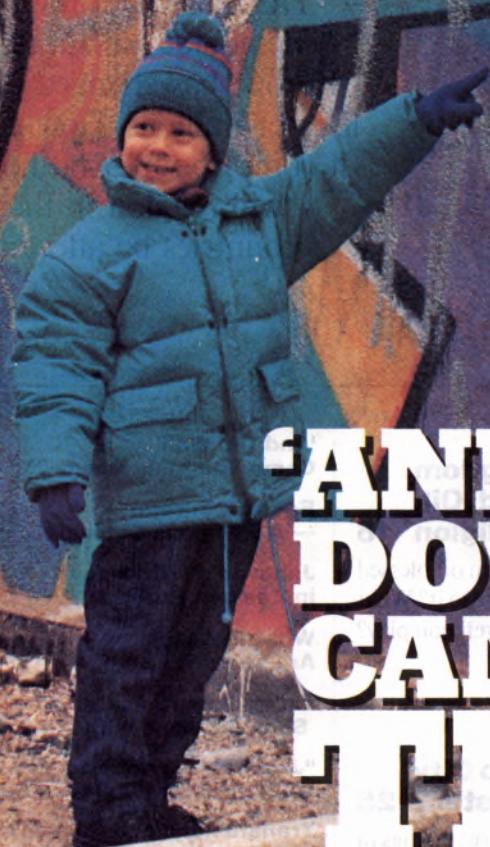
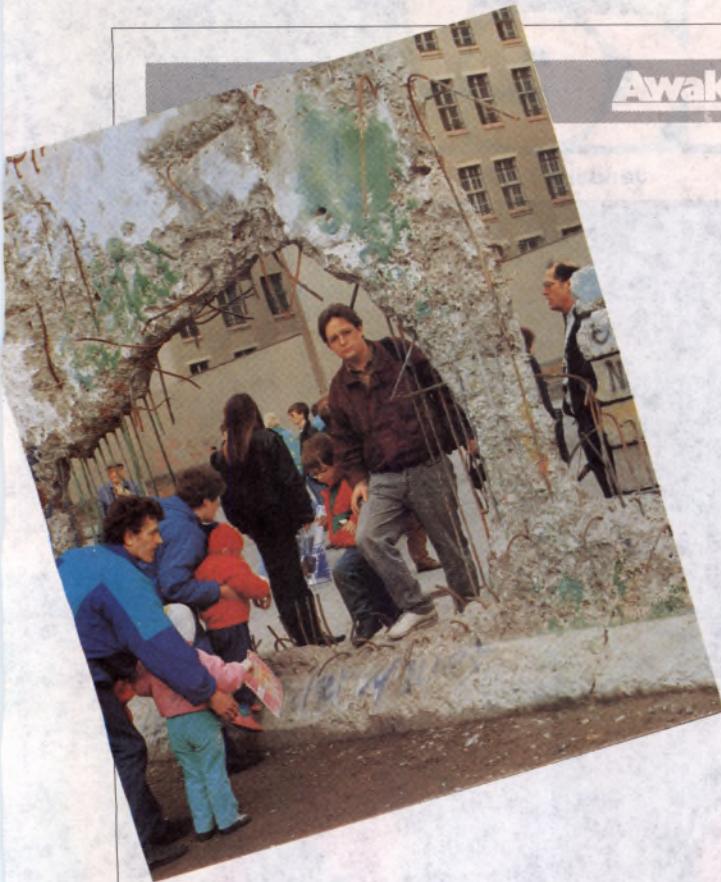


Awake!

January 8, 1991



**'AND
DOWN
CAME
THE
WALL'**



'And Down Came the Wall' 3-15

The movement toward democracy in Eastern Europe has changed the lives of millions. How did it come about? And how will religion in those countries be affected?



A Kingdom Built on Sand, Oil, and Religion 16

Saudi Arabia—is it just an oil-blessed kingdom, or is there more to it? What role does religion play?



Mexico City —A Growing Monster? 25

Mexico City is one of the largest cities in the world. Pollution is a major problem. What solutions have the Mexican authorities applied?

'And the Wall Came Tumbling Down'	3
Eastern Europe —A Religious Revival?	6
Jehovah's Witnesses in Eastern Europe	8
What Message Are They Hearing?	14
Young People Ask . . . Should I Work While in School?	19
"Jehovah's Witnesses From the USSR—Brighter Days Ahead"	22
Transfusions and Peer Pressure	24
Watching the World	28
From Our Readers	30
Devastating Deluge Down Under	31

Cover photo: Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos

'And the Wall Came Tumbling Down'

WHOMO would have believed it?" "I never thought I would see it in my lifetime!" What provoked these comments? The destruction of the infamous Berlin Wall and all that it represented, starting in November 1989.* East Berliners poured into West Berlin, some to taste the expensive delights of capitalism and others to reunite as families.

That breach in the dike opened up the floodgates. Many felt that Eastern Europe would never be the same again.

Cold War Ended?

Much more significant than the fall of the Berlin Wall has been the collapse of the ideological wall that separated East from West. Suddenly there is virtually no Cold War. As retired U.S. Army colonel David Hackworth wrote in *Newsweek*: "The cold war is over. Even the hard-line kill-a-Commie-for-Mommy haters now admit it's over."

According to the German paper *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, even NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), in a meeting held in London in July 1990, recognized the end of the Cold War. Under the title "Atlantic Alliance Says a Final Goodbye to Cold-War Era," *The German Tribune* quotes the Stuttgart paper as saying: "Af-

* The Berlin Wall, 29 miles long, separating East and West Berlin, was constructed by East Germany in 1961 to impede the exodus of refugees to the West.

ter 41 years of confrontation [with the Soviet bloc nations] the 16 Nato leaders paved the way for a new strategy and bade the cold war era a last farewell. . . . Hostility was to be replaced by partnership. . . . Security and stability . . . were no longer to be ensured mainly by military means but by a policy of balance, dialogue and all-European cooperation." The theater of peace-threatening conflict has now moved from Europe to the Middle East.

Democracy Has Its Price

Democracy, so-called free choice for the people, is the latest political fashion. And nearly everybody is jumping on the bandwagon. But there is a price to be paid. Warmer relations between the East and the West and its capitalistic democracy do not come cheaply. An editorial in *Asiaweek* commented: "The countries of what can no longer quite be called the Soviet bloc are in an economic mess . . . Democracy comes at a price. . . . Democracy has many virtues, but perfect stability is not one of them." Who are paying the price for these changes to a freer, democratic society, as it is called?

Millions in Poland, eastern Germany, and elsewhere are discovering that the move from a centrally controlled economy to a free-market system initially brings with it unemployment and adversity. As industries try to streamline and become more competitive,

redundancies set in. Other sectors of society are also seriously affected—the military and the armaments industry. How so?

As mutual fear and animosity dissipate between East and West, so the need for massive armies diminishes. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers and their families will now have to adapt to civilian life and all its pressures. Defense budgets may be cut. Orders to armament factories may slow down, and the manufacturers may have to diversify. Workers may have to move to other areas and learn new skills.

This incredible and turbulent turnabout in Eastern Europe has created a fundamentally new international situation. How did all of this come about?

Crucial Words, Crucial Changes

Crucial to these changes has been the revised attitude of nonintervention displayed by the Soviet Union. In the past the specter of the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) held reform forces in Eastern Europe in check. But Poland's experience in the 1980's with the challenge of the Solidarity movement and the nation's gradual move to a more democratic regime showed that the previous Soviet policy of military intervention had changed. Poland's experience indicated that cracks in the Communist monolith did exist and that peaceful, gradual change could be achieved, at a price. But what made all of this possible?

According to some political commentators, fundamental to all the changes in Eastern Europe has been the pragmatic policy of the leadership in the Soviet Union under the guidance of the president of the U.S.S.R., Mikhail Gorbachev. In February 1990 he stated: "The Soviet Communist Party initiated perestroika [restructuring of society] and generated its concept and policy. Profound revolutionary changes encompassing all spheres of life and all sections of the population have been launched on this basis in the country.... Rapid changes, unusual in scope and originality, are taking place within the framework of perestroika."

As *Asiaweek* commented: "Today, despite some setbacks, [Gorbachev's] campaigns for *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) have encouraged reformers in Hungary, Poland and throughout the Soviet Bloc." These two crucial Russian words, *glasnost* and *perestroika*, have entered the world's vocabulary since Gorbachev took power in the Soviet Union in 1985. They have represented a new attitude toward government in the Communist world.

Political commentator Philippe Marcovici, writing in the conservative French journal *Le Quotidien de Paris* on the changes in Czechoslovakia, said that such had come about "thanks to Moscow, because one thing is clear: The Soviets did not just let it happen; they made sure that Czechoslovakia, like the other people's democracies, would break out of the

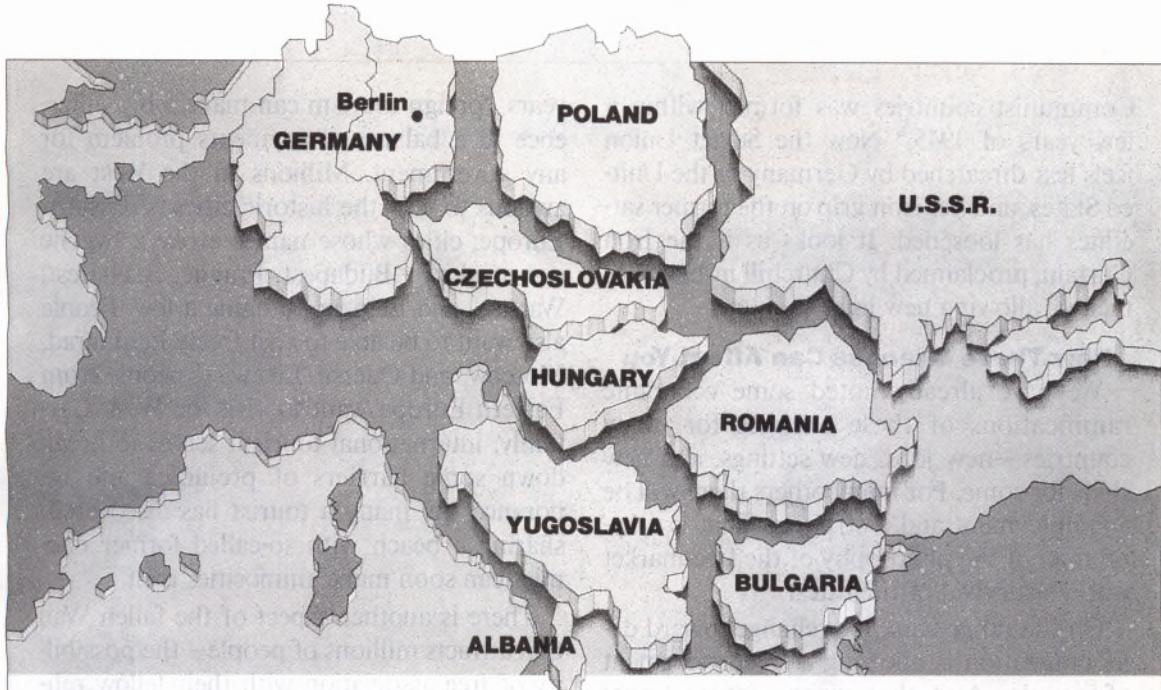
Awake!

