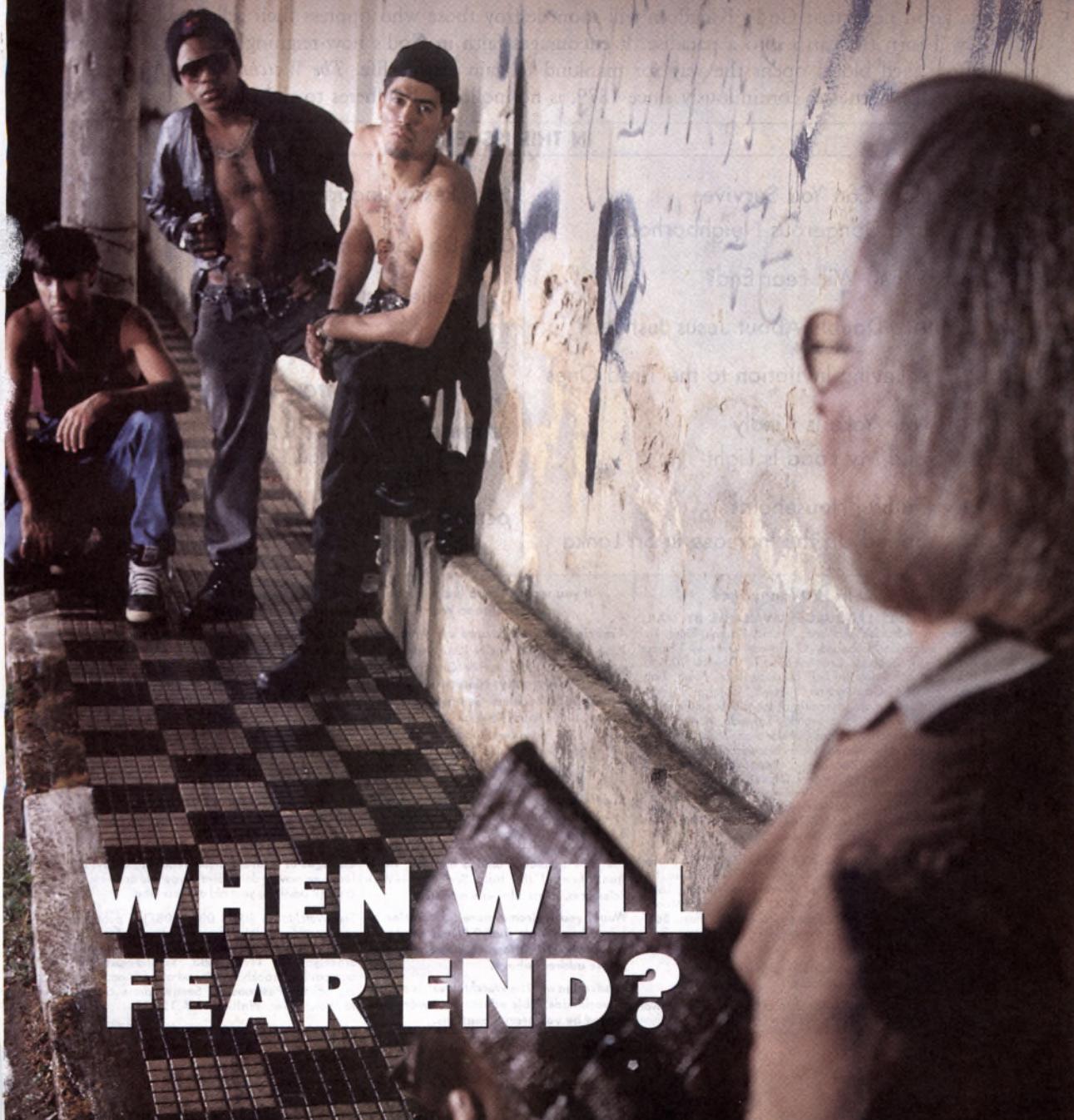


AUGUST 15, 1995

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



**WHEN WILL
FEAR END?**

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

August 15, 1995

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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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How Can You Survive in a Dangerous Neighborhood?

"I WAS scared all the time. I was afraid on the elevator. I was afraid in my car. I was afraid in my apartment. There was crime everywhere. People were always getting robbed," says Maria. Do you feel like this Brazilian woman, afraid in your neighborhood, especially in the darkness of the night?

To read detective stories may be exciting, but in real life there often is no happy ending. A crime may remain unsolved. Or in cases of homicide, someone has to go on living without a husband, father, or son, without a wife, mother, or daughter. Is violent crime increasing in your area? Do you long for a quiet place where your family would be safe? Or, if you are compelled to raise your children in a crime-ridden area, what can you do to survive?

Granted, there are still cities where little crime is reported. In many lands, people still live in rural tranquillity or in cozy villages. But things are changing rapidly even in areas formerly considered crime-free. For example, in Brazil 50 years ago,

70 percent of the population lived in the country. Now 70 percent live in the cities. Along with job opportunities has come an increase in urban problems, such as crime and violence. Whether living in a dangerous area or not, you still must go to work or school and do scores of things away from home.

Acknowledging the prevailing "panic syndrome," a chief of police in Rio de Janeiro cites social injustice and organized crime as contributing factors. He also feels that newspapers and television contribute to widespread fear, "influencing the population's spirit with tragic news." Drug addiction, family breakdown, and faulty religious education also contribute to the growing lawlessness. And what will the future bring? Will the steady diet of violent scenes, trivialized in books and films as entertainment, cause people to become insensitive toward others? Will areas considered crime-free also become dangerous?

Since violence is no fun for the victim, we have a strong desire to be safe. No

wonder concerned citizens demand more police officers on the streets and stiffer prison sentences or even capital punishment! Despite the risks, some acquire guns for self-defense. Others want the authorities to restrict the sale of firearms. But despite the bad news that crime abounds, there is no need to despair. In fact, many habitants of such large cities as Johannesburg, Mexico City, New York, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo have never been robbed. Let us examine how people cope in a dangerous neighborhood.

Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Regarding a crime-ridden area, a writer comments on "the ingenuity and perseverance of thousands of Brazilians who have fashioned some dignity and decency out of still-harsh living conditions." After 38 years in Rio de Janeiro, Jorge says: "I avoid certain streets and areas and do not show any curiosity. I also avoid staying on the street late and do not display excessive fear. Although I am cautious, I view people as if they were honest, treating them with dignity and respect."

Yes, avoid unnecessary trouble. Mind your own business. Never downplay the fact that overwhelming fear can try the nerves, making even well-behaved people act irrationally. Regarding his work in dangerous areas, Odair observes: "I try to be positive, not feeding my mind with fear of bad things that might happen because this causes unnecessary tension and panic. I try to show respect to all people." Besides being alert and keeping at a distance from suspicious ones, he adds another aid to control one's emotions: "Above all, I cultivate confidence in Jehovah God, remembering that nothing escapes his eyes and anything that happens is with his permission."

Yet, no one likes to live in constant fear. Moreover, who will deny that excessive fear and stress are harmful to emotional and physical health? Hence, what hope is there for those who fear that they could be attacked at any time? Since many are afraid that the worst regarding crime is still ahead, will we ever see the end of violence? We invite you to read the following article, "When Will Fear End?"

When Will Fear End?

WOULD it surprise you to know that real security has to do with a man who lived 2,000 years ago? Showing the need for love, Jesus Christ told a remarkable parable: "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among robbers, who both stripped him and inflicted blows, and went off, leaving him half-dead." Although two travelers ignored the victim, a kind Samaritan showed mercy. Who, though, cares for the victims of crime today? What relief from fear can we expect?—Luke 10:30-37.

While professing to believe in God, many think that law and order have to be enforced by man. But will heavier prison terms or more and better-paid police put an end to violent crime? Do you really believe that law-enforcement agencies, notwithstanding sincere efforts to provide a mea-

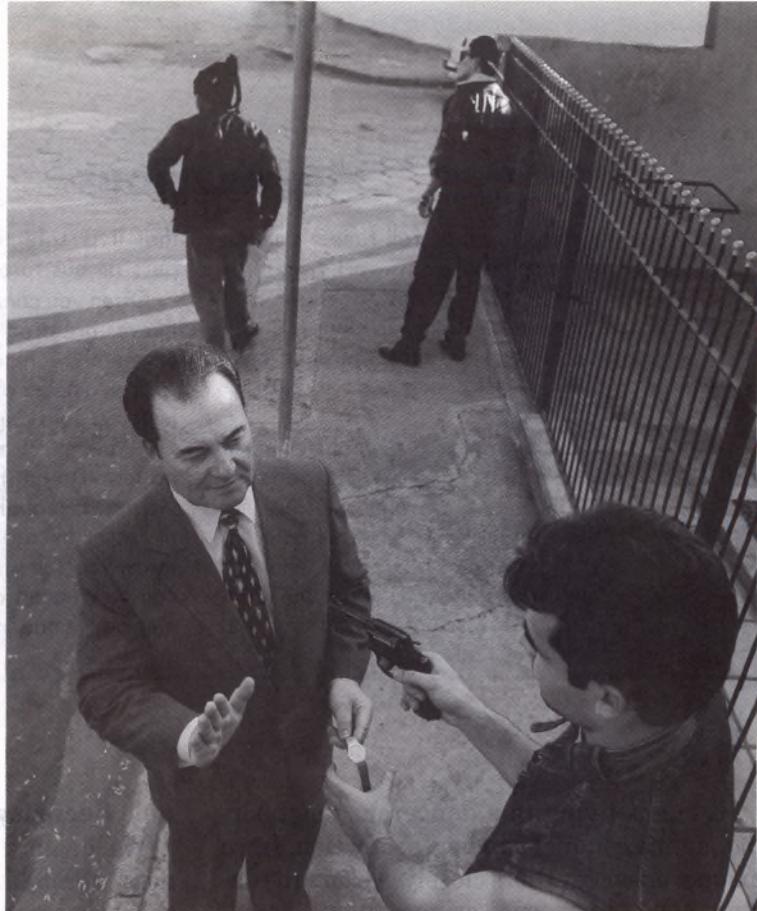
Remain calm and hand over what the thief wants. If you delay, the danger increases

sure of security, will eliminate such things as drug abuse, organized crime, and poverty? Yet, our hungering and thirsting for righteousness need not be in vain.—Matthew 5:6.

