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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

HOW TO TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG



THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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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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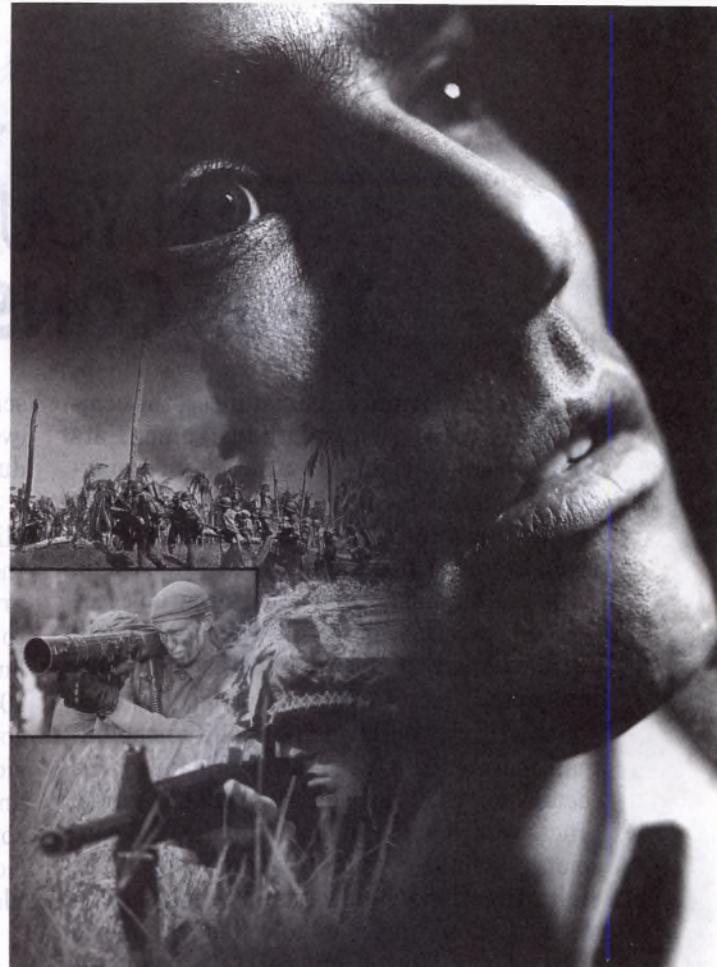
CAN YOU TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG?

"I was personally responsible for killing about 25 people. . . . I have an image of it in my mind every night, every day. I have nightmares. . . . I can go somewhere and see a face that reminds me of the people that I killed. I can see that vividly, just like it's happened today, right now. . . . I can't forgive myself for the things I did."—V.S.

"I was ordered to go in there and destroy the enemy. . . . I did not sit down and think in terms of men, women and children. . . . I felt then and I still do that I acted as I was directed, and I carried out the orders that I was given and I do not feel wrong in doing so."—W.C.

ON March 16, 1968, the two men quoted above participated in what would later be judged an infamous war crime. They, along with other soldiers, entered a small Vietnamese village and slaughtered hundreds of civilians—including women, children, and elderly men. But note the contrasting reactions of these two soldiers. The first soldier is clearly tormented by what he did. The second feels that his actions were justified. How can two people respond so differently to the same experience?

The answer has to do with conscience—a God-given faculty that



Upper war scene: U.S. Signal Corps photo

helps us to look squarely at ourselves and judge our actions and intentions. Conscience is our inner sense of right and wrong.

When making decisions, some people fall back on the adage, "Let your conscience be your guide." Sadly, however, the conscience is not always reliable. Indeed, many have tolerated and even committed horrible atrocities, and their consciences have not troubled them at all. (John 16:2; Acts 8:1) As English novelist Samuel Butler once observed, the conscience "soon leaves off talking to those who do not wish to hear it."

Can you trust your conscience? The answer largely depends upon how well it is trained, as the following article will show.



CAN YOU TRUST YOUR CONSCIENCE?

UNDER normal circumstances, the compass is a trustworthy instrument. Its needle, oriented by the earth's magnetic field, consistently points north. Travellers can thus rely on the compass for direction when there are no landmarks to guide them. But what happens when a magnetic object is placed near the compass? The needle will swing toward the magnet instead of pointing north. It is no longer a reliable guide.

Something similar can happen to the human conscience. The Creator implanted this faculty in us to serve as a reliable guide. Since we are made in God's image, the conscience should consistently point us in the right direction when we need to make decisions. It should move us to reflect the moral standards of God. (Genesis 1:27) Frequently, it does. For example, the Christian apostle Paul wrote that even some who are without God's revealed law "do by nature the things of the law." Why? Because "their conscience is bearing witness with them."