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Would you welcome more information? Write Watch Tower at the appropriate address on page 5. This is part of a worldwide Bible educational work that is supported by voluntary donations.

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straitjacket in which it was bound. . . . In both Prague and East Berlin, mass demonstrations prompted change; people taking to the streets forced authorities to capitulate and leave."

The consequence has been that, like a political Mount St. Helens' exploding, democracy and independence burst out all over the Eastern European map in a matter of a few months—Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania.

German Reunification —Blessing or Curse?

That is a question that many in Europe are now weighing. The two Germanys established monetary unity in July 1990 and

achieved political unity in October. While this makes millions rejoice, it also makes many in Europe tremble. That includes some in eastern Germany who might have to give up their homes to former owners in western Germany. In spite of reservations expressed by some British leaders, one British newspaper headline stated: "We'll Just Have to Trust the New-Born Germany."

Having suffered terrible and costly invasions at the hands of Napoléon (1812) and Hitler (1941), the Soviet Union at the end of World War II wanted to guarantee its safety with a buffer zone in Eastern Europe. Thus, the Soviet bloc of eight Eastern European

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Communist countries was formed within a few years of 1945.* Now the Soviet Union feels less threatened by Germany or the United States, and her iron grip on the former satellites has loosened. It looks as if the Iron Curtain, proclaimed by Churchill in 1946, has melted, allowing new light to enter.

How These Changes Can Affect You

We have already noted some economic ramifications of these changes for many countries—new jobs, new settings, and new skills for some. For many others there will be unemployment and a struggle. That is a by-product of the philosophy of the free-market world—survival of the fittest.

On the other hand, the change toward democratization is allowing a freer movement of people. And that means international tourism. As other countries (Spain and Italy, for example) have discovered over the past 30

* The eight countries were Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, East Germany, Albania, and Yugoslavia.

years, foreign tourism can make a big difference to a balance-of-payments problem for any government. Millions in the West are anxious to visit the historic cities of Eastern Europe, cities whose names evoke a bygone age of glory—Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, Warsaw, and Leipzig, to name a few. People also want to be able to visit freely Leningrad, Moscow, and Odessa. Likewise, people from Eastern Europe want to visit the West. Certainly, international tourism serves to break down some barriers of prejudice and ignorance. As many a tourist has discovered, sharing a beach with so-called former enemies can soon make animosities melt.

There is another aspect of the fallen Wall that attracts millions of people—the possibility of free association with their fellow religious believers in other nations. To what extent will this be possible? What changes in the religious field are taking place in Eastern Europe? The following article will consider these and other questions.

Eastern Europe A Religious Revival?

THE suppression of freedom of expression over the last several decades in Eastern European countries has included severe restrictions on religion. Atheism was actively preached, and some cathedrals and churches were turned into museums of atheism, such as the one visited by many tourists in Leningrad. Any functioning clergy became the handmaidens of the current regime. With all places of worship,

such as monasteries, churches, and mosques, officially closed in 1967, Albania was even proclaimed by Radio Tirana the “first atheist state in the world.”

Now, with freedom blooming like spring flowers everywhere in Eastern Europe, what is happening to religion? As French writer Jean-François Kahn wrote: “Religion beset by repression can join hands with a nation beset by oppression. It happened yesterday in Iran.

It is happening today in Soviet Azerbaijan. Tomorrow it could spread across Russia like wildfire." Even now some religions are allying themselves with nationalistic ideals and aspirations and are becoming one of the main vehicles of political protest, sanctifying it by the presence of their Catholic and Orthodox priests and Lutheran pastors.

So how is religious freedom faring in the new democratic atmosphere?

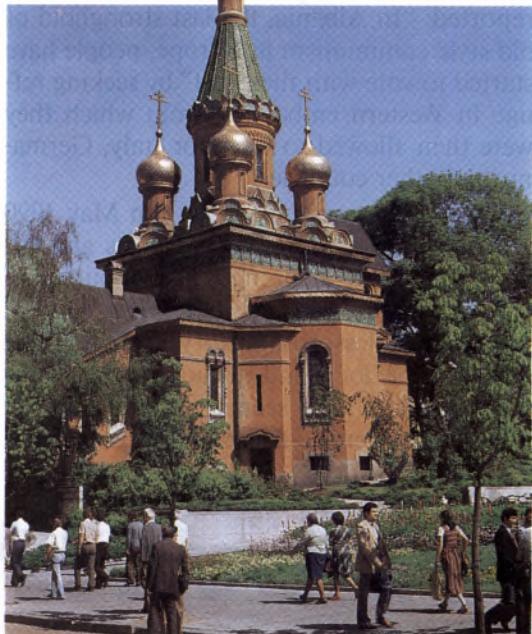
How Things Have Changed!

The major religions of Eastern Europe, especially the Catholic Church, have taken immediate action to get legal recognition from the new governments. For example, *L'Osservatore Romano* reported that "on 9 February [1990], an Accord was signed between the Holy See and the Republic of Hungary." By this accord the two parties agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations. (The Vatican is viewed as a separate sovereign state.)

Another report from the Vatican states that the Catholic Church of the Ukrainian Rite, suppressed in 1946, has requested legalization and has entered into discussions "with the Government and with the Russian Orthodox Church over practical questions regarding Church life in the Ukraine."

In April 1990 the pope visited Czechoslovakia and was greeted at the Prague airport "by dignitaries of Church and State, including . . . Mr. Vaclav Havel, President of the Republic." (*L'Osservatore Romano*) A new religious climate is also developing there.

The Catholic Church has always been a force to be reckoned with in Poland. Now, with its newfound freedom, it is flexing its muscles and campaigning to reintroduce religious classes in the schools. One priest stated: "Schools are the property of the nation. The Polish nation is over 90 percent Catholic. . . . With due respect for other religions, religious instruction in the school will restore the au-



Will the people return to the churches of Eastern Europe?

thority of the teachers, and . . . of the authorities because it deals with the ethical backbone of man."

A report on the Orthodox Church in Romania states: "The Patriarch and a number of bishops who collaborated with the [Ceausescu] regime were forced to resign. A Commission was set up to revitalize the Church. Many former non-believers are turning to religion and filling the local churches . . . The Romanian Byzantine Catholic Church, forced to disband 40 years ago, has been allowed to reorganize."—*Orthodox Unity*, July 1990.

Changes in Albania

According to press reports, surprising changes are slowly taking place in Albania, a small mountainous country of three and a quarter million inhabitants, tucked away on the Adriatic Coast between Yugoslavia and Greece. The German newspaper *Die Welt*

reported: "In Albania, the last stronghold of old-style communism in Europe, people have started to vote with their feet" by seeking refuge in Western embassies, from which they were then allowed to leave for Italy, Germany, and other countries.

The report goes on to say: "In May 1990 Albanians were promised passports and the abolition of laws banning religious pursuits." (Quoted from *The German Tribune*, July 15, 1990) As professor of history Denis R. Janz wrote: "The long and arduous struggle for total secularization seems to have been set aside." However, he adds: "There is evidence

... that religion has in fact been dealt a crushing blow in this society."

In this context Jehovah's Witnesses are maintaining their customary and strict neutrality. On the basis of Bible principles, they do not get involved in political and nationalistic divisions. They trust in God to grant them a peaceful setting in which to fulfill their earth-wide commission of preaching God's Kingdom.—Matthew 22:21; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2; 1 Peter 2:13-15.

So, what about Jehovah's Witnesses in Eastern Europe? Have they prospered under ban? Is there religious freedom for them?

Jehovah's Witnesses in Eastern Europe

WHEN the Berlin Wall fell in November 1989, *Asiaweek* reported that "some 2 million East Germans poured into the western half of their divided country in the two days after East

Berlin opened the frontier." What was their mission?

For the more affluent, it was a buying spree. For others, it was mainly window-shopping and tasting their newfound freedom. Many

Religious Freedom At Last!

The following are comments by Witnesses from former East Germany who attended the "Pure Language" Convention in Berlin, July 1990.