Psalm 46:1 says: "God is for us a refuge and strength, a help that is readily to be found during distresses." We will see that these words are not mere beautiful poetry.

As you know, the news media daily report wanton killing in civil wars and terrorist attacks. In some parts of the world, it has become commonplace to exterminate unwanted youths or eyewitnesses. Why has life become so cheap? Although there may be various causes of such violence, there is one reason we should not overlook.

According to God's Word, the Bible, "the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one." (1 John 5:19) In fact, Jesus Christ identified Satan the Devil not only as a liar but as "a manslayer." (John 8:44) Influencing mankind in various ways, this powerful spirit creature is promoting today's increase of violence. "Woe for the earth and for the sea, because the Devil has come down to you, having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time," says Revelation 12:12. Happily, though, this wicked system will be replaced with "new



heavens and a new earth . . . , and in these righteousness is to dwell."—2 Peter 3:13.

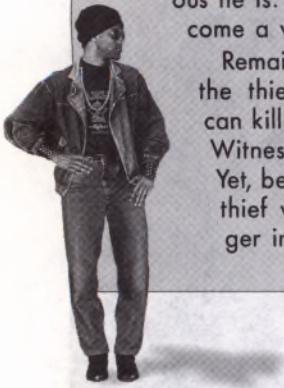
In addition to this marvelous hope of a new world, what help do we have right now?

Before looking at the positive answer to that, it is good to fix in mind that even genuine Christians have no guarantee that they will be protected from crime. The apostle Paul described some risks that he personally faced. He had been "in dangers from rivers, in dangers from highwaymen, in dangers from [his] own race, in dangers from the nations, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea." (2 Corinthians 11:26) Yet Paul survived these dangers. It is the same today; by being cautious, we can still carry out our tasks as normally as possible. Let us consider some things that will help.

BE CAUTIOUS

Many criminals work full-time, making crime a profession. They may work in groups of two or three, even if only one points a gun at you. It is increasingly evident that the younger the criminal, the more dangerous he is. What can you do if you become a victim?

Remain calm so as not to make the thief nervous—his inexperience can kill. If you are one of Jehovah's Witnesses, identify yourself as such. Yet, be ready to hand over what the thief wants. If you delay, the danger increases. Later, you may feel



that it is safe to ask that identification papers or bus fare be returned.

Often you cannot tell who is a criminal. Some thieves are drug addicts or professionals, others merely want to eat. In any event, do not carry a large amount of money. Avoid exhibiting jewelry, gold rings, or expensive watches. Walk and travel normally, showing no fear. Do not fix your eyes on individuals as though you want to identify them. In case of street shootings, throw yourself on the ground; clothes can be cleaned afterward.—A former policeman in Rio de Janeiro.



If one is living in a dangerous neighborhood, fine conduct can be a protection, since people observe others closely. Although robbers plan and execute crimes, many consider themselves to be normal people. Avoid criticizing what they do, and do not try to find out what they are involved in. Thus, you can lessen the possibility of your becoming the object of retaliation. Keep in mind that thieves try to find out who has bought something new or who is going on vacation and therefore will be out of their homes, so be discreet in what you reveal to others.

Many of Jehovah's Witnesses have found that their reputation as ministers has offered them a distinct measure of protection. Criminals have often shown that they respect such Christians, who without partiality give of themselves in helping people in the community. The Witnesses are not themselves murderers or thieves, nor are they 'busybodies in other people's matters,' hence not a threat.—1 Peter 4:15.

Security in God's New World

We deplore "the increasing of lawlessness" foretold by Jesus Christ, but rather than be overanxious, we can be confident that God will soon eradicate this wicked system. Besides foretelling a worldwide preaching of "this good news of the kingdom," Jesus reminded his followers: "He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved."—Matthew 24:12-14.

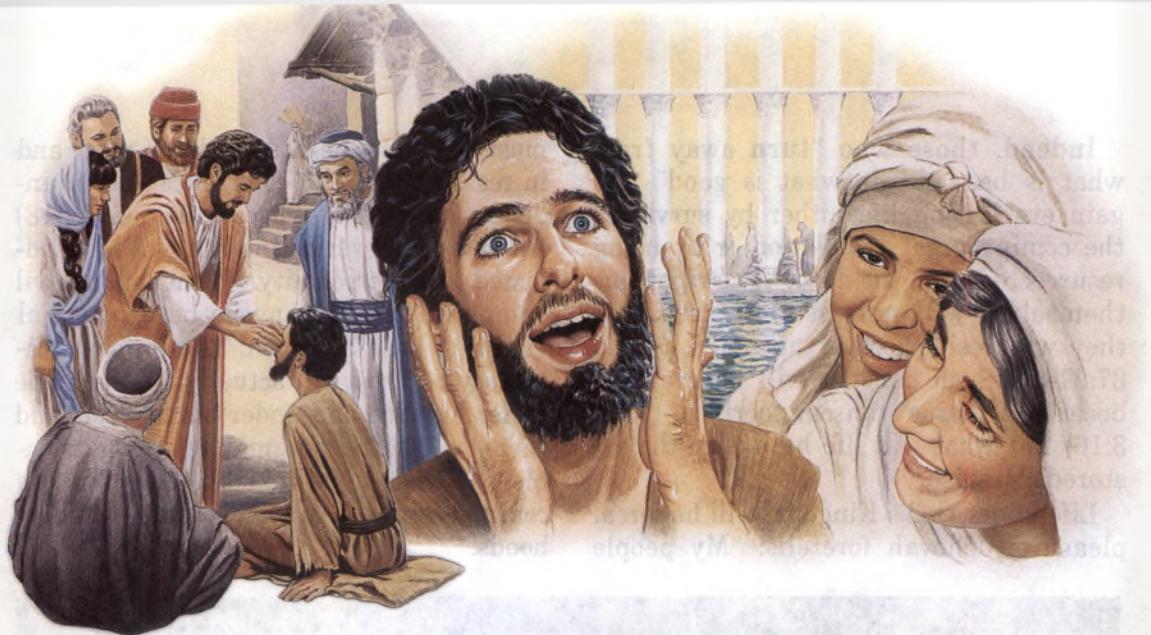
We can be sure that those who prey on others, at times with unbelievable cruelty, will be eliminated. Proverbs 22:22, 23 says: "Do not rob the lowly one because he is lowly, and do not crush the afflicted one in the gate. For Jehovah himself will plead their cause, and he will certainly rob of soul those robbing them." Jehovah will eliminate evildoers, such as robbers, murderers, and sex perverts. Furthermore, he will not ignore the victims of such crimes. He will overcome their losses and fully restore their health.

Indeed, those who "turn away from what is bad and do what is good" will gain everlasting life either by surviving the coming great tribulation or by being resurrected from the dead. "The righteous themselves will possess the earth, and they will reside forever upon it." (Psalm 37:27-29) Such benefits will be available because of Jesus' ransom sacrifice. (John 3:16) But what will life be like in the restored Paradise?

Life under God's Kingdom will be a real pleasure. Jehovah foretells: "My people

must dwell in a peaceful abiding place and in residences of full confidence and in undisturbed resting-places." (Isaiah 32:18) All who gain everlasting life will have adjusted their personality. No one will be evil or unjust, nor will anyone be a potential victim of such a person. The prophet Micah says: "They will actually sit, each one under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be no one making them tremble." (Micah 4:4; Ezekiel 34:28) What a contrast with today's dangerous neighborhoods!





Are Doubts About Jesus Justified?

Did Jesus of Nazareth really perform miracles? Was he resurrected from the dead, as his disciples proclaimed? Did he live at all? In our modern age, many seem to be unable to answer such questions with certainty. Why? Because they entertain doubts about Jesus, and doubts are feelings of uncertainty, not knowing whether something is true or possible. But are feelings of uncertainty concerning Jesus justified? Let us see.

How Doubts About Jesus Were Sown

Certain German theologians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries portrayed Jesus as "a fictitious figure of the ancient Church." Their impugning Jesus' historicity led to a controversy among scholars at the beginning of this century that reached the public at that time and still has an influence today. For example, a recent study in Germany revealed that 3 percent of those interviewed believe that Jesus "never lived" and that "the apostles invented him." Yes, the seeds of doubt about Jesus that were sown

early in this century find fertile soil in people's hearts even now.

Why is the conclusion that Jesus was "invented" simply not justified? Bible scholar Wolfgang Trilling comments: "The controversy as to whether Jesus ever lived, in other words whether he was a historical figure or a myth, was settled. The question was resolved in a scholarly manner, at least in such a way that serious-minded people no longer see the problem as an academic issue." Nevertheless, some still doubt that Jesus ever existed. Consequently, let us investigate how one can establish Jesus' historicity as well as remove other doubts concerning him.