—Romans 2:14, 15.

Nevertheless, the conscience does not always speak up when it should. Because of human imperfection, we are inclined to do things that we know are wrong. "I really delight in the law of God according to the man I am within," admitted Paul, "but I behold in my members another law warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive to sin's law that is in my members." (Romans 7:22, 23) If we give in to wrong inclinations often enough, our con-

science may gradually become dulled and eventually cease telling us that such conduct is wrong.

Despite imperfection, however, we can align our conscience with God's standards. Indeed, it is vital that we do so. A clean, properly trained conscience not only leads to a warm, personal relationship with God but is essential to our salvation. (Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 1:15, 16) Furthermore, a good conscience will help us to make wise decisions in life, which will lead to our peace and happiness. The psalmist said of a person with such a conscience: "The law of his God is in his heart; his steps will not wobble." —Psalm 37:31.

Training the Conscience

Training the conscience involves more than simply memorizing a list of laws and then strictly adhering to them. That is what the Pharisees of Jesus' day did. These religious leaders knew the Law and had developed a detailed tradition, supposedly to help the people to avoid transgressing the Law. Thus, they were quick to protest when Jesus' disciples plucked grain on the Sabbath and ate the kernels. And they challenged Jesus when he healed a man's withered hand on the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:1, 2, 9, 10) Both of these acts, according to the Pharisees' tradition, constituted a violation of the fourth commandment.—Exodus 20:8-11.

Clearly, the Pharisees studied the Law.

But were their consciences aligned with God's standards? Hardly! Why, just after nitpicking about what they thought to be a shocking infraction of the Sabbath regulation, the Pharisees took counsel against Jesus "that they might destroy him." (Matthew 12:14) Imagine—these self-righteous religious leaders bristled at the idea of eating freshly plucked grain and of healing on the Sabbath; but they had no qualms about plotting Jesus' death!

The chief priests manifested similar twisted thinking. These corrupt men felt not a twinge of guilt when they offered Judas 30 pieces of silver from the temple treasury to betray Jesus. But when Judas unexpectedly returned the money, throwing it back into the temple, the consciences of the chief priests were confronted with a legal dilemma. "It is not lawful," they said, "to drop them [the coins] into the sacred treasury, because they are the price of blood." (Matthew 27:3-6) Evidently, the chief priests were worried that Judas' money was now unclean. (Compare Deuteronomy 23:18.) Yet, this same group of men saw nothing wrong with spending money to buy the betrayal of God's Son!

Being Attuned to God's Thinking

The above examples show that training the conscience requires more than filling the mind with a list of dos and don'ts. Granted, knowledge of God's laws is essential, and obedience to them is necessary for salvation. (Psalm 19:7-11) However, in addition to learning God's laws, we must develop a heart that is attuned to God's thinking. Then we can experience the outworking of Jehovah's prophecy through Isaiah, which states: "Your eyes must become eyes seeing your Grand Instructor. And your own ears will hear a word behind you saying: 'This

is the way. Walk in it, you people,' in case you people should go to the right or in case you should go to the left."—Isaiah 30:20, 21; 48:17.

Of course, this does not mean that when we are faced with a weighty decision, a literal voice will tell us what to do. Nevertheless, when our thinking is attuned to God's thinking on matters, our conscience will be better equipped to help us make decisions that will please him.—Proverbs 27:11.

Consider Joseph, who lived during the 18th century B.C.E. When Potiphar's wife urged him to commit adultery with her, Joseph refused, saying: "How could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9) In Joseph's day, there was no written law from God condemning the act of adultery. Furthermore, Joseph was living in Egypt, far from family discipline or patriarchal rules. What, then, enabled Joseph to resist temptation? Put simply, it was his trained conscience. Joseph adopted God's view that a husband and wife were to be "one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) He saw that it would therefore be wrong to take another man's wife. Joseph's thinking was attuned to God's thinking on the matter. Adultery violated his moral sense.

Today, there are few people like Joseph. Sexual immorality is rampant, and many feel no responsibility to their Creator, to themselves, or even to their spouses to remain morally clean. The situation is much like that described in the book of Jeremiah: "There was not a man repenting over his badness, saying, 'What have I done?' Each one is going back into the popular course, like a horse that is dashing into the battle." (Jeremiah 8:6) Thus, there is a greater need than ever for us to be attuned to God's thinking. We have a marvelous provision to help us do so.