"My name is Lydia. I am eight years old, and I come from the GDR [German Democratic Republic]. I am very happy to be attending this district convention because a year ago, the borders were not open. We had to celebrate the Memorial secretly. This time free! When everyone starts

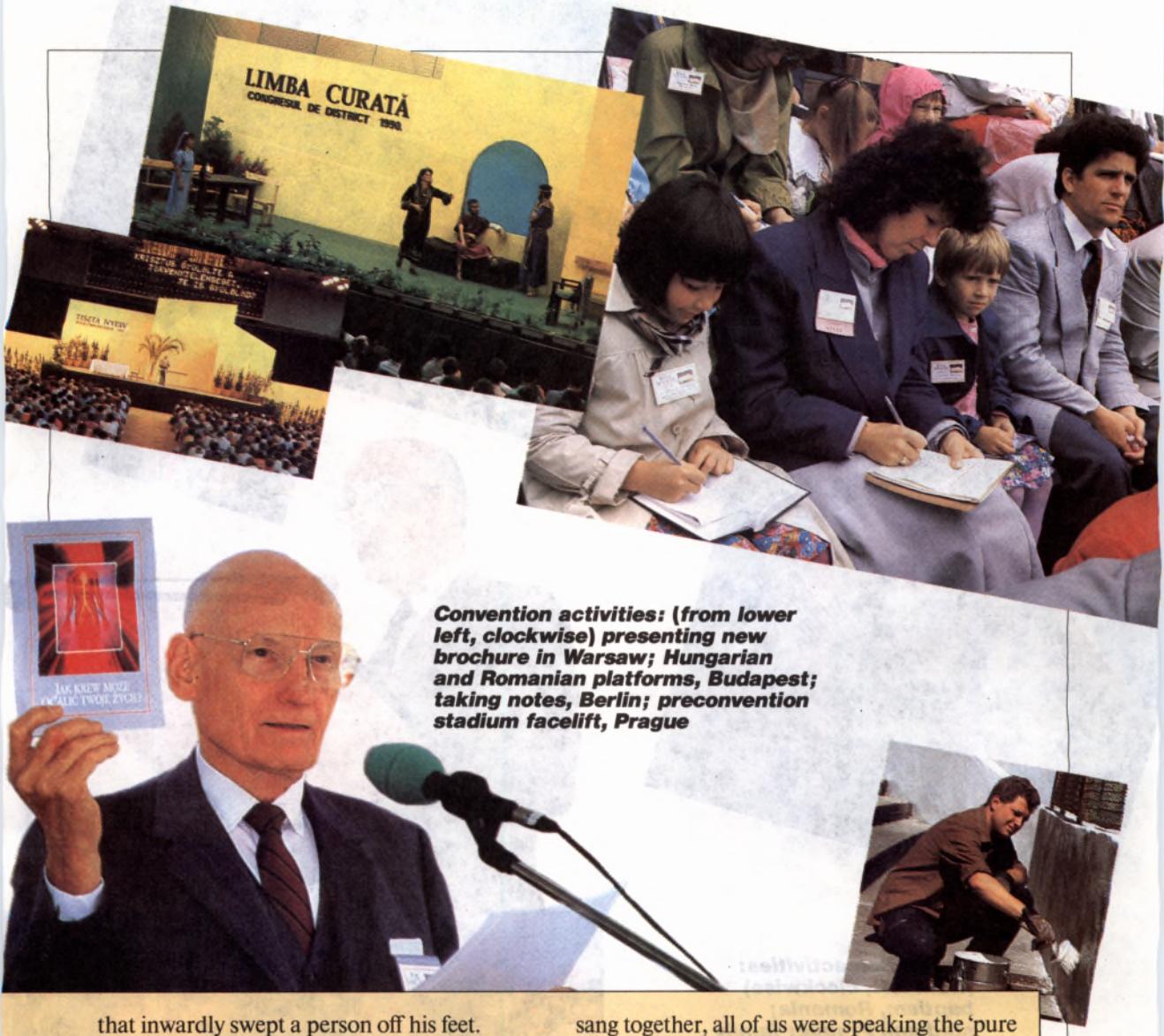
singing, the tears come. I am so excited I will just have to tell about it at school!"

"We are filled with gratefulness and appreciation for being Jehovah's guests here in Berlin amid an international brotherhood."

—Bernd.

"That GDR brothers were also on the program points up a special aspect: Jehovah trains and qualifies his people even when they are under ban."—Gottfried.

"The applause and the singing showed that everyone was happy. It was a roaring sound



Convention activities: (from lower left, clockwise) presenting new brochure in Warsaw; Hungarian and Romanian platforms, Budapest; taking notes, Berlin; preconvention stadium facelift, Prague

that inwardly swept a person off his feet. How Jehovah must have rejoiced!"—Egon.

"After my baptism some of the brothers asked if the water had been very cold. I could only answer that I didn't know. The blessing of Jehovah was so warm that I hardly noticed the temperature of the water."

—Heidrun.

"The atmosphere in the dormitory accommodations was indescribable! From Denmark, Mozambique, England, California, southern Germany, Spain, GDR—all of us

sang together, all of us were speaking the 'pure language.'”—Jutta.

"We always related to our children the memories of the 1958 and 1960 Berlin conventions, the last we were able to attend. But what we now experienced surpassed all our memories and expectations."—Wolfgang.

"What impressed us most was when thousands stood up to sing and praise Jehovah, especially during the closing song and prayer. We could no longer hold back our tears."—Monika and Reinhard.



Convention activities:
(from left, clockwise)
baptism, Romania;
stadium, Prague; family
with "Mankind's Search
for God" book in Berlin;
speaker in Budapest;
examining the Bible
in Poland



found Jehovah's Witnesses on the streets of Berlin and other cities and accepted literature from them. Since then, some have written to the Watch Tower Society's branch office in

Selters, near Frankfurt am Main, expressing some remarkable reactions.

One letter stated: "When I visited West Berlin for the first time in my life, I received a

copy of *The Watchtower* as a gift from Jehovah's Witnesses on the street. Since then, I have started looking into the Bible again, and even though I have many, many problems, once again there is someone who gives me hope and joy in living. I would be very happy if I could read the book *Your Youth—Getting the Best out of It*. I would also like to have contact with Jehovah's Witnesses."

Another visitor wrote: "As I passed through the tunnel to the main station in Nuremberg, a lady gave me copies of *Awake!* and *The Watchtower*. I was thrilled when I read them. For some days I have been using the Bible daily again."

Conventions of Jehovah's Witnesses were held in major cities across Eastern Europe during the summer of 1990. The Olympia Stadium in what was then West Berlin was the site of one convention attended by Witnesses from many nations, including eastern Germany. It is estimated that of the 44,532 in attendance, some 30,000 were from eastern Germany. The newspaper *Berliner Morgenpost* reported that 1,017 new Witnesses were baptized in the Olympic swimming pool, using total immersion in water, the method by which "the participants closely stick to the pattern of the primitive Christians."

How have things changed in eastern Germany? In March 1990 the East German newspapers announced the legalization of Jehovah's Witnesses. Under the title "Jehovah's Witnesses Legal Again," the East German newspaper *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung* stated: "March 14 meant the end of a ban that had lasted for four decades. On this day German representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses were able to leave the building of the G[erman] D[emocratic] R[epublic] State Secretariat for Church Affairs with an official document in their pocket again permitting their commun-

ty of faith the free exercise of religion within the realm of the GDR."

A letter received last spring from a Witness in Leipzig tells the story: "One week ago we were still secretly importing spiritual food in small amounts. Now [March 14, 1990] we have been officially recognized! Soon we will be unloading a truck with four tons of literature!" In fact, the first truck into East Germany was loaded with 25 tons of Bible literature, and within the next two months, 250 tons more were sent. Such was the spiritual hunger of those Witnesses who had been deprived of freedom for over 40 years!

When we recall that both Nazism (1933-45) and Communism tried to stamp out the work of the Witnesses in Germany, their past and present vigorous activities are a fine testimony to their integrity and to God's blessing upon them.

Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union

In December 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev met with Pope John Paul II in the Vatican. The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* reported Gorbachev as saying about this dialogue: "We had a deep and meaningful talk. . . . We spoke about religion and relevant processes underway in Europe, the world, and the Soviet Union." *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official Vatican newspaper, reported that Mr. Gorbachev said in his speech to the pope: "People of many confessions, including Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others, live in the Soviet Union. All of them have a right to satisfy their spiritual needs. Shortly, the Law on the Freedom of Conscience will be adopted in our country."

True to that word, in September 1990 the Soviet legislature approved a law allowing freedom of conscience. Article 3 of the law as drafted states: "In harmony with the right to freedom of conscience, every citizen decides

for himself his relationship to religion, has the right to practice any religion individually or together with others or to practice none, to express and spread convictions relative to his relationship to religion."

There are thousands of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Soviet Union who look forward to the exercise of freedom of religion. (See page 22.) For the 1990 "Pure Language" Conventions, over 17,000 delegates from the Soviet Union attended the Russian sessions in Warsaw in representation of all the Witnesses spread throughout the Soviet Union. They look forward to the day when it will be possible to hold conventions in the Soviet Union.

Progress in Poland

Jehovah's Witnesses were legalized in Poland in May 1989. Since then a branch office has been established, and enlarged facilities are being constructed near Warsaw. Formerly, hundreds of young Witnesses were imprisoned because of the issue of Christian neutrality. Now they are exempt from military service and punishment if they present an appropriate certificate.

The conventions held in Poland in 1989 and 1990 have been another great stimulus to the Witnesses there. A report states that the number of active Witnesses in Poland has risen every month during the last year, with a new peak of over 97,000. No doubt Poland will soon be the 12th nation with over 100,000

Witnesses.* The attendance at the Memorial of Christ's death in April was 188,861 persons.

Religious Freedom in Romania

Witnesses in Romania were thrilled to hear that their association was legally recognized in April 1990. (See box, page 13.) Soon circuit assemblies were organized throughout the nation, and in one series over 44,000 were present, yet there were only about 19,000 Witnesses in the country at that time. Certainly many Romanians are responding to the Kingdom message.

District conventions with the worldwide theme for 1990 of "Pure Language" were held in the cities of Brasov and Cluj-Napoca. The program was presented in Romanian and Hungarian. Over 36,000 were present, and 1,445 were baptized.

With the January 1, 1991, issue, *The Watchtower* in Romanian began to be published simultaneously with the English and in full color.

In nearby Bulgaria, where the Eastern Orthodox religion predominates, the Witnesses do not yet have legal recognition but are renting rooms for their congregation meetings. Over two hundred traveled down to Salonika, Greece, for the "Pure Language" Convention held in Bulgarian and Greek.

Good News From Hungary

June 27, 1989, was a historic day for the Witnesses in Hungary. The newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* announced: "The State Office for Church Affairs declared the religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Hungary, according to the law pursuant to freedom of religion, as a legally recognized religious confession." The news was announced over the radio and on TV. Hungarians learned that

In Our Next Issue

"I Want It NOW!"—The Age of Instant Gratification

"Our Mission Was Suicide"

Twentieth-Century Fax

* The other 11 are Brazil, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria, Philippines, and the United States.