Testimonies That Dispel Doubts

The ignominious execution of Jesus as a contemptible criminal provides "the most convincing argument against opponents of the historicity of Jesus," states Trilling. Why? Because the execution "encumbered, even hindered, the dispersion of the new faith among Jews and non-Jews." (Compare

1 Corinthians 1:23.) If the execution of Jesus the Messiah was such an effrontery to both Jews and Gentiles, it hardly would have been an invention of the apostles! Furthermore, Jesus' death is attested to as an historical event not only by the four Gospels but also by the Roman writer Tacitus and by the Jewish Talmud.*

Other events during Jesus' life are also viewed as internal evidence of the credibility of the Gospels, hence of what they tell us about him. For example, would the followers of Jesus have fabricated his coming from Nazareth, a place seemingly out of favor? Or is it likely that they would have invented his betrayal by Judas, a trusted companion? Does it seem realistic to think that they would have made up a story about Jesus' being abandoned by the rest of the disciples in such a cowardly manner? It is surely illogical that the disciples would have constructed particulars so detrimental in nature and then proclaimed them far and wide! In addition, the art of teaching employed by Jesus was characterized by a unique style. Jewish literature of the first century contains nothing comparable to his illustrations. Which anonymous person could ever have "invented" such a masterpiece as the Sermon on the Mount? These arguments all tend to corroborate the trustworthiness of the Gospels as reports of Jesus' life.

There is also external evidence for the historicity of Jesus. The four Gospels portray him against a specific, accurately detailed, historical background. Places, such as Bethlehem and Galilee; prominent individuals and groups, such as Pontius Pilate and the Pharisees; as well as Jewish

customs and other peculiarities were not simply concocted. They formed part of the structure of life in the first century, and they have been confirmed by non-Biblical sources and by archaeological findings.

There is, thus, convincing evidence, both internal and external, that Jesus is a historical person.

However, quite a number of people entertain doubts about miracles involving him. Indeed, according to the survey quoted above, only a minority of German churchgoers firmly believe that Jesus' miracles and his resurrection "really happened." Are doubts about Jesus' miracles and resurrection justified?

Why Some Doubt Jesus' Miracles

Matthew 9:18-36 reports that Jesus miraculously healed sick ones, resurrected the dead, and expelled demons. Professor Hugo Staudinger, a historian, comments: "It is quite simply unbelievable, and from the standpoint of history impossible, that these extraordinary reports are the product of a vivid imagination." Why? Because it seems that the earliest Gospels were penned at a time when most eyewitnesses to these miracles were still alive! Further confirmation is found in that, as Staudinger goes on to say, the Jewish opponents "never denied that Jesus performed extraordinary works." Ignoring all other proof and basing our judgment simply on this external evidence, we find that Jesus' miracles are definitely worthy of our belief.—2 Timothy 3:16.

Although "the majority of Germans are convinced that Jesus healed sick people," many have doubts about the power behind these healings. For instance, a well-known German theologian stated publicly that healings performed by Jesus were the result of the power of suggestion influencing people who were suffering from mental distress. Is this a sound explanation?

* Polemic references to Jesus in the Talmud are accepted as genuine by certain scholars only. On the other hand, references to Jesus by Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and at least one by Flavius Josephus, are generally accepted as proof of the historical existence of Jesus.

Just consider. Mark 3:3-5 reports that Jesus cured a man's withered hand. But is a withered hand the result of mental distress? Definitely not. Consequently, this healing could not be attributed to the power of suggestion. So what enabled Jesus to perform miracles? Professor Staudinger admits: "If there are no laws that are absolutely valid, and if one does not completely deny God, then fundamentally one cannot rule out the possibility that God, whose power exceeds man's, is able to perform things that are not common practice." Yes, indeed, with the aid of the "power of God," Jesus literally healed people who were ill. There is thus no reason to doubt the genuineness of his miracles.

—Luke 9:43; Matthew 12:28.

As *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* puts it, if the greatest of all miracles—Jesus' resurrection—took place, all other miracles reported in the Gospels "fall within the realm of possibility." Was Jesus really raised up from the dead?

Doubts About Jesus' Resurrection Justified?

Consider first a piece of strong circumstantial evidence that supports the truth-

fulness of the resurrection of Jesus—his empty tomb. The fact that Jesus' grave was discovered to be empty was undisputed by his contemporaries, even by his opposers. (Matthew 28:11-15) Deception would easily have been exposed! The above-mentioned reference work rightly concludes: "No valid explanation for the empty tomb has ever been suggested except the biblical statement, 'He is not here; for he is risen' (Matt. 28:6)." *Verily, truly, I say unto you, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

Some object, saying that it was only Jesus' own disciples who proclaimed everywhere that he was the resurrected Messiah. They did. But was not the credibility of their message firmly anchored in historical fact, especially the death and resurrection of Jesus? Of course. The apostle Paul was aware of this connection when he wrote: "If Christ has not been raised up, our preaching is certainly in vain, and our faith is in vain. Moreover, we are also found false witnesses of God, because we have borne witness against God that he raised up the Christ."—1 Corinthians 15:14, 15; compare John 19:35; 21:24; Hebrews 2:3.

In the first century, there were many peo-



ple whose identities were well-known and who could bear witness to the appearance of Jesus after his death. Among them were the 12 apostles and Paul, as well as more than 500 other eyewitnesses.* (1 Corinthians 15:6) Bear in mind also the reason why Matthias fulfilled the qualifications to succeed the unfaithful apostle Judas. Acts 1: 21-23 reports that Matthias could testify to Jesus' resurrection and to earlier events in connection with Him. If the life and resurrection of Jesus had been fiction instead of fact, such a requirement for the appointment would certainly have been completely pointless.

Because so many first-century eyewitnesses could testify to the life, miracles, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christianity spread relatively quickly throughout the Roman Empire, despite the above-mentioned obstacles. His followers were willing to put up with hardship, persecution, and even death so as to declare everywhere the resurrection and the fundamental truth emanating from it. Which truth? That his resurrection had been possible only by reason of the power of God. And why had Jehovah God resurrected Jesus from the dead? The answer to that question shows who the historical Jesus is.

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter freely declared to astonished Jews in Jerusalem: "This Jesus God resurrected, of which fact we are all witnesses. Therefore because he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the promised holy spirit from the Father, he has poured out this which you see and hear. Actually David did not ascend to the heavens, but he himself says, 'Jehovah said to my Lord: "Sit at my

right hand, until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet."'" Therefore let all the house of Israel know for a certainty that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you impaled." (Acts 2:32-36) Yes, Jehovah God made Jesus of Nazareth "both Lord and Christ." Are doubts concerning his role in this part of God's purpose justified?

Why Doubt Jesus' Present Role?

How can all doubts about the identity and role of Jesus be dispelled? By the fact that he was clearly a true prophet. He predicted the wars, famines, earthquakes, crime, and lack of love that we see today. Additionally, he predicted: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come." (Matthew 24: 3-14) The fulfillment of these prophecies proves that Jesus is the resurrected Christ, invisibly ruling 'in the midst of his enemies,' and soon he will usher in God's new world.—Psalm 110:1, 2; Daniel 2:44; Revelation 21:1-5.

Now as never before, mankind urgently needs a Savior equipped with superhuman wisdom. Why should we doubt that Jesus is the one rightly selected to save mankind? John, who was an eyewitness to the impressive miracles and to the resurrection of Jesus, declared: "In addition, we ourselves have beheld and are bearing witness that the Father has sent forth his Son as Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14; compare John 4:42.) Just as we have no reasonable grounds to doubt Jesus' existence, miracles, death, and resurrection, we have no reason to doubt that he has been enthroned by Jehovah God as lawful King at His right hand. Without doubt, Jesus of Nazareth is the King of God's Kingdom and "Savior of the world."—Matthew 6:10.

* On one occasion, the resurrected Jesus ate fish with his disciples, which proves that his appearance was not simply a vision, as some claim today.—Luke 24:36-43.

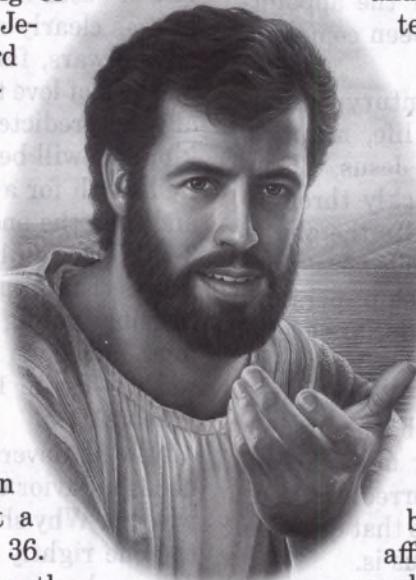
A LOVING INVITATION TO THE TIRED ONES

"Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you."—MATTHEW 11:28.

NEAR the beginning of the year 32 C.E., Jesus was on his third preaching tour in the district of Galilee. He traveled through the cities and villages, "teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom and curing every sort of disease and every sort of infirmity." As he did this, he saw the crowds, and "he felt pity for them, because they were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd."—Matthew 9:35, 36.

² Jesus, however, did more than just feel pity for the crowds. After instructing his disciples to pray to "the Master of the harvest," Jehovah God, he sent them out to help the people. (Matthew 9:38; 10:1) Then he offered the people his personal assurance of the way to genuine relief and comfort. He extended to them this heartwarming invitation: "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you

1. What did Jesus see in Galilee on his third preaching tour?
2. How did Jesus help the people?



and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls."

—Matthew 11:28, 29.

³ Today we live in a time when many feel heavily burdened and loaded down. (Romans 8:22; 2 Timothy 3:1) For some, just making a living consumes so much of their time and energy that they have little left for their family, friends, or anything else. Many are burdened with serious illness, afflictions, depression, and other physical and emotional prob-

lems. Feeling the pressure, some try to find relief by immersing themselves in pleasure-seeking, eating, drinking, even drug abuse. This, of course, only throws them into a vicious circle, bringing them more problems and pressures. (Romans 8:6) Clearly, Jesus' loving invitation sounds just as appealing today as it did back then.