An Aid to Training the Conscience

The inspired Scriptures are “beneficial for teaching, for reproofing, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) A study of the Bible will help us to train what the Bible calls our “perceptive powers,” in order to distinguish right from wrong. (Hebrews 5:14) It will enable us to develop a love for the things that God loves and a loathing for the things that he hates.—Psalm 97:10; 139:21.

The goal of Bible study, then, is to get the spirit and substance of the truth rather than just the technical framework. In its issue of September 1, 1976, *The Watchtower* stated: “In our study of the Scriptures we should endeavor to capture a sense of God’s justice, love and righteousness and implant these deep into our hearts so that they become as much a part of us as eating and breathing. We should try to awaken more fully to a sense of moral responsibility by cultivating a keen awareness of what is right and what is wrong. More than this, we should make our conscience feel strongly its responsibility toward the perfect Law-Giver and Judge. (Isa. 33:22) So while learning things about God, we should be trying to imitate him in every aspect of life.”

Acquiring “the Mind of Christ”

A study of the Bible will also help us to obtain “the mind of Christ,” the mental disposition of obedience and humility that was manifested by Jesus. (1 Corinthians 2:16) Doing his Father’s will was a joy, not simply a routine to be followed automatically, without thinking. His attitude was prophetically described by the psalmist David, who wrote: “To do your will, O my God, I have delighted,

and your law is within my inward parts.”* —Psalm 40:8.

Acquiring “the mind of Christ” is vital to training the conscience. When on earth as a perfect man, Jesus reflected his Father’s qualities and personality to the fullest extent possible within human limitations. Thus, he could say: “He that has seen me has seen the Father also.” (John 14:9) In every situation he faced on earth, Jesus did just what his Father wanted him to do. Therefore, when we study the life of Jesus, we are getting a clear picture of what Jehovah God is like.

We read that Jehovah is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness.” (Exodus 34:6) Time and again, Jesus manifested these qualities in dealing with his apostles. When they repeatedly argued over which one was greater, Jesus patiently taught them by word and by example that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your minister, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave.” (Matthew 20:26, 27) This is just one example to show that we can become attuned to God’s thinking by considering the life of Jesus.

The more we learn about Jesus, the better equipped we will be to imitate our heavenly Father, Jehovah. (Ephesians 5:1, 2) A conscience that is attuned to God’s thinking will steer us in the right direction. Jehovah promises those trusting in him: “I shall make you have insight and instruct you in the way you should go. I will give advice with my eye upon you.”—Psalm 32:8.

Benefiting From a Trained Conscience

Knowing the waywardness of imperfect humans, Moses warned the Israelites: “Apply your hearts to all the words that I am

* In his letter to the Hebrews, the apostle Paul applied the words of the 40th Psalm to Jesus Christ.—Hebrews 10:5-10.

speaking in warning to you today, that you may command your sons to take care to do all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 32: 46) We too must write God's law upon our hearts. If we do so, our conscience will be more likely to direct our steps and help us to make right decisions.

Of course, we must be careful. The Bible proverb says: "There exists a way that is upright before a man, but the ways of death are the end of it afterward." (Proverbs 14: 12) Why is this often the case? Because, as

Compass: Courtesy, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Mass.

the Bible puts it: "The heart is more treacherous than anything else and is desperate. Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) Therefore, there is a need for all of us to follow the admonition of Proverbs 3:5, 6: "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he himself will make your paths straight."

***Like a compass, a Bible-trained conscience
can point us in the right direction***



KEEP SAFE AS PART OF GOD'S ORGANIZATION

"The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. Into it the righteous runs and is given protection."—PROVERBS 18:10

SHORTLY before he died, Jesus prayed to his heavenly Father in behalf of his followers. With loving concern, he said: "I have given your word to them, but the world has hated them, because they are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world. I request you, not to take them out of the world, but to watch over them because of the wicked one." (John 17:14, 15) Jesus knew that the world would be a dangerous place for Christians. It would show its hatred of them by lying about them and persecuting them. (Matthew 5:11, 12; 10:16, 17) It would also be a source of corruption.

—2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:15, 16.

² The world that would hate Christians is made up of those who are alienated from God and who are under the control of Satan. (1 John 5:19) This world is far bigger than the Christian congregation, and Satan himself is far more powerful than any human. Hence, the world's hatred is a real threat. Where can Jesus' followers find spiritual safety? A statement in the December 1, 1922, issue of *The Watchtower* suggested the answer: "We are now in the evil day. The fight is on between Satan's organization and God's organization. It is a desperate fight." In this conflict, God's organization is a place

of spiritual safety. The word "organization" does not appear in the Bible, and back in the 1920's, "God's organization" was a new expression. What, then, is this organization? And how may we find protection in it?