"An Injustice Was Corrected"

Under that title a news item was reported in the Romanian journal *Tineretul liber* (Free Youth) of August 11, 1990. It stated: "Yes, an injustice was corrected. The much reviled religious organization 'Jehovah's Witnesses,' who have kept their integrity as followers of Christ for more than 40 years, have been legalized, obtaining the charter of a legal entity. This organization carries on its activity under the oversight and authorization of the Governing Body, as a worldwide organization, which is active in 210 countries and island territories." The item concluded by announcing the August conventions in Brasov and Cluj-Napoca.

Jehova Tanúi (Jehovah's Witnesses) at last had legal recognition of their work.

To cover the major regions of the country, "Pure Language" Conventions were held in Pecs, Miskolc, Debrecen, and Budapest. Some 2,000 who spoke Hungarian came from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. To underline the international unity of Jehovah's Witnesses, a group of 700 visiting delegates attended from Finland. The total attendance in Hungary was 21,568, including upwards of 2,000 Romanian delegates.

Since January 1990, the Witnesses in Hungary have been receiving their full-color magazines regularly, translated simultaneously with the English language originals.

On the Move in Czechoslovakia

In this beautiful country of rugged mountains and fertile plains, Jehovah's Witnesses are busy helping their neighbors learn more about the Bible. A report on their activity states: "The work is being carried on openly, and large meetings are being held."

After the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe beginning in late 1989, the Witnesses in Czechoslovakia reacted very swiftly and orga-

nized a series of circuit assemblies during the months of April through June 1990. As a result, for the first time, there were positive press reports about the Witnesses. Presently, there are over 21,000 Witnesses in Czechoslovakia, and in 1990 there were 40,295 in attendance at the Memorial of Christ's death. Over half of the congregations have already rented places where they can hold meetings, and 12 congregations even have their own Kingdom Halls.

A convention was held in Prague in August 1990, with an attendance of 23,876, and 1,824 were baptized. To make the stadium presentable for the convention, over 9,500 Witnesses voluntarily spent over 58,000 hours in cleaning and painting. A representative of Czechoslovak TV commented: "We have visited many social events, but we admire your organization here in the stadium. We can hardly believe that you are organizing such a gathering for the first time." A visitor said: "I admire the spiritual atmosphere, cordial relations, and love among your brothers. I came as a friend; I leave as an even greater one."

The *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines are being published in full color in the Czech and Slovak languages, and *The Watchtower* is simultaneous with the English in both tongues. When we recall the repressive situation of just over a year ago, these are remarkable changes.

Future Prospects

What are the prospects for the Witnesses preaching in countries where the newer generations have been raised on atheism? A report states: "There is a great darkness as to the Bible and God. The positive side is, however, that the people are not confused by false religious teachings that must be discarded. It appears that the harvest will be great."

So, what is the message that Jehovah's Witnesses have to offer the people of Eastern Europe from the Bible? The following article will answer.

What Message Are They Hearing?

IN WHAT kind of world would you like to live? What kind of future do you want for your children? If you could have perfect health and not die, would you choose it?

How would you answer those questions? Most people, regardless of religious or political background, would want to live in a world of peace and plenty. They would welcome a world of perfect justice and harmony, where there would be no corruption; nor would there be one law for the privileged and another for the poor.

And for your children, no doubt you would like to have abundant food, a pleasant home, and a good education. In other words, you would want to guarantee a stable future for yourself and your offspring. And if given the opportunity, you would choose to have perfect health and to live long enough to fulfill all your wholesome desires and ambitions, even to enjoying everlasting life on a peaceful, paradisaic earth.

All of this is not an impossible dream. It is the message of the Bible that Jehovah's Witnesses are preaching earth wide, including in the countries of Eastern Europe.

The Bible's Practical Hope for the Future

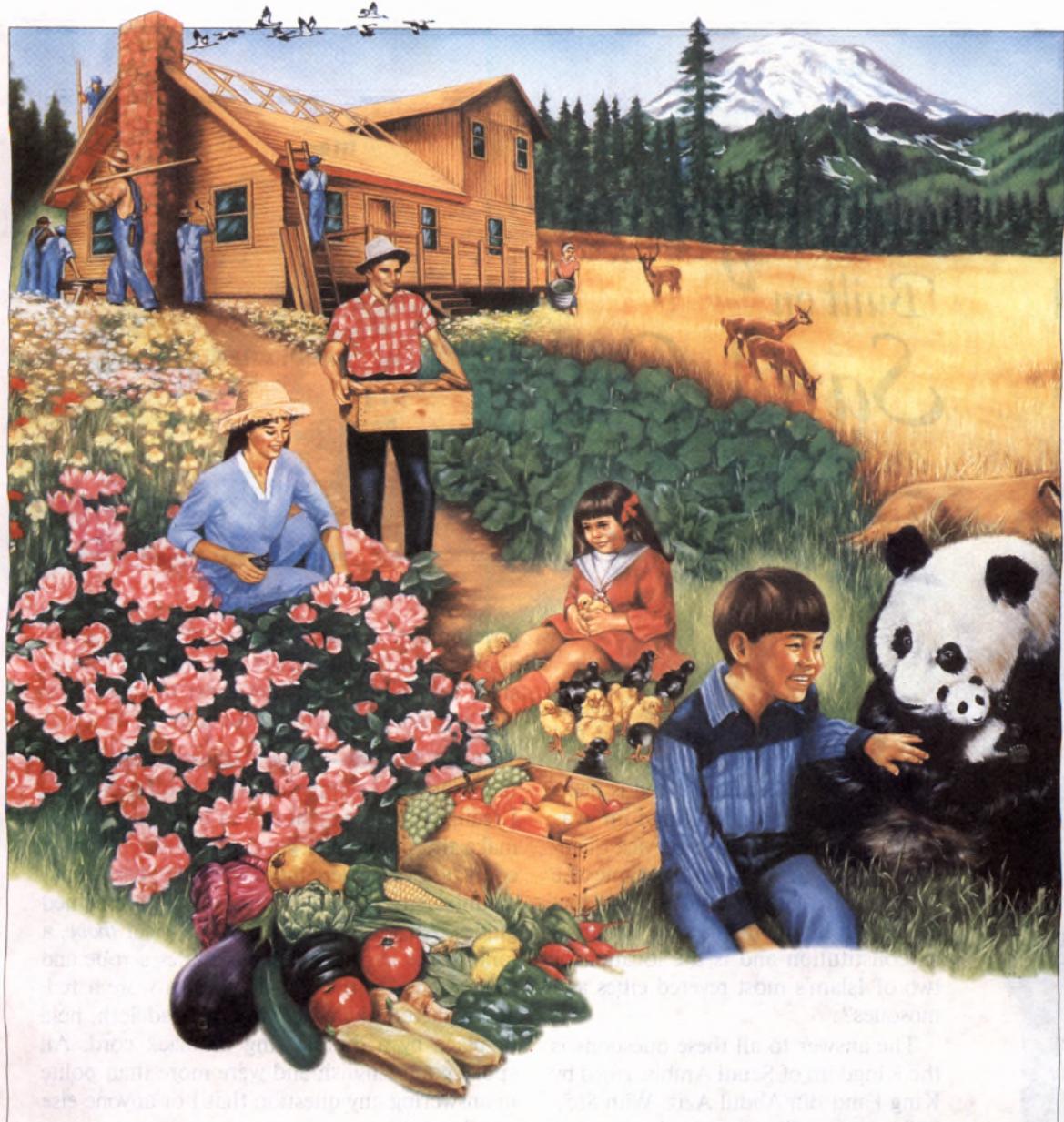
The Bible's reliable prophecies recorded many centuries ago foretold the events of

our 20th century, our 'wars and rumors of wars'; our 'earthquakes and food shortages in one place after another'; our 'anguish of nations, not knowing the way out, while men become faint out of fear and expectation of the events befalling the earth'; our 'ruining and polluting of the earth.'—Luke 21:10-33; Revelation 11:18.

Yet, all these events and many more are a sure sign that God's promised new world is also near at hand. This involves "new heavens and a new earth," that is, a new world rulership, a heavenly government, and a transformed earthly society 'in which righteousness is to dwell.' It means a new world in which 'pain, death, and mourning will be no more.'—Isaiah 65:17-25; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4.

Obviously, no political system, no matter how sincere and conscientious, is capable of fulfilling such a program. Only the Sovereign Lord of the universe, Jehovah God, has both the will and the power to accomplish this. For that reason his Son, Christ Jesus, taught his followers to pray: "Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth."—Matthew 6:9, 10.

God's will is that the earth should be a shining jewel in the universe, inhabited by a peace-loving human family. Soon God will



take action to bring that about. It will be a cleansing action to rid the earth of all contamination and contaminators. All pollution, whether physical or moral, will be eliminated from the earth. Who will remain? Jesus said: "Happy are the mild-tempered ones, since they will inherit the earth." —Matthew 5:5; Revelation 16:14-16.

Do you want to be among those mild-tempered ones who will have God's blessing? Then contact Jehovah's Witnesses in your neighborhood and request a free home Bible study, without any obligation. Prove for yourself what is the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God." And then do it.—Romans 12:2.

A Kingdom Built on Sand, Oil, and Religion



WHICH country is as big as Western Europe, has a population of only 12 million, and is nearly all desert? Which kingdom was founded in 1932, discovered vast quantities of oil in 1938, and became the world's third-largest crude-oil producer? Which kingdom takes the Koran as its constitution and is the location of two of Islam's most revered cities and mosques?

The answer to all these questions is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ruled by King Fahd Bin Abdul Aziz. With 865,000 square miles, it occupies most of the Arabian peninsula, with the Red Sea to the west, the Arabian Sea to the south, and the Arabian Gulf to the east.

How did I get interested in this Arab country? I saw in the newspaper an invitation to an exhibition in New York City sponsored by the Saudi Arabian



government. I was intrigued to know more about this different culture and way of life. And since I would probably never get to Saudi Arabia, why not let Saudi Arabia come to me?