- ⁴ To what, though, were the people in Je-
3. Why is Jesus' invitation equally appealing today?
 4. What questions should we consider in order to benefit from Jesus' loving invitation?

sus' day subjected, so that they appeared "skinned and thrown about," moving Jesus to feel pity for them? What were the burdens and loads they had to carry, and how would Jesus' invitation help them? The answers to these questions can be most helpful to us in benefiting from Jesus' loving invitation to the tired ones.

Those "Toiling and Loaded Down"

⁵ It is interesting that only Matthew reported on this event in Jesus' ministry. Having been a tax collector, Matthew, who was also known as Levi, was well acquainted with one particular burden the people were carrying. (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14) Says the book *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*: "The taxes that [the Jews had] to pay in money and in kind were exceedingly heavy, and they were all the heavier in that two forms of taxation ran side by side for them, civil taxes and religious taxes; and neither was light."

⁶ What made all of this especially burdensome was the tax system at the time. Roman officials farmed out the right to collect taxes in the provinces to the highest bidders. They, in turn, employed people in local communities to supervise the actual work of collecting the tax. Everyone in the pyramid scheme felt fully justified to tag on his own commission, or cut. For example, Luke related that "there was a man called by the name Zacchaeus; and he was a chief tax collector, and he was rich." (Luke 19:2) "Chief tax collector" Zacchaeus and those under his supervision apparently built their fortunes on the people's misery. The abuse and corruption engendered

5. Why was it appropriate that the apostle Matthew reported on this event in Jesus' ministry?
6. (a) What was the tax system in use in Jesus' time? (b) Why did tax collectors have such a bad reputation? (c) Of what did Paul feel the need to remind his fellow Christians?

by such a system caused the people to rank tax collectors among sinners and harlots, and probably deservedly so in most cases. (Matthew 9:10; 21:31, 32; Mark 2:15; Luke 7:34) Since the people felt an almost unbearable burden, it is no wonder that the apostle Paul felt the need to remind his fellow Christians not to chafe under the Roman yoke but to "render to all their dues, to him who calls for the tax, the tax; to him who calls for the tribute, the tribute."—Romans 13:7a; compare Luke 23:2.

⁷ Paul also reminded Christians to render "to him who calls for fear, such fear; to him who calls for honor, such honor." (Romans 13:7b) The Romans were noted for the cruelty and severity of their penal laws. Scourging, flogging, harsh prison terms, and executions were frequently used in order to keep the people in line. (Luke 23:32, 33; Acts 22:24, 25) Even the Jewish leaders were given the authority to administer such punishment as they saw fit. (Matthew 10:17; Acts 5:40) Such a system was certainly most repressive, if not outright oppressive, to anyone living under it.

⁸ Worse than the Roman taxes and laws, however, was the burden placed on the common people by the religious leaders of the day. In fact, this appeared to be Jesus' primary concern when he described the people as "toiling and loaded down." Jesus said that rather than give the down-trodden people hope and solace, the religious leaders "bind up heavy loads and put them upon the shoulders of men, but they themselves are not willing to budge them with their finger." (Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46) One cannot fail to note in the Gospels the unmistakable portrayal of the

7. How did the Roman penal laws add to the people's burden?
8. How did the religious leaders load a burden on the people?

religious leaders—especially the scribes and the Pharisees—as a haughty, heartless, and hypocritical group. They looked down on the common people as being unlearned and unclean, and they despised the foreigners in their midst. A commentary on their attitude observes: “A man who overloads a horse is nowadays chargeable before the law. What of a man who loaded 613 commandments on ‘the people of the land’ who had no religious training; and then, having done nothing to help them, condemned them as godless?” Of course, the real burden was, not the Mosaic Law, but the mass of tradition imposed on the people.

Real Cause of Hardship

⁹ At times the material burden upon the people was a heavy one, so that there was widespread poverty. The Israelites had to pay the reasonable taxes set out by the Mosaic Law. Then during Solomon’s rule, the people cared for very costly national projects, such as building the temple and other edifices. (1 Kings 7:1-8; 9:17-19) Yet, the Bible tells us that the people were “eating and drinking and rejoicing. . . . And Judah and Israel continued to dwell in security, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree, from Dan to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon.” (1 Kings 4:20, 25) What accounted for the difference?

¹⁰ As long as the nation remained firm for true worship, they enjoyed Jehovah’s favor and were blessed with security and prosperity in spite of the heavy national expenditure. However, Jehovah warned that if they “should definitely turn back from following [him] and not keep [his] command-

9. How did conditions among the people of Jesus’ time compare with those in King Solomon’s day?

10. What was the reason for Israel’s situation by the first century?

ments,” they would suffer serious reversals. In fact, “Israel [would] indeed become a proverbial saying and a taunt among all the peoples.” (1 Kings 9:6, 7) Matters turned out just that way. Israel came under foreign domination, and the once glorious kingdom was reduced to mere colonial status. What a price to pay for neglecting their spiritual obligations!

¹¹ All of this helps us to understand why Jesus felt that the people he saw “were skinned and thrown about.” These were Israelites, Jehovah’s people, who by and large were trying to live according to God’s laws and to carry on their worship in an acceptable way. Nevertheless, they were exploited and down-trodden not only by the political and commercial powers but also by the apostate religious leaders among them. They were “like sheep without a shepherd” because they had no one to care for them or to plead their case. They needed help to cope with very harsh realities. How timely was Jesus’ loving and gentle invitation!

Jesus’ Invitation Today

¹² In many ways things are similar today. Sincere people who are trying to make an honest living find the pressures and demands from the corrupt system of things hard to bear. Even those who have dedicated their lives to Jehovah are not immune. Reports show that some among servants of Jehovah are finding it increasingly difficult to live up to all their responsibilities, even though they want to do so. They feel burdened down, tired, worn out. Some even feel that it would be a relief if they could just throw everything to the

11. Why did Jesus feel that the people “were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd”?

12. What pressures do God’s servants and other sincere people feel today?

wind and disappear somewhere so that they could pull themselves together. Have you ever felt that way? Do you know someone close to you in that situation? Yes, Jesus' heartwarming invitation has a great deal of meaning for us today.

¹³ Before Jesus issued his loving invitation, he stated: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one fully knows the Son but the Father, neither does anyone fully know the Father but the Son and anyone to whom the Son is willing to reveal him." (Matthew 11:27) Because of this intimate relationship between Jesus and his Father, we are assured that by accepting Jesus' invitation and becoming his disciples, we can enter into a close, personal relationship with Jehovah, "the God of all comfort." (2 Corinthians 1:3; compare John 14:6.) In addition, since 'all things have been delivered to him,' Jesus Christ alone has the power and authority to lighten our burdens. Which ones? Those imposed by the corrupt political, commercial, and religious systems, as well as the burden imposed by our inherited sin and imperfection. What an encouraging and reassuring thought that is right from the start!

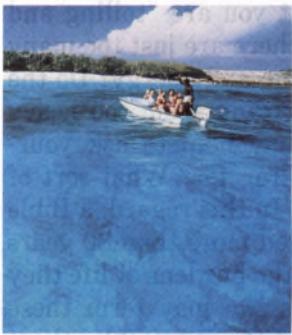
¹⁴ Jesus went on to say: "Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you." (Matthew 11:28) Certainly Jesus was not speaking against hard work, for he often counseled his disciples to exert themselves in the work they had at hand. (Luke 13:24) But "toiling" ("laboring," *Kingdom Interlinear*) implies prolonged and fatiguing labor, often with

13. Why can we be sure that Jesus can help us find rest and refreshment?

14. From what toiling could Jesus provide refreshment?

no worthwhile outcome. And "loaded down" carries the thought of being burdened beyond the normal capacity. The difference can be likened to that between a man digging for a hidden treasure and one digging

Courtesy of Bahamas Ministry of Tourism



**What are some
of the burdens that
we might bring
upon ourselves?**

ditches in a labor camp. They are doing similar hard work. With one, the task is eagerly undertaken, but with the other, it is an endless drudgery. What makes the difference is the purpose of the work or the lack of purpose.

¹⁵ Do you feel that you are “toiling and loaded down,” that there are just too many demands on your time and energy? Do the burdens you are carrying seem too heavy for you? If so, it may help to ask yourself, ‘What am I toiling for? What sort of load am I carrying?’ In this regard, a Bible commentator observed more than 80 years ago: “If we consider the burdens of life they fall into two classes; we may term these the self-imposed and the inevitable: those which are due, and those which are not due, to our own actions.” He then added: “Many of us would be surprised, after a strict self-examination, to find how large a proportion of the whole of our burdens the self-imposed ones are.”

¹⁶ What are some of the burdens that we might bring upon ourselves? Today we live in a materialistic, pleasure-loving, and immoral world. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Even dedicated Christians are under constant pressure to conform to the fashions and life-styles of the world. The apostle John wrote about “the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one’s means of life.” (1 John 2:16) These are powerful influences that can easily affect us. It is known that some have been willing to go deeply into debt in order to enjoy more of the worldly pleasures or to maintain a certain life-style. Then they find that they

15. (a) What questions should we ask ourselves if we feel that we carry a heavy burden on our shoulders? (b) What can be said about the source of our burdens?

16. What burdens may we unwisely impose upon ourselves?

must spend an inordinate amount of time on the job, or take on several jobs, to get the money to pay their debts.

¹⁷ While a person may reason that it is not wrong to have or to do some of the things others have or are doing, it is important to analyze whether he is adding to his load unnecessarily. (1 Corinthians 10:23) Since a person can carry only so much, something must be put off in order to take on another load. Frequently, it is the things essential for our spiritual well-being—personal Bible study, meeting attendance, and the field ministry—that are being put off first. The result is loss of spiritual strength, which, in turn, makes it even harder to bear the load. Jesus Christ warned against such a danger when he said: “Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day be instantly upon you as a snare.” (Luke 21:34, 35; Hebrews 12:1) It is difficult to recognize a snare and escape it if one is loaded down and tired out.