Jehovah's Organization

³ An organization is "an organized body," according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. With that in mind, we understand that because the apostles organized first-century Christians into local congregations under the oversight of a governing body in Jerusalem, it is proper to speak of that "association of brothers" as an organization. (1 Peter 2:17) Jehovah's Witnesses today have a similar organizational structure. The unity of the first-century body was strengthened by "gifts in men," such as "shepherds and teachers." Some of these traveled from congregation to congregation, while others were elders in local congregations. (Ephesians 4:8, 11, 12; Acts 20:28) Similar "gifts" strengthen the unity of Jehovah's Witnesses today.

⁴ The November 1, 1922, issue of *The Watchtower* said about the word "organization": "An organization is an association of persons for the purpose of carrying out a

1. According to Jesus' prayer, what difficult situation are Christians in?
2. Where can Christians find a place of spiritual safety?

3, 4. (a) According to one dictionary and *The Watchtower*, what is an organization? (b) In what sense can the international fellowship of Jehovah's Witnesses be called an organization?

formed design." *The Watchtower* went on to explain that to call Jehovah's Witnesses an organization did not make them "a sect in the sense that that term is used, but it means merely that the Bible Students [Jehovah's Witnesses] are endeavoring to carry out God's purposes and doing it as the Lord does everything, in an orderly manner." (1 Corinthians 14:33) The apostle Paul showed that Christians in his day likewise acted in an orderly fashion. He compared the anointed Christian fellowship to the human body, which has many parts, each fulfilling its assigned role so that the body can function properly. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26) That is an excellent illustration of an organization! Why were Christians organized? To serve "God's purposes," to do Jehovah's will.

⁵ The Bible foretold that true Christians today would be united, brought together into one "land" as one "nation," where they would be "shining as illuminators in the world." (Isaiah 66:8; Philippians 2:15) This organized "nation" now numbers more than five and a half million. (Isaiah 60:8-10, 22) However, that is not the full extent of God's organization. Angels are also involved.

⁶ There are many instances of angels working together with God's human servants. (Genesis 28:12; Daniel 10:12-14; 12:1; Hebrews 1:13, 14; Revelation 14:14-16) Interestingly, then, the May 15, 1925, issue of *The Watchtower* said: "All holy angels are a part of God's organization." Additionally, it said: "At the head of God's organization, possessing all power and authority, [is] the Lord Jesus Christ." (Matthew 28:18) Hence, in its broadest sense, God's organization is made up of all those in heaven and on earth who work together to do God's will. (See

5. What is God's visible organization?
6. In its widest sense, who make up God's organization?

What Is God's Organization?

In Jehovah's Witnesses' literature, the expression "God's organization" is used in three ways.

[1] Jehovah's heavenly, invisible organization made up of faithful spirit creatures. This is called "Jerusalem above" in the Bible. —Galatians 4:26.

[2] Jehovah's human, visible organization. Today, this consists of the anointed remnant joined by the great crowd.

[3] Jehovah's universal organization. Today, this consists of Jehovah's heavenly organization together with his anointed, adopted sons on earth, who have a spiritual hope. In time, it will also include perfected humans on earth.

box.) What a wonderful privilege it is to be a part of this! And what a joy to look forward to the time when all living creatures, heavenly and earthly, will be organized to praise Jehovah God in unity! (Revelation 5: 13, 14) What, though, is the protection that God's organization supplies today?

Protected in God's Organization—How?

⁷ God's organization can help to guard us against Satan and his wiles. (Ephesians 6: 11) Satan pressures, persecutes, and tempts Jehovah's worshipers with just one goal in mind: to draw them away from 'the way in which they should walk.' (Isaiah 48:17; compare Matthew 4:1-11.) We can never completely avoid those attacks in this system of things. However, our close relationship with God and his organization strengthens and protects us and thus helps us to stay in "the way." As a result, we do not lose out with regard to our hope.

7. In what way does God's organization protect us?



**The finest spiritual food
is supplied through
Jehovah's organization**

signifies that we trust in Jehovah himself. (Psalm 20:1; 122:4) It means supporting his sovereignty, upholding his laws and principles, and having faith in his promises. (Psalm 8:1-9; Isaiah 50:10; Hebrews 11:6) It includes giving Jehovah exclusive devotion. Only

those who worship Jehovah in this way can say with the psalmist: "In [Jehovah] our heart rejoices; for in his holy name we have put our trust."—Psalm 33:21; 124:8.