Saudi Arabia—The Old and the New

As soon as I stepped into the exhibition area, I realized that everything had been designed to make the public feel good about this Arabian country. Everywhere there were U.S.-based Saudi university students acting as well-informed guides. All were dressed in the typical *thobe*, a long, white garment that resembles a robe and that reaches to the feet. Each also wore a red-and-white checkered *ghutra*, or headcloth, held in place by a double ring of black cord. All spoke good English and were more than polite in answering any question that I or anyone else cared to ask.

Following a dimly lit foyer, which had photos of the Saudi royal family as well as a multislide presentation of aspects of Saudi Arabia, I next visited the area that depicted traditional Arab and Bedouin life. A black Bedouin tent was on display with all the accoutrements of their nomadic life. However, with the advance of modern technology, the Bedouin life-style, with

David Patterson



(From left) Doors of the Kaaba, Arab artisan, and embroidering Arabic script

its legendary hospitality to strangers, is dying out.

The next sector of the tour was a reminder of the religious force that drives and controls Saudi Arabian life—Islam.*

Mecca, the Kaaba, and the Koran

Islam's holy book, the Koran, "is considered the constitution of [Saudi Arabia] and provides ethical values and guidance," states an official brochure. A pamphlet states: "The Kingdom frames its social, political, and economic policies in light of Islamic teachings." While there were several handwritten copies of the Koran on display, the principal theme of this sector was the pilgrimage city of Mecca (Arabic, *Makkah*) with its huge mosque and the Kaaba in the center. These were portrayed by large-scale models.

The Kaaba, a huge cube-shaped building made of stone and covered by a heavy black cloth, is defined by an Islamic publication as "the place of worship which God commanded Abraham and Ishmael to build over four thou-

sand years ago."** Thus Islam (started by the prophet Muhammad in the seventh century C.E.) claims to be linked with Abraham, the patriarchal forerunner of Judaism and Christianity. It is therefore one of the three major monotheistic religious systems.

In reality the Kaaba is located in the center of the huge open-air square that forms part of the great mosque of Mecca. At the annual pilgrimage (*hajj*), over a million Muslims flock there to pray and to circle the Kaaba seven times. Each able-bodied Muslim considers it an obligation to make this journey at least once in a lifetime. The exhibition also included a model of the massive mosque of Medina (Arabic, *Madinah*), Muhammad's burial place.

* For a detailed consideration of Islam, see the book *Man-kind's Search for God*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 1990, chapter 12, "Islam—The Way to God by Submission."

** There is no reference in the Bible to this event nor to Abraham's being in ancient Mecca.—Genesis 12:8-13:18.

Especially interesting were the heavy ornate doors of the Kaaba that were on display. Normally, only Muslims ever get to see these, since only they are allowed into the mosque of Mecca. It was hard to believe they were originals until a guide explained that they were the doors that had been used from 1942 to 1982, when they were replaced by new ones. They are made of gold and silver and are decorated with gold plaques that have verses from the Koran inscribed in Arabic. Hanging from a nearby wall was a *kiswah*, or heavy black curtain, used to cover the Kaaba, embroidered with more Koranic quotations in gold.

Modern Life in Saudi Arabia

Further on in the tour, there were re-creations of typical street scenes, with craftsmen weaving mats and others beating ironwork into domestic utensils. Other artisans were working in leather to produce typical Arab slippers. Another was making simple wooden birdcages. Yet another was shaping pottery at a foot-operated potter's wheel.

Eventually I came to the section that highlighted the achievements of modern Saudi Arabia. It was obvious that the discovery of oil had transformed the Saudi economy and the standard of living for the nation. ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) discovered vast oil deposits in 1938. Sample bottles of the black liquid were on display. A company brochure states: "Aramco now has more than 43,000 employees, about 550 wells in production, 20,500 kilometers (12,733 miles) of flowlines and pipelines and more than 60 gas-oil separator plants."

Little wonder that with such a solid economic foundation, information brochures can state that Saudi Arabia supports some 15,000 schools and educational centers that serve over 2.5 million students. Education is free for everybody right through to university level. And there are seven universities.

Of course, oil is not everything in Saudi Arabia. Huge irrigation projects have been completed, and agriculture has flourished to the point

that the country exports fish, poultry, wheat, dates, vegetables, and dairy and other farm products.

Two Sides to Every Coin

I finished my three-hour visit to "Saudi Arabia" very impressed by the accomplishments of a relatively small nation. I wondered how different things might have been if every nation had been similarly blessed with petroleum reserves or other valuable resources in worldwide demand.

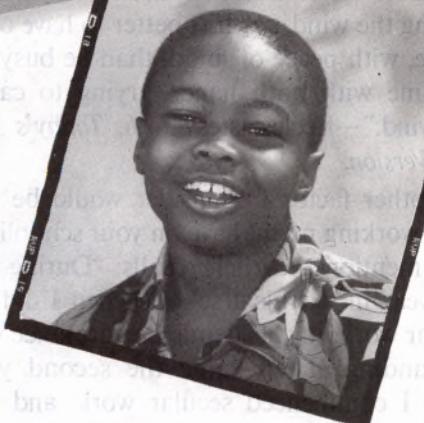
While I found the visit to be very informative, I could not help but notice the omissions in the field of religion. I learned nothing about the actual Kaaba stone, a black meteorite that is revered by Muslims who visit Mecca. Before the founding of Islam, the stone "was venerated as a fetish," states Philip K. Hitti in his *History of the Arabs*. The tradition is that while Ishmael was rebuilding the Kaaba, he received the black stone from the angel Gabriel.

Another omission in the exhibition was that I found no reference to the two major divisions of Islam, the Sunni and the Shia. This split goes back all the way to Muhammad's successors and is based on a difference of interpretation as to who are his rightful spiritual heirs—does the line follow in Muhammad's bloodline as the Shiite Muslims claim or is it based on elective office as the majority Sunni claim? The Saudis belong to the strict Wahhabi sect of the Hanbali school, the most rigid of the four schools of Sunni Muslims.

Notably absent from the exhibition were Arabian women. I assumed that this omission was due to the strict Saudi interpretation of Islamic laws on the role of women in public life.

As I left the exhibition, I was forcibly reminded of the saying that there are two sides to every coin. Outside on the street, there were Arab protesters giving out pamphlets alleging acts of cruelty and injustice in Saudi Arabia and denouncing the lack of democratic process in that country (there is no secular constitution or parliament). It made me realize that for some people sand, oil, and religion are not necessarily the whole story. But at least I had received a clearer perspective of life in Saudi Arabia and the impact of Islam on its people.—Contributed.

**Young
People
Ask...**



Should I Work While in School?

SCHOOL days are busy for most youths. Classroom instruction takes up a generous portion of each weekday. Homework and studying tie up the evenings. And in between there are numerous household chores that cry for attention.*

* This article deals primarily with the situation faced by youths in developing lands. Nevertheless, the suggestions set out here are based on Bible principles and will thus prove helpful to young people the world over.

In Western lands school-age youths can usually look forward to the weekend as a time for fun and relaxation. But in many parts of the world, weekends are anything but relaxing. In rural Africa, for example, youths often spend their weekends helping their parents on the farm, making up for some of the time lost during their week of schooling. And among Jehovah's Witnesses, youths have the added responsibility of participating in the door-to-door preaching work and going to Christian meetings.—Hebrews 10:23-25.

It may therefore seem unlikely that African youths would want to take on the extra burden of a secular job. But many such youths *are* working and in a diversity of ways: cultivating their own farms and selling the produce, weaving cloth with handlooms, or making baskets to sell in the marketplace. Still others are fishing, selling newspapers, and picking or selling fruit.

Why, though, are these youths taking on secular work? Does it necessarily mean that you should do the same?

Why They Work

Some youths are virtually compelled to work because of circumstances beyond their control, such as the death of a parent. (This can leave a youth with no one to sponsor his schooling.) On the other hand, some youths take on jobs to establish a measure of independence from their parents.

Consider Kofi, a young man in Ghana. While in technical school, he worked as a farmhand two hours each day after school.* Kofi explains: "My parents had provided my needs throughout elementary school. But I did not want to continue depending on them

* In some lands, after primary school a youth has a choice of entering either a secondary, or high, school (which teaches a wide range of subjects) or a technical school.

for my every need. So I started secular work. I felt much happier being able to buy my own stationery and pay my school transportation."

Kofi's brother Moses similarly had a job. While in secondary school, Moses privately tutored young schoolchildren. But while Kofi's income appropriately went to pay for his own needs, some of Moses' money went toward the upkeep of his family. Why? Coming from a family of eight children, he reasoned: "My doing part-time work gave my parents a measure of relief in caring for the needs of my other brothers and sisters." He also admits to a sense of satisfaction in being able to buy things for himself.

Helping one's parents financially when there is a real need may be a way of rendering the honor due them. (Ephesians 6:1, 2) At the same time, though, there is nothing necessarily wrong with working so as to have some spending money of one's own.

Having a job may also do much to instill a sense of responsibility in a youth. It can help a youth master skills that can later be used in supporting a family. Jesus Christ himself, for example, apparently learned the carpentry trade by working with his adoptive father as a youth. (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) Nevertheless, "the time left is reduced" for this world, and a wise youth makes sure that his or her time is being used profitably. (1 Corinthians 7:29; Ephesians 5:16) So before taking on a job, you should weigh all the factors involved—including your own motives.

Counting the Cost

Some questions you might consider are: Do my parents really need or even want my financial assistance? Or are they willing to make do with less so that I can apply myself to my schoolwork and spiritual development? Am I really in *need* of extra funds, or am I responding to "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.

The wise man Solomon observed: "I have also learned why people work so hard to succeed: it is because they envy the things their neighbors have. But it is useless. It is like chasing the wind. . . . It is better to have only a little, with peace of mind, than be busy all the time with both hands, trying to catch the wind."—Ecclesiastes 4:4-6, *Today's English Version*.

Another factor to consider would be the effect working might have on your schooling. Kofi, mentioned earlier, recalls: "During my first year in technical school when I did no secular work, my academic performance was outstanding. Then came the second year when I commenced secular work, and my grades began to fall. I still managed to be above average, but it was all so tiring." Interestingly, one research study conducted in the United States found that "working leads to a decline in school performance and diminishes adolescent involvement in school."