17. What situation may make it even harder to bear the load, and how may this be remedied?

Can You Recall?

- In what ways were the people of Jesus’ day burdened?
- What was the true cause of the people’s hardship?
- How should we examine ourselves if we feel heavily burdened?
- What burdens may we unwisely impose upon ourselves?
- How can we receive the refreshment Jesus promised?

Relief and Refreshment

¹⁸ Lovingly, therefore, Jesus offered the remedy: “Come to me, . . . and I will refresh you.” (Matthew 11:28) The words “refresh” here and “refreshment” in verse 29 come from Greek words that correspond to the word that the Septuagint version uses to render the Hebrew word for “sabbath” or “sabbath-keeping.” (Exodus 16:23) Thus, Jesus did not promise that those who came to him would have no more work, but he promised that he would refresh them so that they would be fit for the work they must perform in harmony with God’s purpose.

18. What did Jesus offer those who come to him?

¹⁹ How, though, does one ‘come to Jesus’? To his disciples, Jesus said: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and continually follow me.” (Matthew 16:24) Hence, to come to Jesus implies submitting one’s own will to that of God’s and Christ’s, accepting a certain load of responsibility, doing so continually. Is all of this too demanding? Is the price too high? Let us consider what Jesus said after he gave the loving invitation to the tired ones.

19. How does one ‘come to Jesus’?

“MY YOKE IS KINDLY AND MY LOAD IS LIGHT”

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.”—MATTHEW 11:29.

A COOL shower at the end of a hot and humid day, or a good night’s sleep after a long and tiring journey—oh, how refreshing! So it is when a heavy burden is lifted or when sins and transgressions are forgiven. (Proverbs 25:25; Acts 3:19) The refreshment brought about by such exhilarating experiences rejuvenates us, and we are energized to move ahead.

² All who feel loaded down and tired can come to Jesus, for he promised them just

1, 2. (a) What have you experienced in life that brings you refreshment? (b) What must one do to receive the refreshment that Jesus promised?

that—refreshment. However, to find the refreshment that is so desirable, there is something that one must be willing to do. “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,” said Jesus, “and you will find refreshment for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29) What is this yoke? How does it bring refreshment?

A Kindly Yoke

³ Living in an agricultural society, Jesus and his hearers were well acquainted

3. (a) What kind of yokes were used in Bible times? (b) What figurative meaning is associated with a yoke?

with the yoke. Basically, a yoke is a long wooden beam with two recessed areas on the underside to fit over the necks of a pair of draft animals, usually oxen, to harness them together to pull a plow, a cart, or some other load. (1 Samuel 6:7) Yokes for humans were also used. These were simple beams or poles carried across the shoulders with a load attached to each end. With them, laborers were able to carry heavy loads. (Jeremiah 27:2; 28:10, 13) From its association with burdens and labor, the yoke is often used figuratively in the Bible to symbolize domination

and control.—Deuteronomy 28:48; 1 Kings 12:4; Acts 15:10.

⁴ What, then, is the yoke that Jesus invited those who come to him for refreshment to take upon themselves? Recall that he said: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” (Matthew 11:29) A learner is a disciple. Hence, to take up Jesus’ yoke simply means to become his disciple. (Philippians 4:3) This, however, requires more than just giving mental recognition to his teachings. It requires actions in harmony with them—doing the work he did and living the way he lived. (1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Peter 2:21) It requires willing submission to his authority and to those to whom he delegates authority. (Ephesians 5:21; Hebrews 13:17) It means becoming a dedicated, baptized Christian, accepting all the privileges and responsibilities that come with such a dedication. That is the yoke that Jesus offers all who

4. What is symbolized by the yoke that Jesus offers those who come to him?



come to him for comfort and refreshment. Are you willing to accept it?—John 8:31, 32.

⁵ To find refreshment by taking up a yoke—is that not a contradiction in terms? Actually it is not, since Jesus said that his yoke is “kindly.” This word has the meaning of mild, pleasant, agreeable. (Matthew 11:30; Luke 5:39; Romans 2:4; 1 Peter 2:3) As a professional carpenter, Jesus most likely had made plows and yokes, and he would know how to shape a yoke to fit so that maximum work could be performed as comfortably as possible. He might line the yokes with cloth or leather. Many are done that way so that they would not chafe, or rub, against the neck excessively. In the same way, the figurative yoke that Jesus offers us is “kindly.” Even though being a disciple of his involves certain obligations and responsibilities, it is not a harsh or oppressive experience but a refreshing one. The commandments of his Heavenly Father, Jehovah, are not burdensome either.—Deuteronomy 30:11; 1 John 5:3.

⁶ There is something else that makes Jesus’ yoke “kindly,” or easy to bear. When he said: “Take my yoke upon you,” he could have meant one of two things. If he had in mind the double yoke, that is, the kind that links two draft animals together to pull the load, then he was inviting us to come under the same yoke with him. What a blessing that would be—to have Jesus by our side pulling our load with us! On the other hand, if Jesus had in mind the yoke bar used by the common laborer, then he was offering us the means by which we can make whatever load we must carry easier or more manageable. Either way, his yoke

5. Why would it not be a harsh experience to take up Jesus’ yoke?
6. What might Jesus have meant when he said: “Take my yoke upon you”?

is a source of real refreshment because he assures us: “For I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart.”

⁷ What, then, should we do if we feel that the load of life’s problems that we are carrying is becoming intolerable and that we are being stressed to the breaking point? Some may incorrectly feel that the yoke of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is too hard or too demanding, even though the cares of daily life are what are weighing on them. Some individuals in that situation stop attending Christian meetings, or they refrain from participating in the ministry, feeling perhaps that they would gain some relief. That, however, is a serious mistake.

⁸ We appreciate that the yoke that Jesus offers is “kindly.” If we did not put it on properly, it could be chafing. In that case we should take a closer look at the yoke upon our shoulders. If, for some reason, the yoke is in disrepair or is not fitted correctly, using it not only will require more effort on our part but will cause some pain as a result. In other words, if theocratic activities begin to seem like a burden to us, we must check to see if we are handling them in the right way. What is our motive for doing what we do? Are we adequately prepared when we go to the meetings? Are we physically and mentally primed when we engage in the field ministry? Do we enjoy a close and healthy relationship with others in the congregation? And, above all, how is our personal relationship with Jehovah God and his Son, Jesus Christ?

⁹ When we wholeheartedly accept the yoke Jesus offers and learn to carry it properly, there is no reason for it ever to seem an unbearable burden. In fact, if we can

- 7, 8. What mistake do some make when they feel stressed?
9. Why should the Christian yoke never be an unbearable burden?

visualize the situation—Jesus under the same yoke with us—it is not hard for us to see who really is carrying the bulk of the burden. It is not unlike a toddler leaning on the handlebar of his stroller, thinking that he is pushing it forward, but in reality, of course, it is the parent who is doing it. As a loving Father, Jehovah God is well aware of our limitations and frailties, and he responds to our needs through Jesus Christ. “God will fully supply all your need to the extent of his riches in glory by means of Christ Jesus,” said Paul.—Philippians 4:19; compare Isaiah 65:24.

¹⁰ Many dedicated Christians have come to appreciate this through personal experience. There is, for example, Jenny, who finds that serving as an auxiliary pioneer every month and working full-time at a high-pressure secular job puts her under a great deal of stress. She feels, though, that the pioneer work actually helps her to keep her balance. Aiding people to learn Bible truth and seeing them change their lives to gain God’s approval—this is what brings her the greatest joy in her busy life. She wholeheartedly agrees with the words of the proverb that says: “The blessing of Jehovah—that is what makes rich, and he adds no pain with it.”—Proverbs 10:22.

A Light Load

¹¹ In addition to promising us a “kindly” yoke, Jesus assures us: “My load is light.” A “kindly” yoke already makes the work easier; if the load is also lightened, the work is truly a pleasure. What, though, did Jesus have in mind by that statement?

¹² Consider what a farmer would do when he wanted to change jobs for his animals,

10. What has been the experience of one who takes discipleship seriously?

11, 12. What did Jesus mean when he said: “My load is light”?

say from plowing a field to drawing a cart. He would first remove the plow and then attach the cart. It would be absurd for him to hitch both the plow and the cart to the animals. Likewise, Jesus was not telling the people to put his load on top of the one they were already carrying. He said to his disciples: “No house servant can be a slave to two masters.” (Luke 16:13) Thus, Jesus was offering the people a choice. Would they rather go on carrying the heavy load they had, or would they put that down and accept what he was offering? Jesus gave them the loving incentive: “My load is light.”

¹³ In Jesus’ day, the people were struggling under a heavy load imposed upon them by the oppressive Roman rulers and the formalistic, hypocritical religious leaders. (Matthew 23:23) In an attempt to cast off the Roman load, some people tried to take matters into their own hands. They became involved in political struggles, only to come to a disastrous end. (Acts 5:36, 37) Others were bent on improving their lot by becoming deeply involved in materialistic endeavors. (Matthew 19:21, 22; Luke 14:18-20) When Jesus offered them the way to relief by inviting them to become his disciples, not all were ready to accept. They were hesitant about putting down the load they were carrying, heavy as it was, and taking up his. (Luke 9:59-62) What a tragic mistake!

¹⁴ If we are not careful, we can make the same mistake today. Becoming Jesus’ disciples frees us from striving after the same goals and values as the people of the world do. Though we still have to work hard to obtain the daily necessities, we do not make these things the center of our life. Yet, the

13. What load were the people in Jesus’ day carrying, and with what result?

14. How can anxieties of life and material desires load us down?



anxieties of life and the lure of material comforts can have a powerful grip on us. If we allow it, such desires can even choke out the truth that we have eagerly accepted. (Matthew 13:22) We can become so preoccupied with fulfilling such desires that our Christian responsibilities become tiresome obligations that we just want to get done and get out of the way quickly. We certainly could not expect any refreshment to come from our service to God if it is done in that spirit.