¹⁰ Now all in God's visible organization say with Micah: "We, for our part, shall walk in the name of Jehovah our God to time indefinite, even forever." (Micah 4:5) The modern-day organization is gathered around "the Israel of God," which is called in the Bible "a people for his name." (Galatians 6:16; Acts 15:14; Isaiah 43:6, 7; 1 Peter 2:17) Hence, to be part of Jehovah's organization means to be part of a people who seek, and receive, protection in God's name.

¹¹ In addition, God's visible organization is a community of faith, an association of fellow believers who build up and encourage one another. (Proverbs 13:20; Romans 1:12) It is a place where Christian shepherds care for the sheep, encourage the sick and depressed, and seek to restore those who have fallen. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:2-4) "The faithful and discreet slave" provides "food at the proper time" through the organiza-

⁸ How does God's organization provide this protection? First, we have the unfailing support of Jehovah's spirit servants. When Jesus was under intense pressure, he was ministered to by an angel. (Luke 22:43) When under threat of death, Peter was miraculously saved by an angel. (Acts 12:6-11) While there are no such miracles today, Jehovah's people are promised angelic support in their preaching activity. (Revelation 14:6, 7) They often have strength beyond what is normal when facing difficult situations. (2 Corinthians 4:7) Moreover, they are conscious that "the angel of Jehovah is camping all around those fearing him, and he rescues them."—Psalm 34:7.

⁹ Jehovah's visible organization is also a protection. How? At Proverbs 18:10, we read: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. Into it the righteous runs and is given protection." This does not imply that merely repeating God's name provides protection. Rather, our taking refuge in God's name

8. How does Jehovah's invisible organization support his earthly servants?

9, 10. How can it be said that "the name of Jehovah is a strong tower," and how does this principle apply to God's organization as a whole?

11. In what specific ways does Jehovah's organization provide protection for those who are part of it?

tion. (Matthew 24:45) That “slave,” made up of anointed Christians, provides the very best of spiritually good things—accurate, Bible-based knowledge that can lead to everlasting life. (John 17:3) Thanks to guidance from the “slave,” Christians are helped to maintain high moral standards and to be “cautious as serpents and yet innocent as doves” in the dangerous environment that surrounds them. (Matthew 10:16) And they are helped always to have “plenty to do in the work of the Lord,” which is in itself a powerful protection.—1 Corinthians 15:58.

Who Are Part of God’s Organization?

¹² Since this protection is available to those who are part of God’s organization, whom does this include? Regarding the heavenly organization, there is no doubt as to the answer to this question. Satan and his angels are no longer in heaven. On the other hand, the faithful angels are still there “in general assembly.” The apostle John saw that during the last days, “the Lamb,” the cherubs (“the four living creatures”), and “many angels” would be in close proximity to God’s throne. With them would be the 24 elders—representing those anointed Christians who have already entered into their glorious heavenly inheritance. (Hebrews 12:22, 23; Revelation 5:6, 11; 12:7-12) All are clearly part of God’s organization. Among humans, though, things are not so simple.

¹³ Jesus said of some who would claim to follow him: “Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and expel demons in your name, and perform many powerful works in your name?’ And yet then I will confess to them: I never knew you! Get away from me, you

12. Who are identified as part of God’s heavenly organization?

13. How did Jesus identify those who are part of God’s organization and those who are not?

workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:22, 23) If someone is a worker of lawlessness, he is certainly no part of God’s organization, no matter what he claims, and no matter where he goes to worship. Jesus also showed how to identify one who *is* part of God’s organization. He said: “Not everyone saying to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of my Father who is in the heavens will.”—Matthew 7:21.

¹⁴ Hence, to be part of God’s organization—of which “the kingdom of the heavens” is the central part—one has to be doing God’s will. What is his will? Paul identified a vital aspect of it when he said: “[God’s] will is that all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) If a person truly seeks to gain accurate knowledge from the Bible, to apply it in his life, and to disseminate it to “all sorts of men,” he is doing God’s will. (Matthew 28:19, 20; Romans 10:13-15) It is also God’s will that Jehovah’s sheep be fed and cared for. (John 21:15-17) Christian meetings play a vital part in this. A person who is free to attend such meetings but neglects to do so lacks appreciation for his place in God’s organization.—Hebrews 10:23-25.