Do you recall Kofi's brother Moses, who had a tutoring job? He admits: "Unless one is very careful, one can begin to take on more learners than can be taught within the limited time available." Mawuli, another African man, worked part-time as a fisherman. He says: "There was great temptation when there was a big catch at the beach. The impulse was to abandon the books to go and earn more money. Lots of boys in the village did that and dropped out of school."

School plus job can also sap a youth's strength to the point of adversely affecting him spiritually. It may become hard for him to attend Christian meetings or to concentrate when there. Personal study of the Bible and Bible-based publications may fall by the wayside.

Some African youths work at afterschool jobs. But what are the advantages and disadvantages of doing so?



Keeping Your Balance

Nevertheless, after weighing all factors, you and your parents may decide that your working at some sort of job would be advantageous. How can you make the best of the situation?

Self-discipline is essential. The apostle Paul spoke of his own efforts, saying: "I pummel my body and lead it as a slave." (1 Corinthians 9:27) It will take self-discipline for you to save—and not squander—the money you earn. It will also take self-discipline for you to use your remaining time properly. Of course, relaxation and adequate rest have their place and can enhance productive work. But take care that hobbies and recreation do not crowd out homework and even spiritual matters.

You will therefore need to make a realistic schedule of study periods—and stick to it. For example, it may be best to begin your homework as soon as possible upon returning home from work, not waiting until long

after supper when you might feel too drowsy. Others prefer to go to bed early and care for their studies first thing in the morning. Whatever the case, make your study periods as productive as possible. Avoid playing music or indulging in other distractions. Your homework may also go more smoothly if you pay attention to how you listen in class, taking notes on main points and supporting details.—Compare Luke 8:18.

Most important of all, though, are your spiritual needs. (Matthew 5:3) For these to be filled, you must also set aside time for personal Bible study, for Christian meetings, and for sharing in the public ministry. True, working and going to school is demanding. But if you must do both, give spiritual matters priority. Pray incessantly to Jehovah God to help you maintain your spiritual balance. If a job, in addition to school, is decided on, he can strengthen you to stand up to the pressures of the situation.—Isaiah 40:29-31.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses From the USSR Brighter Days Ahead”

THAT was the headline in the English-language newspaper *The Warsaw Voice* of August 19, 1990, published in Poland. The writer, Anna Dubrawska, commented on the “Pure Language” Convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Warsaw in August 1990. She interviewed Witnesses from the Soviet Union, some of whom had spent 15 years in prisons and labor camps because of their religious beliefs. But now they were emphasizing the positive changes taking place in their country.

Grigor Goryachek, a construction worker from the Crimea who was raised a Witness, was exiled for 15 years in Siberia. He said: “We are now expecting better times to come along.” Another Witness, Anton Pohanich, said: “Better times are already here. I can now take our message freely from house to house, whereas in the past this was not possible.”

Dubrawska quotes Igor Cherny, a 17-year-old Witness from the Caucasus: “For 70 years people, especially the young, were so intensively drawn away from God that now they want to return to Him just as intensively, or at least hear about Him as a start.”

The Polish publication *Dziennik Wieczorny* (Evening Paper) reported, under the title *Radość braci* (Joy of the Brothers), that an employee of Zawisza stadium in the city of Bydgoszcz said: “I am delighted by the clean language used and good manners shown by the youths.”

Writing in the Polish daily *Trybuna* under the heading *Głosiciele Królestwa* (Kingdom Publishers), Zofia Uszynska stated concerning the convention: “In a period of 30 minutes I was offered snacks and coffee ten times. Five times someone wanted to give up his seat for me. For four consecutive days more than 30,000 people at Dziesięciolecia Stadium in Warsaw participated in a [religious] festival. Women in a state of advanced pregnancy, families with small children, grown-ups and youths. The youngest baptized was 11 years old, the oldest almost 80.”

The article continued: “Several thousand Russians [actually more than 16,000] came to this year’s meeting. Last year there were 6,000 of them. Russian border officials let all the buses through without the need to wait for checking in lines many kilometers long. Delegates from all over the Soviet Union came: from Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, Vorkuta. Some spent four or five days on a train.”

The same paper quotes Ivan M. Greviak as saying: “I saw injustice in what the popes and priests did, and I searched for honesty.” The account continues: “He noticed agreement between the words and deeds in the behavior of Jehovah’s Witnesses.” Then Ivan added: “I thank God that he allowed me to learn the truth.”

The *Trybuna* reports that Ivan is an elder in a congregation in Lvov, where “there are 13 con-



gregations and more than 2,000 religious believers.... 'In all religious groups everywhere there reigns a spirit of nationalism. However, it is absent among my coreligionists,' says Grevniak."

This unity was shown at the Warsaw convention of Jehovah's Witnesses where the program was presented simultaneously in Polish and Russian in different parts of the stadium. There was absolutely no nationalistic friction.

Zofia Uszynska was also impressed by the organization needed to house, feed, and even medically care for the more than 35,000 who attended the convention. She concluded: "I have never participated in such a fine, friendly public gathering."

The Polish daily *Sztandar Młodych* (Standard of Youth) commented on the work done to make the stadium fit to receive so many visitors: "As a social service . . . Jehovah's followers rebuilt the benches, remodeled tunnels and toilets, cleaned the grass field. They contributed to the cost of the convention from their own pockets. Jehovah's Witnesses prepared about 22,000 private accommodations for the visitors, cared for boarding for Soviet citizens, and had their own medical care."

Certainly Jehovah's Witnesses are already experiencing "brighter days" in Eastern Europe and pray that their newfound legal standing in countries such as Romania, Hungary, and Poland will soon extend to Czechoslovakia, Albania, Bulgaria, and the Soviet Union.—2 Thessalonians 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2.



**Soviet Witnesses at Warsaw
"Pure Language" Convention,
including baptismal candidates
(upper and inset), Russian
speaker, program, and
Soviet delegates in front
of their buses**



Transfusions and Peer Pressure

Many people today, including some doctors, are refusing blood transfusions. On what grounds? Not for religious reasons, as do Jehovah's Witnesses, but on medical grounds. Why is that? Because of the inherent risks (such as hepatitis, AIDS, and suppressed immune system) that someone else's blood always carries. Yet, in most cases where blood is recom-

in its July 25, 1990, issue: "Evidence shows that blood products, like other health care resources, are often used inappropriately . . . We conducted a face-to-face survey of 122 general surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, and anesthesiologists in three hospitals to evaluate the influence of several clinical and nonclinical factors on transfusion decision making. We found widespread deficiencies in physicians' knowledge of transfusion risks and indications."

What is meant by "nonclinical factors"? The report answers in part: "Physicians' decisions are influenced by their colleagues through professional and social networks. The influence of peer pressure is felt most strongly when several physicians practice together . . . In these settings, actions may at times be motivated by the expectation of a superior or influential peer, a desire to conform with group norms, or the wish to avoid criticism."

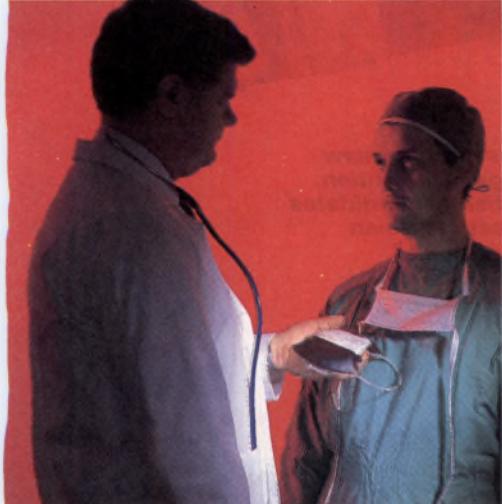
The article explained that "only 10%, however, stated that they had given a potentially unnecessary transfusion to appease a colleague once a month or more . . . Fully 61% of residents indicated that

they had given transfusions that they thought were unnecessary because a more senior physician had suggested that they do so, at least once a month." Apart from this kind of professional peer pressure, what other factor might induce a doctor to order a transfusion?

"Some physicians may be predisposed to provide treatments because of a preference for errors of commission vs errors of omission." One medical expert "suggested that the traditional injunction *Primum non nocere* ('First do no harm') may often be suspended in favor of the rule 'First do something.' Such a propensity to act may be a factor in explaining inappropriate transfusion practice."

Are patients conscious of transfusion risks? "On average, physicians stated that half of the patients for whom they order a red blood cell transfusion voice concern about the risks of transfusion."

Surely, this illustrates that in the field of transfusions, an educated physician and an educated patient are in a better position to avoid unnecessary risks. The educated Christian has an even better protection—Jehovah's commands against the abuse of blood.—*Genesis 9:3, 4; Leviticus 17:13-16; Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29.*



mended, friends and hospital staff tend to pressure the patient to accept a transfusion. But there is often another kind of pressure at work—peer pressure on the attending doctors.

The Journal of the American Medical Association reported

MEXICO CITY

A GROWING MONSTER?



By Awake! correspondent in Mexico

“THE city of Mexico is a monster . . . that amazingly still functions,” stated Mexican architect Teodoro González de León. *National Geographic* magazine called it “An Alarming Giant.” To Carmen, born there some 30 years ago, “it is a bustling city of humble people who know how to be happy and to enjoy the simple things in life—including their favorite Mexican foods, such as enchiladas, tamales, tortillas and mole.”