¹⁵ Jesus pointed out that a life of contentment comes, not by striving to fulfill all our wants, but by making sure of the more important things in life. "Stop being anxious about your souls as to what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your bodies as to what you will wear," he admonished. "Does not the soul mean more than food and the body than clothing?" Then he called attention to the birds of heaven and said: "They do not sow seed or reap or gather into storehouses; still your heavenly Father feeds them." Referring to the lilies of

15. What warning did Jesus give regarding material desires?

the field, he said: "They do not toil, nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these."—Matthew 6:25-29.

¹⁶ Can we learn something from these simple object lessons? It is a common experience that the harder a person strives to improve his lot in life materially, the more entangled he becomes in worldly pursuits and the heavier the burden on his shoulders becomes. The world is full of entrepreneurs who have paid for their material successes with broken families, wrecked marriages, ruined health, and more. (Luke 9:25; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10) Nobel laureate Albert Einstein once said: "Possessions, outward success, publicity, luxury—to me these have always been contemptible. I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone." This merely echoes the apostle Paul's simple advice: "It is a means of great gain, this godly devotion along with self-sufficiency."—1 Timothy 6:6.

¹⁷ There is an important element that we

16. What has experience shown as to the effects of material pursuits?

17. What manner of life does the Bible recommend?

should not overlook. Though "a simple and unassuming manner of life" has numerous advantages, it is not in itself what brings contentment. There are many whose manner of life is simple by force of circumstances, yet they are by no means content or happy. The Bible is not urging us to renounce material enjoyment and to live the life of a hermit. The emphasis is on godly devotion, not self-sufficiency. It is only when we couple the two that we have the "means of great gain." What gain? Further along in that same letter, Paul points out that those who "rest their hope, not on uncertain riches, but on God" will be "safely treasuring up for themselves a fine foundation for the future, in order that they may get a firm hold on the real life."—1 Timothy 6:17-19.

¹⁸ Refreshment will come to us if we learn to put down our personal heavy load that we may be carrying and to take up the light load that Jesus offers. Many who have reorganized their lives so that they can share more fully in the Kingdom service have found the way to a life of happiness and contentment. Of course, it takes faith

18. (a) How may one find true refreshment? (b) How should we view the changes that we may have to make?

Can You Explain?

- What is the kindly yoke that Jesus offered?
- What should we do if we feel that our yoke is becoming a burden?
- What did Jesus mean when he said: "My load is light"?
- How can we make sure that our load remains light?

and courage for one to make such a move, and there may be obstacles in the way. But the Bible reminds us: "He that is watching the wind will not sow seed; and he that is looking at the clouds will not reap." (Ecclesiastes 11:4) Many things are really not that difficult once we have made up our minds to do them. The hardest part, it seems, is making up our minds. We may wear ourselves out by struggling with or resisting the idea. If we brace up our minds and accept the challenge, we might be surprised to find what a blessing it turns out to be. The psalmist urged: "Taste and see that Jehovah is good, O you people."—Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 1:13.

"Refreshment for Your Souls"

¹⁹ The apostle Paul reminded the first-century disciples: "We must enter into the kingdom of God through many tribulations." (Acts 14:22) That still holds true today. As world conditions continue to deteriorate, the pressures coming upon all who are determined to live a life of righteousness and godly devotion will become even greater. (2 Timothy 3:12; Revelation 13:16, 17) Yet, we feel the way Paul did when he said: "We are pressed in every way, but not cramped beyond movement; we are perplexed, but not absolutely with no way out; we are persecuted, but not left in the lurch; we are thrown down, but not destroyed." The reason is that we can count on Jesus Christ to give us the strength beyond what is normal. (2 Corinthians 4:7-9) By accepting the yoke of discipleship wholeheartedly, we will enjoy the fulfillment of Jesus' promise: "You will find refreshment for your souls."—Matthew 11:29.

19. (a) What can we expect as world conditions continue to deteriorate? (b) While under Jesus' yoke, of what are we assured?

Faithful Households Speed Up the Increase in Sri Lanka

KNOWN as Ceylon until 1972, Sri Lanka is a lovely island with palm-fringed beaches, mountain ranges, and small deserts. In the uplands, Adam's Peak, at 7,360 feet, is a site sacred to four major religions.* Nearby is World's End, an escarpment where the rocky cliff drops precipitously over 5,000 feet. The site offers one of Sri Lanka's most spectacular views.

Sri Lanka's 18 million inhabitants share an interesting background. Since the fifth century B.C.E., people of Indo-European stock from northern India have populated the island. They are the Sinhalese, now making up about three quarters of the population. Then, through about the 12th century, came a wave of Tamils from southern India; these now live mainly in the north and east of the island. The Portuguese, Dutch, and British too have left their mark from the colonial days. Additionally, seafaring merchants from the Arabian and Malayan peninsulas have settled in among the local people. There also are pockets of Europeans, Parsis, Chinese, and others.

Besides the racial mix, language and religion in Sri Lanka reflect its diverse background. The principal languages in



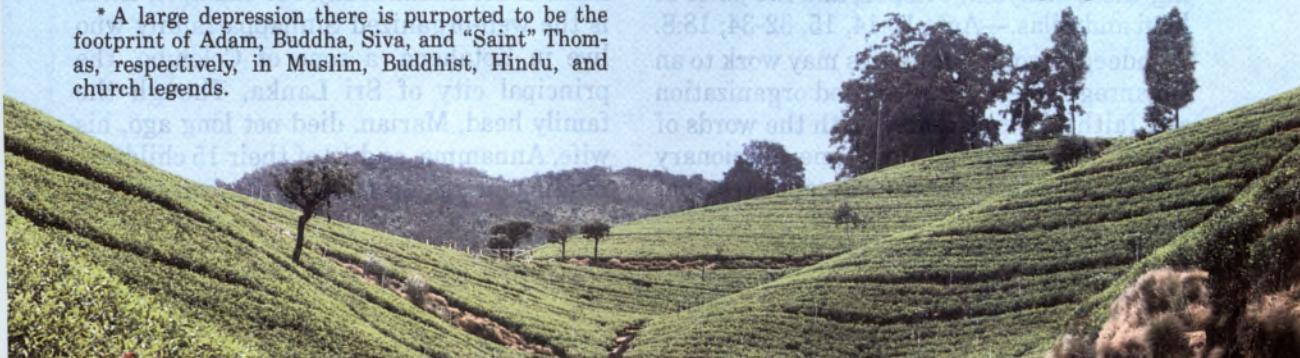
the island are Sinhalese, Tamil, and English. Many Sri Lankans speak at least two of the three. Ethnic backgrounds also play a large role in the people's religion. Most Sinhalese are Buddhists, whereas most Tamils are Hindus. Those with Arabic or Malayan ties usually adhere to Islam, and those with European background are generally members of Christendom's churches, Catholic and Protestant.

Meeting the Challenge

All of this presents a tremendous challenge to Jehovah's Witnesses in Sri Lanka. These work hard to carry out Jesus' commission: "This good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations." (Matthew 24:14) Besides having to deal with several languages, publishers of the good news may talk to Buddhists, Hindus, members of Christendom's churches, as well as atheists—all in a few hours of preaching.

To be effective in their ministry, the publishers must carry with them the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines and other Bible literature in Tamil, Sinhalese, and English. Those strong enough to manage it even carry Bibles in those languages. The

* A large depression there is purported to be the footprint of Adam, Buddha, Siva, and "Saint" Thomas, respectively, in Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and church legends.



publishers were recently overjoyed when the brochures *Does God Really Care About Us?* and *Our Problems—Who Will Help Us Solve Them?* and the tract *Will This World Survive?* were released in the three languages simultaneously. This meant more tools for the work.

The Witnesses have been working hard since 1912, when Charles Taze Russell, then president of the International Bible Students Association, paid a brief visit to Ceylon. Significant growth, however, had to await the arrival of graduates of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead in 1947. Since then, the publishers in Sri Lanka have enjoyed fine results from their preaching work. In 1994 the 1,866 Kingdom publishers conducted, on the average, 2,551 home Bible studies each month. And the Memorial attendance of 6,930 was almost four times the number of publishers in all the congregations. What a marvelous blessing!

In comparison with some other lands, the progress in Sri Lanka may seem to be slow. One factor appears to be the strong family ties. However, things can go the other way as well. When the Roman army officer Cornelius took his stand for the truth, his household stood alongside him. (Acts 10:1, 2, 24, 44) The book of Acts also mentions other strong Christian households, including those of Lydia, Crispus, and the jailer of Paul and Silas.—Acts 16:14, 15, 32-34; 18:8.

