B.C.E.

100
C.E.

500

1000

1500

had been dead for a very long time. Second, the restoration is described as a gradual process, not something that happens suddenly. Initially, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and “the bones began to come together, bone to bone.” Then, “sinews and flesh” were added. Next, the bones, sinews, and flesh were covered with skin. Eventually, “breath came into them, and they began to live.” Finally, Jehovah settled the revived people on their land. All of this would take time.—Ezek. 37:7-10, 14.

The captivity of the ancient nation of Israel lasted a long time. It began in 740 B.C.E. with the fall and exile of many from the ten-tribe northern kingdom. Then, in 607 B.C.E., Jerusalem was destroyed and people of the southern kingdom of Judah were also taken into exile. This period of captivity ended in 537 B.C.E. when a remnant of the Jews returned to rebuild the temple and re-established pure worship in Jerusalem.

With these Scriptural details in mind, it becomes clear that the captivity of God’s people to Babylon the Great must have been much longer than the events of 1918-1919. The captivity parallels the time when the symbolic weeds would grow together with the wheatlike “sons of the

Kingdom.” (Matt. 13:36-43) That growing season refers to the period during which genuine Christians were greatly outnumbered by apostates. The Christian congregation, in effect, was held captive by Babylon the Great. That captivity began sometime in the second century C.E. and continued until the cleansing of the spiritual temple in the time of the end.—Acts 20:29, 30; 2 Thess. 2:3, 6; 1 John 2:18, 19.

During that extended period of spiritual captivity, the clergy and their political associates, who were desirous of maintaining their power, kept the Word of God from the people under their control. At times, it was a crime to read the Bible in a common language. Some people who did so were even burned at the stake. Any who expressed an opinion contrary to what the clergy taught were dealt with harshly, thus stifling any attempts to spread the light of the truth.

What about the second development, the restoration? When and how did that occur? This spiritual restoration work was a gradual process. It was accompanied by “a rattling sound” during the centuries leading up to the time of the end. Although false religious teachings held sway for the most part, some faithful individuals stood up



LATE 1800's
A gradual
restoration
of Bible truths
began



1919-TODAY
Freedom from captivity:
God's people were
restored to life and freed
from captivity

CAPTIVITY TO BABYLON THE GREAT

1850
C.E.

1900

1950

2000

in behalf of true worship to the extent that they were able to do so. Some of them endeavored to produce Bibles in the languages of the common people. Others declared the truths that they had discovered in the pages of God's Word.

Then, in the late 1800's, Charles Taze Russell and his associates worked zealously to restore Bible truths. It was as if symbolic flesh and skin were starting to be put on spiritual skeletons. *Zion's Watch Tower* and other publications helped honesthearted ones to discover spiritual truths. Later, such tools as the "Photo-Drama of Creation" in 1914 and the book *The Finished Mystery* in 1917 also strengthened God's people. Finally, in 1919, God's people were given life, spiritually speaking, and were settled in their new spiritual land. As time has progressed, this remnant of anointed ones has been joined by those with an earthly hope, and together they have become "an

extremely large army."—Ezek. 37:10; Zech. 8:20-23.*

Given these facts, it becomes clear that God's people went into captivity to Babylon the Great with the growth of the apostasy in the second century C.E. This was a dark period of time, similar to what the ancient Israelites experienced while in exile. How happy we can be, though, that after God's people experienced centuries of spiritual oppression, we are living in the time when "those having insight will shine . . . brightly" and "many will cleanse themselves" and they "will be refined"!—Dan. 12:3, 10.

* Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Revelation 11:7-12 each speak of a spiritual restoration that took place in 1919. However, the prophecy in Ezekiel foretold the eventual spiritual restoration of *all of God's people* after an extremely long period of captivity. On the other hand, the prophecy in Revelation refers to the spiritual rebirth of a *small group of anointed brothers who have taken the lead* after a relatively short period of forced inactivity.

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

Did Satan physically take Jesus to the temple when tempting him?