Mexico City, with a population of some 15 million, is presently one of the largest cities in the world but has been a thriving metropolis for centuries.* It was originally founded about 1325 as Tenochtitlán and be-

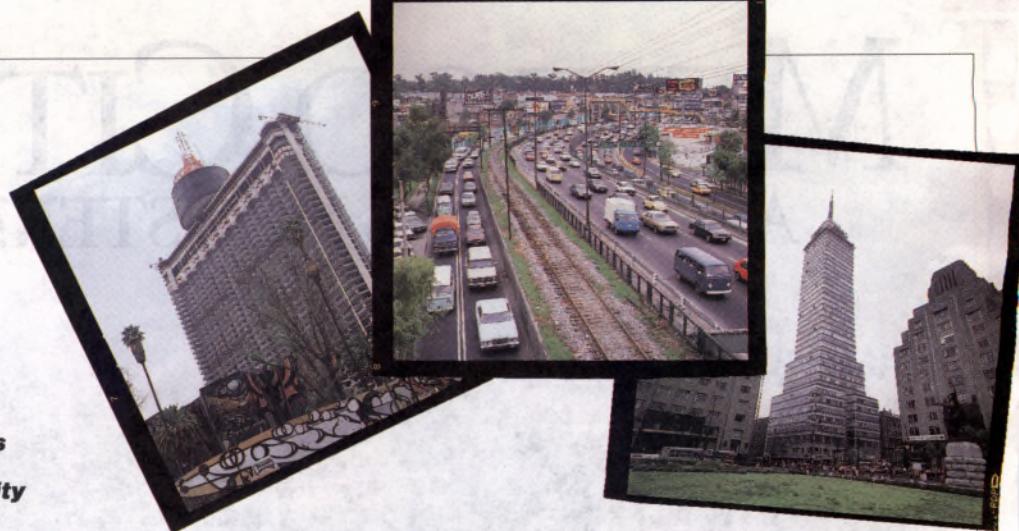
came the capital of the Aztec Empire. The Aztecs started building the city when they settled on an island within Lake Texcoco. In the course of time, they filled the lake with soil so that the city could be expanded, but it was a city of canals and always surrounded by water. When the Spaniards arrived in 1519, they were astonished by the grandeur, beauty, and organization of a city of some 200,000 to 300,000 inhabitants.

City of Contrasts

Mexico City, like most large cities, has a dark side of poverty and crime, but from many other points of view, it is very attractive. Its prodigious growth has won it the adjective “chaotic”; yet, in contrast, in the midst of the city, there is one of the largest parks in

* The National Census of 1990 has lowered previous estimates of the population.

**Skyscrapers
and traffic
in Mexico City**



the world, Chapultepec Park, with an area of 1,600 acres. It has woods, several lakes, restaurants, and museums; and a great variety of cultural events are held there. The yearly presentation of Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" ballet in a natural setting on the shores of a lake is a beautiful tradition. For those who are not able to leave the city for the weekend, the park becomes their resort for recreation and entertainment.

While hardly competing with New York or Chicago, Mexico City has its *rascacielos*, or skyscrapers. The Latin American Tower, a 44-story building completed in 1956, is an example of a design engineered to resist earthquakes. It is constructed on 361 direct-support piles that are intended to protect the building from seismic movements. From its restaurant, located on floors 40 and 41, one can admire the city, especially at night when its multitude of lights sparkle against a background like black velvet. The tallest skyscraper in the city, the World Trade Center of Mexico, is not yet finished. It has 54 floors and will house international offices for world trade as well as other facilities.

Mexico City has grown and spread to such a degree that its Benito Juárez International

Airport, which was once outside the city, is now practically in its midst. It is one of the busiest airports in the world, handling about a million people each month.

In Mexico City contrasts are sharp. Huge and luxurious mansions, exclusive and expensive hotels, attractive condominiums, and shopping centers rub shoulders with the poverty of dark and gloomy slums. Yet, unlike many other big cities in the world, the streets are full of life late at night.

Problems of the Big City

Mexico City, like an ever-spreading octopus, now embraces over 380 square miles and occupies all of what is called the Federal District as well as part of Mexico State. Many villages and suburbs, formerly independent, have now been overtaken by the city's tentacles.

Naturally, a city with these dimensions faces huge problems. The main one is overpopulation, together with the consequent problems of pollution, housing shortages, and serious deficiencies in essential resources for living, as well as a constantly growing crime rate. Regular educational campaigns have been used to try to reduce the country's birthrate, but large families are a cultural

heritage in Mexico and are viewed as proof of male virility and female fertility. In addition, many people from the rural zones are moving to the city, looking for a better life. Although the 1985 earthquake forced thousands to leave the city, the population is on the increase. People move to where there is work and a better hope of survival.

Can the "Monster" Breathe?

Air pollution in Mexico City has become critical during the last ten years. In the 1960's, there was a zone of the city that was called "the most transparent region." Now no region of Mexico City is transparent. Warnings have been sounded in the media. "Air pollution in the valley of Mexico has reached dangerous levels," stated one scientific journal. *Time* magazine said: "Three million cars and 7,000 diesel buses, many of them old and out of repair, spew contamination into the air. So do the approximately 130,000 nearby factories that represent more than 50% of all Mexican industry. The daily total of chemical air pollution amounts to 11,000 tons. Just breathing is estimated to be equivalent to smoking two packs of cigarettes a day."

The situation is worsening. The newspaper *El Universal* of October 12, 1989, quoted the director of the Autonomous Institute of Ecological Investigation as saying: "The pollution ratio in Mexico City is alarming, since every person in the metropolitan zone receives daily an average of 580 grams [20 oz] of harmful substances." Every year, over four million tons of pollutants are emitted in the city.

Recently, some emergency steps have been taken to fight pollution. A program was set up to prevent each day a certain number of cars from driving in the city because, according to a governmental report, "transportation vehicles generate 9,778.3 tons of pollutants every day," of which 7,430 tons are from pri-

vately owned automobiles. People had already been invited to reduce voluntarily the use of their cars by pooling together in only one vehicle when going to work or elsewhere, but this was unsuccessful. What did the city government do?

Now, by means of the "one day without car" program, all private cars are banned by rotation one day a week, depending on the last number of their registration card or its color. This means that every day 20 percent of the three million private cars in the city are out of use. This program was originally to be applied only during wintertime to try to prevent thermal inversion, but now the authorities are trying to adopt it permanently. For those who do not obey, there are heavy fines as well as the troublesome procedures needed to recover the impounded car. These Draconian measures have convinced most drivers to support the program.

Another step being taken is improvement in the quality of the gasoline, reducing the amount of lead. Also, it is now required that all automobiles be checked periodically for pollution emissions. Furthermore, new laws require factories to have antipollution systems. Some factories have been closed down because they did not comply with this requirement. These steps have eased the pollution problem a little, but it is not yet solved. Like the rest of the world, Mexico needs a universal solution to its problems.

One day soon, under the rule of God's heavenly government, mankind will use its resources wisely, and all humans will be able to enjoy, not crowded cities, but open spaces together with all that is needed for a happy life. Meanwhile, there is no option but to bear the crowds and inconveniences of Mexico City, while one enjoys the many good things it does offer—including the rich mosaic of the hospitable Mexican people.—Revelation 11:18; 21:1-4.

Watching the World

Women Are Disadvantaged

"Poor rural women are the most deprived people in the world," states the United Nations publication, *UN Chronicle*. "They are sicker and more illiterate than men and lack the opportunities males have to better themselves." Two major studies on world poverty in 1990 by two international development agencies, the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank, have reached that bleak conclusion. "About half a million women, 99 per cent of them in the developing world, die in childbirth each year," reports the *UN Chronicle*.

Environment Pledge

"We human beings have become a danger to ourselves. We must act in time." Those ominous words form part of an environmental pledge taken by university presidents from 22 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North and South America. They pledged to have their schools teach more about environmental issues than in the past and to increase school resources devoted to research on the environment. The officials, who met at a conference in Talloires, France, this past October, also declared common goals "for an environmentally sustainable future."

"Rationed" Miracles

Drought necessitated that the "miracle water" from the world-famous pool at Lourdes in France be rationed, causing

alarm among visitors in search of miraculous cures. Religious authorities allowed pilgrims only half a pint each of the water from the spring, which, according to tradition, welled up in 1858 after an apparition of the Madonna. All bottles in excess were confiscated, and the water poured back into the pool. "In all the churches in France, they are praying to the Virgin of the Rain, in vain. But in any case, she couldn't make it rain only on Lourdes," observed the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.

Pet Problems

The increasing popularity of dogs as household pets has become a cause for concern among city and health authorities in France. The French weekly magazine *L'Express* reports that each day 20 tons of dog droppings are picked up from the streets and sidewalks of Paris at a cost of more than 400 francs



(\$70, U.S.) per kilo. But in addition to the cost and nuisance, a more serious factor has come to light. Dog waste is the source of a disease caused by the parasite *Toxocara canis*. Half the children's play areas and sandboxes of Paris were found to be contaminated with the highly resis-

tant microscopic eggs of the parasite, which enter homes on the soles of shoes and on the paws of household pets. Its presence in man has been largely underestimated. Fatigue, abdominal pain, allergies, heart and arterial problems are early symptoms of the disease.

Church Losses

Membership rolls of the major Protestant denominations are continuing in their downward trend in the United States, according to the *1990 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*. Although the yearbook, published by the National Council of Churches, shows that the losses are smaller than 1 percent in most cases, they have been constant since the mid-1960's. The Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. have all experienced losses. However, the report listed Jehovah's Witnesses as one of the religions that has shown an increase in numbers. Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States had a 3-percent increase in 1989 and a 4-percent gain for 1990.

Bad News for Smokers

On September 25, 1990, the Centers for Disease Control in the United States released the report "The Health Benefits of Smoking Cessation: A Report of the Surgeon General, 1990."

Some principal conclusions reached are: "1) Smoking cessation has major and immediate health benefits for persons of all ages . . . ; 2) former smokers live longer than continuing smokers; 3) smoking cessation decreases the risk for lung and other cancers, heart attack, stroke, and chronic lung disease."

Tobacco Sale to Soviets

Recently in the Soviet Union, an angry crowd of smokers were on the verge of rioting because of a shortage of cigarettes in that country. Two United States companies pledged to ease the shortage. They plan to sell more than a month's supply to the Soviets, 34 thousand million cigarettes. Interestingly, spokesmen for the American companies said that the cigarettes would lack the surgeon general's health warning about cancer and other diseases associated with tobacco use.