Indeed, strong family ties may work to an advantage where there is good organization and faithful persistence. With the words of Isaiah 60:22 in mind, longtime missionary Ray Matthews observes: "It appears that



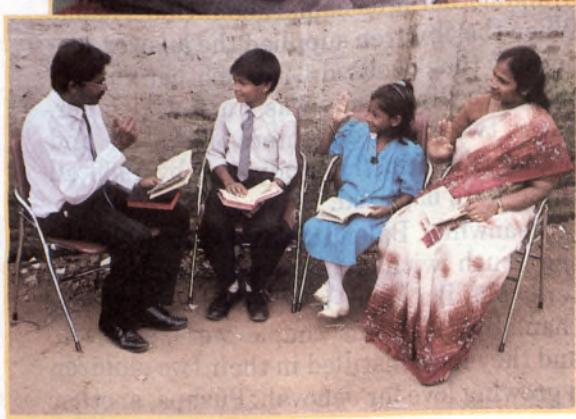
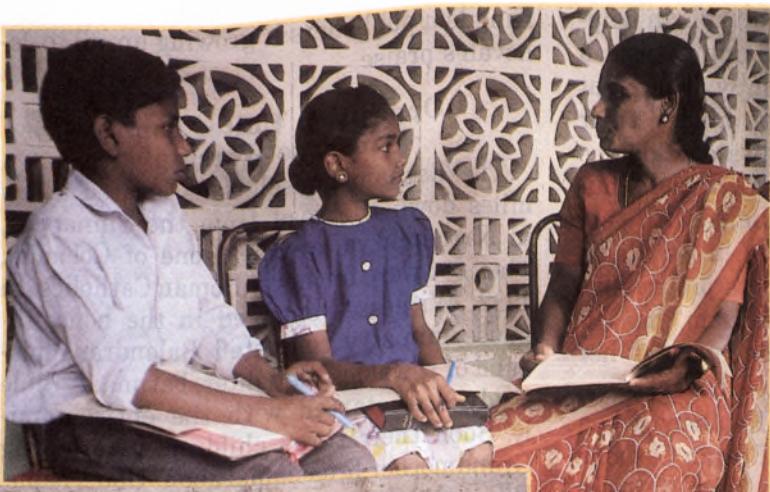
Many in Sri Lanka are responding to Christian preaching and teaching



Jehovah is now speeding things up at the proper time, not just by individuals but also by households."

Organized Family Brings Praise

There certainly are such faithful households in Sri Lanka today. For example, there is the well-organized Sinnappa family who live in Kotahena, a zone of Colombo, the principal city of Sri Lanka. Though the family head, Marian, died not long ago, his wife, Annamma, and 12 of their 15 children, ranging in age from 13 to 33, continue to



serve Jehovah as a household. At the time of writing, eight of the children were baptized, and three of them were in the full-time ministry, serving as regular pioneers. Three others had enrolled in the auxiliary pioneer service from time to time. Among the younger ones of the household were four unbaptized publishers. In addition, four grandchildren, though still of tender years, were studying the Bible and attending Christian meetings at the Colombo North Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

It was in 1978 that Annamma first heard the Kingdom good news when she accepted a copy of *The Watchtower*. A Bible study was started, and after completing the Bi-

ble study aid *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*, Annamma dedicated her life to Jehovah God and was baptized, thus setting the initial example for many of her household.

Like the military man Cornelius, Annamma has good organization in her household. "We had to plan for Christian meetings and assemblies—to say nothing of school," Annamma recalls. "Clothing was a challenge, but with Jehovah's blessing we

were able to make some new clothes for each assembly. All the family arrived well clothed and well fed—and wearing a large smile too."

The children remember their household organization with affection. To help the whole family to attend Christian meetings, the older ones generally were given special responsibilities. For example, Mangala did the washing, and Winnifreda the ironing. Winnifreda, who also helped the younger ones to dress, says: "Everyone looked really nice as they left home."

Spiritual provisions were equally well organized. Daughter Pushpam, now a regular pioneer, remembers: "Each day, our family enjoyed reading the Bible and reviewing the daily Bible text together." Annamma adds: "Every child has a personal copy of the Bible, *The Watchtower*, and other publications. I listen carefully to all their comments at the meetings. Where it seems necessary, I follow up at home with encouragement and correction. At night we unite to conclude the day with our family prayer."

The older children are invaluable in helping Annamma to provide a fine Christian education for all in the family. The tight schedule, however, does not hinder their desire to share the good news outside the home. In all, various members of the family conduct 57 home Bible studies with people in the neighborhood. Son-in-law Rajan remarks: "The family conducts progressive Bible studies. My wife, Pushpam, has already had the privilege of seeing one of her students dedicate her life to Jehovah."

It caused quite a stir in Kotahena when such a large family left the Roman Catholic Church. Though the priest himself never visited the family to find out why, he did ask lay members of the church to investigate. Several discussions ensued, mostly about the Trinity doctrine. Annamma always relied on Jehovah and the Bible to defend her faith. Her favorite scripture in these discussions was John 17:3.

The Sinnappa household clearly demonstrates that good organization and consistent effort can bring satisfying results. By their zealous efforts, a new generation of

Kingdom publishers is growing up, all to Jehovah's praise.

Opposition Unites Family in True Worship

The Ratnam household is located a few miles down the road from the Sinnappas, in Narhenpitya, another zone of Colombo. They too were formerly Roman Catholics. In 1982, Witnesses engaged in the house-to-house ministry contacted Balendran, husband of the eldest daughter, Fatima. A Bible study was started with the entire family. Soon their three children were asking Grandmother Ignasiamal about God's name. When the children supplied the answer "Jehovah," they aroused Grandmother's interest, and a Bible study was started with her. Later, two of her daughters, Jeevakala and Stella, joined in the study, and by 1988 all three were baptized.

Meanwhile, Balendran and Fatima shared the truth with another of Fatima's sisters, Mallika, and her husband, Yogathan. By 1987 this couple were baptized, and they have instilled in their two children a growing love for Jehovah. Pushpa, another

of Fatima's sisters, came next. She made her dedication and was baptized in 1990. While in Tokyo, her husband, Eka, served with an English congregation, and Pushpa helped their young son, Alfred, to be brought up in Jehovah's way.

Thus far, four of the ten children of the Ratnam family have taken their stand for true worship. Happily, three more are making good progress in their personal Bible stud-



ies. Among the 11 grandchildren, one girl, Pradeepa, is already baptized. Seven other younger ones are regularly being instructed through their family Bible studies. In addition, a total of 24 home Bible studies are being conducted with interested people in the neighborhood.

All of this did not come about easily. Initially, there was family opposition. The father, Muthupillai, and the older brothers were very opposed to any of their family attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall or engaging in the public preaching work. While some of this had to do with concern for personal safety, Muthupillai adds: "I was totally committed to the 'saints' and did not approve of my family leaving the Catholic Church." Now, however, he believes that they are worshiping the true God because he can see the benefits that their faith has brought them.

For instance, once their Buddhist landlord attempted to evict them from his property by using charms on them. He came one night and placed "charmed" lime fruits around the house. Fear came over the superstitious neighbors, all of whom were expecting some unhappy event to strike the Ratnam household. When Ignasiamal discovered this, however, she and the children simply removed the fruits without any fear or trepidation—and nothing evil happened to them. Their fearless action became quite a witness in the area, causing people to have great respect for them. Stella was able to start two home Bible studies in the adjoin-



ing lanes. Encouraged by this, daughter-in-law Na-zeera also accepted a Bi-ble study.

Looking back over the many blessings that have come upon her family, Ignasiamal observes: "I am very happy to see the spiritual growth within the family. We have been blessed by Jehovah because opposition has softened, and our family unity has increased."

What a blessing these large households have proved to be. They have added their voices to those of the smaller families, the one-parent families, and the single Christians who are striving hard to speed up the proclamation of the Kingdom good news in "the resplendent land," as the name Sri Lanka means. Together with their fellow Christians worldwide, the Sri Lankan Witnesses look forward to the restoration of Paradise, which we may call to mind even now as we see the beaches and mountains of lovely Sri Lanka.

In Our Next Issue

The Narrow Road to Freedom

Can You
Cultivate More Discernment?

The Cathari
—Were They Christian Martyrs?

RESIST UNGODLY TRADITIONS!

THE truth will set you free," said Jesus Christ. (John 8:32) Yes, Christianity sets people free—free from enslavement to superstitions, free from belief in false doctrines and hopes, free from bondage to degrading practices.

As in ancient times, however, Christians today often face pressures to return to former traditions. (Galatians 4:9, 10) Not that all popular customs are harmful. Indeed, a Christian may choose to follow local customs that are wholesome and beneficial. But when customs run counter to God's Word, Christians do not compromise. Jehovah's Witnesses are thus well-known for refusing to take part in Christmas celebrations, birthdays, and other customs that conflict with God's Word.

This courageous stand has often resulted in much ridicule and opposition from acquaintances, neighbors, and unbelieving relatives. Particularly has this been the case in some African lands, where a vast array of traditions are commonly observed at funerals, weddings, and births. The pressures to conform can be formidable—often including threats and acts of violence. How can Christians there stand firm? Is it possible to avoid confrontation without compromising? In answer, let us examine how faithful Christians have dealt with some unscriptural traditions.

Superstitious Funeral Customs

In southern Africa there are numerous traditions related to funerals and burials. Grieving ones commonly spend the entire night—or several nights—at the house of mourning, where a fire is constantly kept

burning. The bereaved are forbidden to cook, get a haircut, or even take a bath until the burial has taken place. Afterward, they are to wash themselves in a special mixture of herbs. Are such customs acceptable to Christians? No. They all reflect a belief in the immortality of the soul and a morbid fear of the dead.

Says Ecclesiastes 9:5: "The living are conscious that they will die; but as for the dead, they are conscious of nothing at all." Knowing this truth frees one from having a fear of the 'spirits of the dead.' But what should a Christian do when well-meaning relatives demand that he or she participate in such rituals?

Consider the experience of an African Witness named Jane, whose father died. Upon arriving at the funeral house, she was immediately told that she and the rest of the family were to dance around the corpse all night long so as to appease the spirit of the deceased. "I told them that as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, I could not engage in such practices," relates Jane. "However, the following day after the burial, elderly relatives said that they were going to bathe the bereaved family members as further protection against the spirit of the deceased. Again I refused to participate. At the same time, Mother was kept secluded in a house. Anyone who wanted to see her had first to drink of an alcoholic beverage prepared for that purpose.

"I refused to get involved in any of this. Instead I went home to prepare some food, which I took to the house where Mother was staying. This really disappointed my family. My relatives thought I was not normal."

More than that, they mocked her and called down evil on her, saying: "Since you have rejected our tradition because of your religion, you will be troubled by the spirit of your father. In fact, you might not even bear children." Still, Jane refused to be intimidated. The outcome? She says: "At the time I had two children. Now I have six! This has put to shame those who charged that I would never bear children again."