Friendship With the World

¹⁵ Some 30 years after Jesus died, his half brother James identified some factors that can jeopardize one’s place in God’s organization. He wrote: “Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world

14. What aspects of God’s will are identified as being obligatory upon those who are part of God’s organization?

15. What warning did James give to congregations of his day?

is constituting himself an enemy of God.” (James 4:4) An enemy of God is certainly no part of his organization. What, then, is friendship with the world? It has been explained as taking different forms, such as cultivating or becoming involved with bad associations. In addition, James focused on something very specific—wrong mental attitudes that lead to improper conduct.

¹⁶ At James 4:1-3, we read: “From what source are there wars and from what source are there fights among you? Are they not from this source, namely, from your cravings for sensual pleasure that carry on a conflict in your members? You desire, and yet you do not have. You go on murdering and coveting, and yet you are not able to obtain. You go on fighting and waging war. You do not have because of your not asking. You do ask, and yet you do not receive, because you are asking for a wrong purpose, that you may expend it upon your cravings for sensual pleasure.” It was after writing these words that James warned against friendship with the world.

¹⁷ Centuries after James died, false Chris-

16. What was the context of James’ warning that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

17. In what way were there “wars” and “fights” in the first-century Christian congregation?

Can You Explain?

- What is God’s visible organization?
- In what ways does God’s organization provide protection?
- Who are part of God’s organization?
- How can we avoid being friends of the world?

tians waged war on and murdered one another in a literal sense. However, James was writing to first-century members of “the Israel of God,” prospective heavenly ‘priests and kings.’ (Revelation 20:6) They did not murder one another or kill one another in literal wars. So why did James speak of such things among Christians? Well, the apostle John called anyone hating his brother a manslayer. And Paul spoke of personality conflicts and feuds in the congregations as “fights” and “strife.” (Titus 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:14; 1 John 3:15-17) Along this same line, James apparently had in mind a failure to love fellow Christians. Among themselves, Christians were acting in a manner resembling the way those in the world often deal with one another.

¹⁸ Why did such things happen in Christian congregations? Because of wrong attitudes, such as covetousness and “cravings for sensual pleasure.” Pride, jealousy, and ambition can also rupture the loving Christian fellowship in a congregation. (James 3:6, 14) Such attitudes make one a friend of the world and, hence, an enemy of God. None who harbor attitudes like these can expect to remain a part of God’s organization.

¹⁹ Whom can we blame if we find wrong thinking taking root in our heart? Satan? To a degree, yes. He is “the ruler of the authority of the air” of this world, in which such attitudes are widespread. (Ephesians 2:1, 2; Titus 2:12) Usually, though, the roots of wrong thinking lie in our own imperfect flesh. After warning against friendship with the world, James wrote: “Does it seem

18. What can lead to unloving actions and feelings among Christians?

19. (a) Who primarily is to blame if a Christian finds that wrong thinking is taking root in his heart? (b) How can a Christian overcome wrong thinking?

to you that the scripture says to no purpose: ‘It is with a tendency to envy that the spirit which has taken up residence within us keeps longing?’” (James 4:5) All of us have an inborn tendency to do wrong. (Genesis 8:21; Romans 7:18-20) We can, though, combat that tendency if we admit our weaknesses and rely on Jehovah’s help to overcome them. James says: “The undeserved kindness which [God] gives is greater [than our inborn tendency to envy].” (James 4:6) Thanks to the help of God’s holy spirit and the support of faithful Christian brothers, and through the merit of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, faithful Christians are not conquered by the weaknesses of their flesh. (Romans 7:24, 25) They are safe in God’s organization, friends of God, not of the world.

²⁰ The Bible promises: “Jehovah himself will give strength indeed to his people. Jehovah himself will bless his people with peace.” (Psalm 29:11) If we are truly part of Jehovah’s modern-day “nation,” his visible organization, we will share in the strength that he gives and enjoy the peace with which he blesses his people. True, Satan’s world is much bigger than Jehovah’s visible organization, and Satan is much stronger than we are. But Jehovah is the Almighty. His active force is invincible. His mighty angels too are united with us in serving God. Thus, despite the hatred that we face, we can stand firm. Like Jesus, we can conquer the world.—John 16:33; 1 John 4:4.

20. What rich blessings are enjoyed by those who are part of God’s organization?

STAY CLOSE TO THE THEOCRACY

*“Jehovah is our Judge, Jehovah is our Statute-giver,
Jehovah is our King.”—ISAIAH 33:22.*

THE subject of government is of great concern to all. Good government brings peace and prosperity. The Bible says: “By justice a king makes a land keep standing.” (Proverbs 29:4) On the other hand, bad government leads to injustice, corruption, and oppression. “When anyone wicked bears rule, the people sigh.” (Proverbs 29:2) Throughout history, humans have tried many kinds of government, and sadly,

1. Why is government a matter of concern to most people?

they have often ‘sighed’ because of oppression by their rulers. (Ecclesiastes 8:9) Will any form of government succeed in bringing lasting contentment to its subjects?