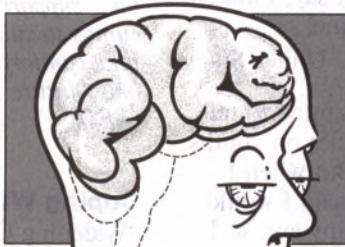
Toxic Toad-Slime Licking

Dr. Alan Emery of the Canadian Museum of Nature told *The Globe and Mail* that there has been a population explosion among cane toads all over the world in the last ten years. The cane toad, or *Bufo marinus*, "secretes a toxic milky white liquid that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency calls bufotenine." In Queensland, Australia, the toad has become such a plague that the government has "classified toad slime as an illegal substance under its Drug Misuse Act." The slime secreted by the cane toad is toxic and "causes hallucinations, severe vomiting and seizures." The *Globe* reported that two Canadians who

licked their fingers after touching a pet toad became violently ill and had to be hospitalized.

Sleep for the Brain

Why do we need sleep? At a recent conference in Strasbourg, France, a controversial theory was presented. Sleep was said to be of less benefit to the body than to the brain, which recovers from the efforts of the day through sleep. Tests indicate that whereas "human bodily functions continue practically unimpaired even after several days without sleep," reports *Die Zeit*, "the brain is different." In



test cases, people suffered from "lack of attention and concentration, impaired memory, a slowing down of the thought process, and orientation problems" when deprived of sleep.

Rebuilding of Babylon Stalled

Ancient Babylon, the famed city of King Nebuchadnezzar with its hanging gardens, collapsed under the onslaught of conquerors more than 2,500 years ago. A much smaller Babylon survived until about the fourth century C.E., when it became a complete ruin. Modern-day Iraq recently planned to rebuild the former citadel of imperial power to its grandeur of old. (See *Awake!* of March 8,

1988, page 30.) However, recent political events in the Middle East have put a restraint on such construction plans, reports *The New York Times*. Isaiah 13:19, 20 sets forth an interesting prophecy on Babylon's doom, stating that "she will never be inhabited, nor will she reside for generation after generation."

German Church Tax

In the Federal Republic of Germany, churches get financial support by means of a church tax, which employers deduct from wages. One employer refused to remit church tax deducted from his employees' wages. Why? In 1664 his ancestors were accused of witchcraft and were tortured and burned to death, and he holds the church responsible. He was taken to court, which found his action unjustified. "Otherwise," reports the magazine *Polizei*, "anyone whose ancestors suffered unjustly . . . could refuse by reason of conscience to perform a duty placed upon him" by the State.

Slow Music and Drinking

Research conducted in bars that play country and western music found that "as the music slows down, the drinking picks up," reports the journal *Psychology Today*. The study was conducted over a period of two years and included 2,000 groups of drinkers. James Schaefer, a researcher on the project, said that "hard drinkers prefer listening to slower paced, wailing, lonesome, self-pitying music." As Schaefer points out: "The patrons may often be living the life of the songs they want played."

From Our Readers

Prayer in Sports Thank you for "The Bible's Viewpoint: Prayer in Sports—Does God Listen?" (May 8, 1990) I used to pray fervently to God before a handball game. During key games, I prayed to have strength to win. (We never won any of those games.) Now I know that such prayers were not in harmony with God's will.

M.A.L.S., Brazil

Youth—Challenge of the '90's I read the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work* when I first received it. Your articles on youth (September 8, 1990) encouraged me to start reading it again. And I must say, I am enjoying it even more the second time!

B. B., United States

I am a 13-year-old girl, and I wanted to tell you that I really enjoyed the articles on youths. I have a subscription to *Awake!* But when I would get the magazines in the mail, I would put them away. This one caught my eye, so I read it and really enjoyed it. Afterward, I got out my other copies of *Awake!* and read some of the articles. Now I've asked my mom to study the Bible with me.

A. P., United States

Suicide My mother, a faithful servant of God, took her life after a month of deep depression. Her death left an indescribable burden and heartache for all of us who loved her. The thought that I might never see her again made the pain of her loss harder to bear. Your article ("The Bible's Viewpoint: Suicides—A Resurrection?" September 8, 1990) made me feel more "normal" and happy inside, knowing that I can entertain the hope of her resurrection.

T. M., United States

The article was merciful. But might not distressed ones view such mercy as justification for taking the "easy way out"?

N. G., United States

Feelings of unrelenting despair might make death appear attractive to a severely depressed one. (Compare Job 10:1.) But since suicide is self-murder, it is a violation of God's law and an unacceptable option for a Christian. If thoughts of suicide afflict a person, he should not presume upon God's mercy but should seek help to resist self-destructive urges. (James 1:14, 15) He might think of the painful void his death will leave in the lives of loved ones. He should remember that Jehovah "is near to those that are broken at heart" and throw his burdens upon Him. (Psalm 34:18; 55:22) He should also let fellow Christians know of his despair and accept their support. Nevertheless, if a person succumbs to suicidal feelings, bereaved ones can take comfort in knowing that their loved one's future is in the hands of a loving God.

—ED.

Coping With Paralysis After reading "Widening Out to Help Others" (September 22, 1990), I just want to say thank you for such an upbuilding and positive article. Being fully fit myself, I sometimes wonder how I could cope under similar circumstances. We are all under tremendous pressure from this world, but Tony Wood copes with this and even more by relying on Jehovah.

P. G., England

Movies Thank you for the article "Young People Ask . . . How Can I Pick a Decent Movie?" (August 8, 1990) Today the majority of youths do not know what kind of movies are fit for a Christian to view, nor do they ask their parents if they should watch a movie or not. I liked very much the idea that if a person happens to be watching an inappropriate movie, he should turn it off.

J. N. S., Brazil

Devastating Deluge Down Under

IMAGINE a flood inundating an area the size of Great Britain, France, and Germany combined. Well, that is what happened last year in Queensland, Australia. Charleville, a town near the middle of the disaster area, had to be evacuated. Three thousand inhabitants huddled in tents on high ground at the local airport. Some had to be rescued from rooftops by helicopter.

A small band of 35 people associated with the Charleville Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses sought refuge with a Witness whose property was located on high ground six miles outside of town. This became a base of operations to help those left homeless.

Swiftly, the Witnesses began to mobilize assistance. In Dalby, 340 miles away, a team of volunteers was formed to clean the flooded homes. In Roma, 170 miles away, the Witnesses collected food and other emergency supplies, such as blankets and clothing. After an aerial reconnaissance to assess the damage, the volunteers streamed in—over a hundred strong.

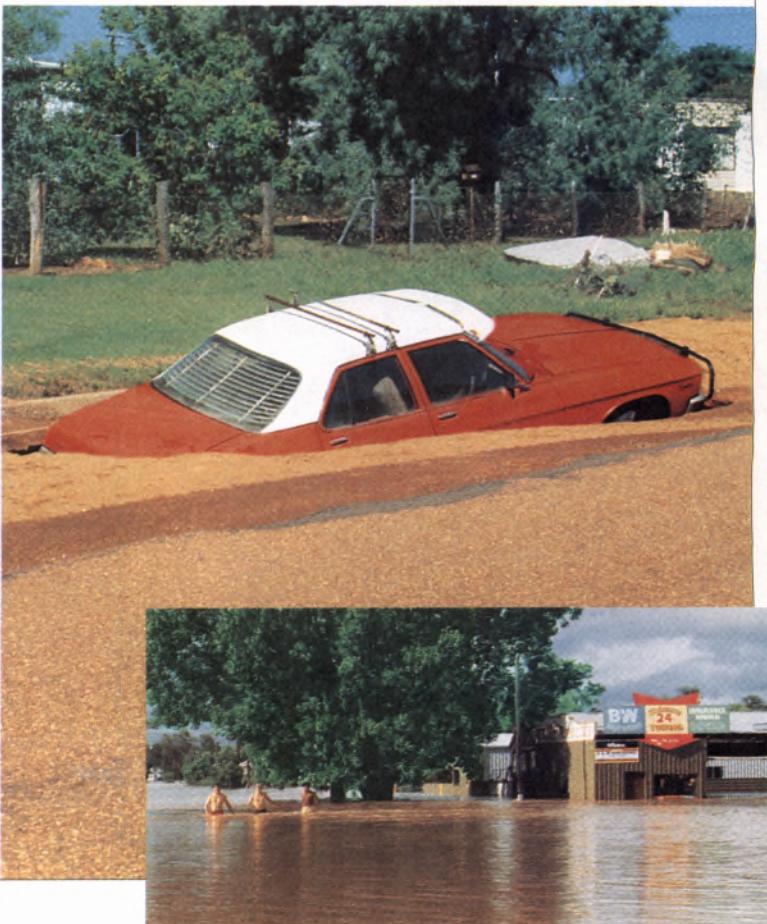
They described the disaster site as "beyond imagination." Two inches of slime and silt covered everything. Smashed furniture was scattered around the rooms, carpets were ruined, electrical appliances submerged,

cars overturned. The stench of decaying food, saturated wood, and debris was everywhere.

The volunteers set to work. By Saturday, April 28, just over a week after the flood, the homes and yards of the Charleville Witnesses were looking clean and respectable. More than a clean-up was needed, though. The volunteer teams set about restoring power to the homes and repairing cars and household appliances. Carpet-layers put down new carpets; cabinetmakers built and installed new cabinets; carpenters, painters, and plumbers made repairs.

The upshot: Two weeks after the flood, all the Witnesses were back in their renovated homes. The volunteers did not, however, limit their efforts to helping fellow Witnesses. When one team cleaned the home of a Catholic, he repeatedly expressed his amazement.

In Brisbane the Witnesses were praised over the radio for their work during the flood. And in Charleville, many townspeople were astonished to see how fast the Witnesses acted. One man who had formerly opposed them was overheard to say: "And we have the hide [the nerve] to turn them away from the door."



Geopolitics Goliath Ghosts Nobles

The newspaper "The New York Times" has been reporting on the situation in Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. In its article from March 1, 2022, it states: "Russia's invasion of Ukraine has exposed deep divisions within the European Union and raised questions about the future of the alliance. The war has also highlighted the growing influence of China and other non-Western powers on global politics." The article goes on to say: "The war has shown that the world is changing, and that the old order of things is no longer sustainable. The United States and its allies are facing a new reality where they must work together to protect their interests and values in the face of a powerful and determined adversary." The article concludes by stating: "The war in Ukraine is a reminder that the world is still a dangerous place, and that we must remain vigilant and prepared for whatever challenges lie ahead."