Sexual "Cleansing"

Another custom involves ceremonial cleansing after the death of one's spouse. If a wife dies, her family will bring to the widower a sister-in-law or another woman closely related to his deceased wife. He is obliged to have sexual intercourse with her. Only then can he marry whomever he wishes. The same takes place when a woman's husband dies. The practice is thought to purify the surviving spouse of the "spirit" of the dead mate.

Anyone refusing to undergo such "cleansing" risks incurring the wrath of the relatives. He or she may be isolated and subjected to mockery and pronouncements of doom. Nevertheless, Christians refuse to follow this custom. They know that far from being a sort of "cleansing," sex outside of marriage is defiling in the eyes of God. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20) Furthermore, Christians are to marry "only in the Lord." —1 Corinthians 7:39.

Many believe that a person who has just died can act as an intermediary and deliver messages to long dead relatives

A Zambian Christian woman named Violet lost her husband. Afterward, relatives brought a man to her, insisting that she have sex relations with him. Violet refused, and as punishment she was barred from drawing water at the public well. She was also warned not to walk on the main road, lest harm befall her. However, she refused to be cowed either by relatives or by fellow villagers.

Later Violet was summoned to a local court. There she unwaveringly explained her Scriptural reasons for refusing to engage in illicit sex. The court ruled in her favor, saying that it could not force her to adhere to local customs and traditions that went contrary to her beliefs. Interestingly, her staunch refusal to compromise served to reduce the pressure on other Witnesses in the village who later faced the same issue.

An African Witness named Monika withstood similar pressure after her husband died. The man's family insisted on giving her another husband. Says Monika: "I refused, determined to obey the command at 1 Corinthians 7:39." The pressure did not



let up though. "They threatened me," Monika recalls. "They said: 'If you refuse, you will never get married again.' They even claimed that some of my fellow Christians had secretly been ceremonially cleansed in this way." Nevertheless, Monika stood firm. "I stayed single for two years, after which I remarried in a Christian way," she says. Monika now serves as a regular pioneer.

Miscarriages and Stillbirths

Christians in southern Africa must also deal with customs surrounding miscarriages and stillbirths. Such tragic occurrences are the result of human imperfection—not of divine punishment. (Romans 3:23) But if a woman miscarries, some African traditions demand that she be treated as an outcast for a period of time.

One woman who had recently miscarried was thus surprised to see a Witness walking toward her house. As he got near, she called out to him: "Do not come here! According to our custom, a woman who has just had a miscarriage is not supposed to be visited." However, the Witness told her that Jehovah's Witnesses take the Bible message to people of all sorts and that they do not observe the local customs regarding miscarriages. Then he read to her Isaiah 65:20, 23, explaining that under God's Kingdom miscarriages and stillbirths will not occur. As a result, the woman accepted a home Bible study.

Superstitious customs may also accompany the burial of stillborn babies. When a Witness named Joseph attended such a burial, he was told that all present had to wash their hands in some herbs and rub the medicine onto their chests. This was said to prevent the "spirit" of the infant from coming back and causing them harm. Joseph respectfully declined, knowing the Bible's teaching that the dead cannot harm the

living. Still, some tried to pressure him into applying the medicine. Joseph again declined. On seeing this Christian's fearless stand, others in attendance likewise refused the herbs.

Avoid Confrontations, but Stand Firm

Fear of the living and a dread of being made an outcast can be powerful forces for compromise. Proverbs 29:25 says: "Trembling at men is what lays a snare." The preceding experiences demonstrate the truthfulness of the latter part of that verse: "But he that is trusting in Jehovah will be protected."

Nevertheless, confrontation can often be avoided. For example, if a Christian is invited to a relative's funeral, he should not wait until he finds himself in a potentially compromising situation. "The shrewd one that has seen the calamity has concealed himself; the inexperienced that have passed along have suffered the penalty."—Proverbs 27:12.

It would be wise to ask tactfully just what customs will be followed. If these are objectionable, the Christian could use this opportunity to explain just why he cannot participate, doing so "with a mild temper and deep respect." (1 Peter 3:15) When a Christian respectfully explains his Bible-based stand *in advance*, his relatives are usually more inclined to respect his beliefs and less inclined to use threats and intimidation.

Whatever the response of relatives, a Christian simply cannot compromise by following God-dishonoring traditions—no matter what threats or abuse may be heaped upon him. We have been liberated from superstitious fear. The apostle Paul urged: "For such freedom Christ set us free. Therefore stand fast, and do not let yourselves be confined again in a yoke of slavery."—Galatians 5:1.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Have you enjoyed reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*? If so, you will find it interesting to recall the following:

□ **Is religious truth attainable?** Jesus Christ said: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) Jesus not only pointed out that the truth is attainable but showed that finding it is required in our worship of God. He told a Samaritan woman: "True worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth." (John 4:23)—4/15, page 5.

□ **Who was Robert Estienne, and how did he leave his mark?** Robert Estienne was a printer who lived in the 16th century. He devoted his life to the publication of the Holy Scriptures and strove to uncover the words of the Bible as originally written. His system for dividing the Bible's text into numbered verses is the system universally used today.—4/15, pages 10, 14.

□ **How do we benefit from daily Bible reading?** The Scriptures constantly take on fresh meaning for us, and prophecies regarding the last days become more impressive in the light of what we have seen, heard, and personally experienced. As our own experience in life is broadened and we cope with problems, we appreciate more fully the Bible's counsel. (Proverbs 4:18)—5/1, page 15.

□ **How can Bible texts be remembered?** As you read the Bible, mark selected texts that you want to remember, or copy them on cards and put these cards where you will see them daily. As you try to memorize the verses, meditate on them and make use of them. Do not try to memorize too many at once, perhaps only one or two each week.—5/1, pages 16, 17.

□ **What information does the Gospel of Luke contain that is in addition to what the other Gospel writers provided?** While much recorded by Luke is similar to that in Matthew's account, 59 percent is different. Luke recorded six miracles unique to his book, and he reported more than twice that number of Jesus' illustrations not mentioned by other Gospel writers.—5/15, page 12.

□ **What outstanding flash of the light of truth was revealed in 1935?** That year Jehovah's people came to understand that the great crowd mentioned at Revelation 7:9, 14 referred, not to a secondary heavenly class, but to those whose hopes are earthly. (John 10:16)—5/15, page 20.

□ **In what practical ways can we comfort the bereaved?** Listen. Provide reassurance. Be available. Take the initiative when appropriate. Write a comforting letter

or card. Pray with them. (James 5:16) Continue to help them.—6/1, pages 13, 14.

□ **What can spiritual brothers and sisters do to help those living in religiously divided families to endure?** Regularly speak encouraging, positive, and comforting words to them. (1 Thessalonians 5:14) This acts like a refreshment to their mind and body. When practical and appropriate, include them in your theocratic and social activities. Include them in your prayers. (Romans 1:9; Ephesians 1:16)—6/1, page 29.

□ **What rewards come from exercising patience while engaging in the field ministry?** Patience helps the Kingdom publisher to endure any indifference or opposition. Instead of arguing with angry householders, patient ministers will be able to give a mild answer or quietly leave, thus retaining peace and joy. (Matthew 10:12, 13) Furthermore, sheeplike ones will be drawn to the Kingdom message.—6/15, page 9.

□ **Why is knowing Bible truth so valuable?** Knowing the truth sets us free from lies, delusions, and superstitions. When we live by it, the truth strengthens us to endure hardships and inspires us with hope that enables us to stand up under test.—7/1, page 8.

□ **What primary responsibility did the anointed Christian congregation take over from natural Israel?** The privilege of witnessing to Jehovah's greatness among the nations. (Isaiah 43:21; 1 Peter 2:9)—7/1, page 19.

□ **What is implied by the apostle Peter's words that a husband should 'assign honor' to his wife? (1 Peter 3:7)** The husband who honors his wife does not humiliate or downgrade her. Rather, he demonstrates by his words and his deeds—in private and in public—that he esteems her. (Proverbs 31:10-31)—7/15, page 19.

□ **Why can it be said that it is loving to expel an unrepentant wrongdoer from the Christian congregation?** Disfellowshipping is an expression of love for Jehovah and his ways. (Psalm 97:10) It shows love for those pursuing a righteous course because it removes from their midst one who could exercise a bad influence on them; this also protects the purity of the congregation. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)—7/15, page 25.

□ **How can "the faithful and discreet slave," spoken of by Jesus at Matthew 24:45-47, be identified today?** They are particularly identified by the work they do in providing Bible-based publications, in teaching and preaching the "good news of the kingdom," and by their close adherence to God's Word, the Bible. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20)—8/1, page 16.



RELIEF FOR INNOCENT VICTIMS

IT IS one of the most repulsive crimes ever committed by man—ritual sacrifice of children. Some do not believe that such a gross practice could have taken place. But this trademark of Phoenician worship has been confirmed by numerous archaeological discoveries.

Children from noble families were offered up in fire to such gods as Tanit and Baal-Hammon. In Carthage young victims were burned in sacrifice to a bronze statue of Kronos. Diodorus Siculus, a historian of the first century B.C.E., says that the child's relatives were not allowed to cry. Perhaps it was believed that tears of anguish would diminish the value of the sacrifice.

For a time a similar ritual was practiced near Jerusalem in ancient Topheth. Worshipers there would dance and strike tambourines to drown out the child's cries as it was thrown into the furnace-belly of Molech.—Jeremiah 7:31.

Jehovah feels great anger toward those who heartlessly stop up their ears to the pain of others. (Compare Proverbs 21:13.) As the God who shows compassion for children, Jehovah will certainly include such innocent victims in the "resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous."—Acts 24:15; Exodus 22:22-24.