² The historian Josephus mentioned a unique kind of government when he wrote: “Some peoples have entrusted the supreme political power to monarchies, others to oligarchies, yet others to the masses. Our lawgiver [Moses], however, was attracted by

2. Why is “theocracy” a good description of the government of ancient Israel?

none of these forms of polity, but gave to his constitution the form of what—if a forced expression be permitted—may be termed a ‘theocracy,’ placing all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God.” (*Against Apion*, II, 164-5) According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, theocracy means “a form of government by God.” The word does not appear in the Bible, but it well describes the government of ancient Israel. Although the Israelites came to have a visible king, their real ruler was Jehovah. The Israelite prophet Isaiah said: “Jehovah is our Judge, Jehovah is our Statute-giver, Jehovah is our King.”—Isaiah 33:22.

What Is True Theocracy?

³ Ever since Josephus coined the word, many societies have been described as theocracies. Some of them appeared intolerant, fanatic, and cruelly oppressive. Were they true theocracies? Not in the sense that Josephus used the word. The problem is that the meaning of “theocracy” has been extended. The *World Book Encyclopedia* defines it as “a form of government in which the state is ruled by a priest or priests, and in which members of the priesthood have authority in civil and religious matters.” True theocracy, however, is not government by priests. It really is God rule, government by the Creator of the universe, Jehovah God.

⁴ One day soon, the whole earth will be under theocracy, and what a blessing that will be! “God himself will be with [mankind]. And he will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore. The former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3, 4) No priestly rule by imperfect humans could bring such happiness. Only

^{3, 4. (a)} What is a true theocracy? ^(b) One day soon, what blessings will theocracy bring to all mankind?

God rule can. Hence, true Christians do not try to introduce theocracy by political action. They patiently wait for God to establish a worldwide theocracy in his own time and in his own way.—Daniel 2:44.

⁵ In the meantime, however, a true theocracy does operate. Where? Among those who voluntarily submit to God’s rule and cooperate together to do his will. Such faithful ones have been gathered as a worldwide spiritual “nation” on its spiritual “land.” They are the remaining ones of “the Israel of God” and their more than five and a half million Christian companions. (Isaiah 66:8; Galatians 6:16) These are subject to Jesus Christ, the heavenly King enthroned by Jehovah God, “the King of eternity.” (1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 11:15) In what way is this organization theocratic? How do its members view the authority of secular governments? And how is the principle of theocracy maintained by the humans who exercise authority within their spiritual community?

A Theocratic Organization

⁶ How can a human organization be ruled by Jehovah, who dwells in the invisible heavens? (Psalm 103:19) In that those associated with it follow the inspired counsel: “Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6; 3:5) They allow God to rule them as they observe “the law of the Christ” and apply inspired Bible principles in their day-to-day lives. (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21; 2 Timothy 3:16; see Matthew 5:22, 28, 39; 6:24, 33; 7:12, 21.) To do this, they have to be Bible students. (Psalm 1:1-3) Like the “noble-minded” Bereans of old, they do not follow humans but constantly verify in

5. Where does true theocracy operate today, and what questions are raised about it?

6. How can a visible, human organization be ruled by God?

the Bible the things that they are learning. (Acts 17:10, 11; Psalm 119:33-36) They pray like the psalmist: "Teach me goodness, sensibleness and knowledge themselves, for in your commandments I have exercised faith." —Psalm 119:66.

⁷ In every organization, there must be some who exercise authority or provide direction. Jehovah's Witnesses are no exception, and they observe the authority structure outlined by the apostle Paul: "The head of every man is the Christ; in turn the head of a woman is the man; in turn the head of the Christ is God." (1 Corinthians 11:3) In harmony with this, only qualified men serve as elders in the congregations. And although Jesus—"the head of every man"—is in heaven, there are still on earth "the remaining ones" of his anointed brothers, who have the hope of ruling with him in the heavens. (Revelation 12:17; 20:6) These make up the composite "faithful and discreet slave." Christians show their submission to Jesus, and therefore to Jesus' head, Jehovah, by accepting the oversight of that "slave." (Matthew 24:45-47; 25:40) In this way, the theocracy is orderly. "God is a God, not of disorder, but of peace." —1 Corinthians 14:33.