■ Put simply, we cannot be certain whether Jesus actually stood in the temple or he did so only by means of a vision. At times, both possibilities have been presented in our publications.

Consider first what the Bible record says. In his Gospel account of this event, the apostle Matthew was inspired to write: "Then the Devil *took him* [Jesus] along into the holy city, and he *stationed him* on the battlement ["parapet; highest point," ftn.] of the temple." (Matt. 4:5) Luke's parallel account puts it this way: "He then *led him* into Jerusalem and *stationed him* on the battlement of the temple."—Luke 4:9.

In the past, our publications have reasoned that this event may not have happened literally.

For example, in the issue of March 1, 1961, *The Watchtower* explained: "It does not seem reasonable to place a literal construction on all that appears in the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Certainly there is no mountain from which one could be shown 'all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.' So too, we must reasonably conclude that Satan did not literally, bodily, physically, take Jesus 'along into the holy city' and station him 'upon the battlement of the temple.' Such was not at all necessary for the temptation to have force." However, in subsequent issues of this journal, we have observed that Christ's complying with Satan's request could have resulted in Jesus' suicide.

Some have stated that, as a non-Levite, Jesus was not authorized to stand on top of the temple sanctuary. So it was assumed that Jesus may have been ‘taken along’ to the temple by means of a vision. That is similar to what happened centuries earlier to the prophet Ezekiel.—Ezek. 8:3, 7-10; 11:1, 24; 37:1, 2.

However, if this temptation occurred only in the form of a vision, the following questions arise:

- Was the *temptation* real or imaginary?
- If the other temptations were efforts to lure Jesus into carrying out physical actions such as turning literal stones into bread or performing a real act of worship before Satan, would not this temptation have been similar—requiring Jesus physically to jump from the temple?

On the other hand, if Jesus did stand physically on the battlement of the temple, other questions arise:

- Did Jesus violate the Law by standing on top of the sanctuary?
- How did Jesus get from the wilderness to Jerusalem?

Further research helps us to see some possibilities that may answer these last two questions.

First, Professor D. A. Carson notes that the Greek word *hi-e-ron'*, translated “temple” in both accounts, “probably refers to the entire complex, not the sanctuary itself.” So Jesus would not necessarily have had to stand on top of the sanctuary itself. He could have stood, for example, on the southeastern corner of the temple area. From that location, there was a drop of some 450 feet (137 m) to the floor of the Kidron Valley. The southeast structure had a flat roof with a parapet and was the highest in the temple. The ancient historian Josephus stated that if a person stood

there and looked down, he “would become dizzy” because of the height. As a non-Levite, Jesus would have been allowed to stand in that location, and his doing so would not have caused any commotion.

But how could Jesus have been taken along to the temple when he was in the wilderness? The basic answer is that we cannot know for certain. The brief description of the temptations does not state how long a period was involved or where Jesus was in the wilderness. We cannot rule out the possibility that Jesus may have walked back to Jerusalem, even though doing so may have taken some time. The account does not specifically say that Jesus remained in the wilderness throughout the time of the temptations. Rather, it merely says that he was taken into Jerusalem.

What, though, of the temptation wherein Jesus was shown “all the kingdoms of the world”? Obviously, he did not literally see all the kingdoms; there is no literal mountain from which all of them can be seen. So Satan may have used some sort of vision to show these to Jesus, similar to the way a projector and a screen can be used to show someone pictures of various places on earth. However, although a vision may have been used, the “act of worship” would have been real, not imaginary. (Matt. 4:8, 9) It could be argued, then, that the temptation to jump off the battlement of the temple involved a real action with real consequences—adding a greater seriousness to this temptation than would be the case were it a mere vision.

The fact is, as stated at the outset, we cannot be dogmatic about this matter. Hence, we cannot rule out the possibility that Jesus actually went to Jerusalem and stood on the battlement of the temple. But one thing we can be sure about is that these temptations were real and that Jesus gave a conclusive answer to the Devil in each case.



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