⁸ Christian elders support the principle of theocracy because they recognize that they are responsible to Jehovah for how they exercise their limited degree of authority. (Hebrews 13:17) And in making decisions, they rely on God's wisdom, not their own. In this, they follow the example of Jesus. He was the wisest man who ever lived. (Matthew 12:42) Nevertheless, he told the Jews: "The Son cannot do a single thing of his own initiative, but only what he beholds the Father doing." (John 5:19) Elders also have the

7. What is the order of oversight in the theocracy?

8. How do Christian elders support the principle of theocracy?

same attitude as King David. He exercised weighty authority in a theocracy. Yet, he wanted to follow Jehovah's way, not his own. He prayed: "Instruct me, O Jehovah, in your way, and lead me in the path of uprightness." —Psalm 27:11.

⁹ Some have questioned whether it is fair that authority in the congregation is exercised only by qualified men or that some have a heavenly hope while others have an earthly hope. (Psalm 37:29; Philippians 3:20) Dedicated Christians, however, appreciate that these arrangements are outlined in the Word of God. They are theocratic. If they are questioned, it is usually by those who do not recognize Bible principles. Besides, Christians know that men and women are equal in Jehovah's eyes as far as salvation is concerned. (Galatians 3:28) For true Christians, to be worshipers of the Sovereign of the universe is the highest possible privilege, and they are happy to occupy whatever role Jehovah outlines for them. (Psalm 31:23; 84:10; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, 18) Moreover, everlasting life, whether it be in heaven or on a paradise earth, is a truly wonderful hope.

¹⁰ Thus, Jehovah's Witnesses resemble Jonathan, the God-fearing son of King Saul. Jonathan would likely have made an excellent king. However, because of Saul's unfaithfulness, Jehovah chose David to be the second king of Israel. Was Jonathan embittered by this? No. He became a good friend of David and even protected him from Saul. (1 Samuel 18:1; 20:1-42) In a similar way, those with an earthly hope are not jealous of those with a heavenly hope. And true

9. Regarding the different hopes and different privileges of service in the theocracy, what balanced view do dedicated Christians have?

10. (a) What fine attitude did Jonathan display? (b) How do Christians today show an attitude similar to that of Jonathan?

Christians are not jealous of those exercising theocratic authority in the congregation. Rather, they "give them more than extraordinary consideration in love," recognizing their hard work in behalf of their spiritual brothers and sisters.—1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13.

The Theocratic View of Secular Rule

¹¹ If Jehovah's Witnesses are under theocracy, God rule, how do they view national rulers? Jesus said that his followers would be "no part of the world." (John 17:16) However, Christians recognize their debt to "Caesar," secular governments. Jesus said that they should "pay back . . . Caesar's things to Caesar, but God's things to God." (Matthew 22:21) According to the Bible, human governments "stand placed in their relative positions by God." Jehovah, the Source of all authority, permits governments to exist, and he expects them to do good to those under their jurisdiction. When they do so, they are "God's minister." Christians are subject to the government of the land in which they live "on account of [their] conscience." (Romans 13:1-7) Of course, if the state should demand something contrary to God's law, the Christian would "obey God as ruler rather than men."—Acts 5:29.

¹² What about when true Christians are persecuted by governmental authorities? Then they follow the example of the early Christians, who endured periods of great persecution. (Acts 8:1; 13:50) These tests of faith were not unexpected, since Jesus had warned that they would come. (Matthew 5:10-12; Mark 4:17) Yet, those early Christians did not retaliate against their persecutors; neither did their faith weaken under

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11. How do Christians submitting to theocratic rule view secular authorities?
 12. When Christians are persecuted by the authorities, whose example do they follow?

the pressure. Rather, they followed the example of Jesus: "When he was being reviled, he did not go reviling in return. When he was suffering, he did not go threatening, but kept on committing himself to the one who judges righteously." (1 Peter 2:21-23) Yes, Christian principles won out over the provocations of Satan.—Romans 12:21.

¹³ The same is true today. During this century, Jehovah's Witnesses have suffered greatly at the hands of despotic rulers—just as Jesus foretold. (Matthew 24:9, 13) In some lands, lies and misrepresentations are circulated by those trying to pressure the authorities to act against these sincere Christians. Still, despite such "bad report," the Witnesses by their fine conduct recommend themselves as God's ministers. (2 Corinthians 6:4, 8) When possible, they present their case to officials and before the courts of the land so as to demonstrate their innocence of wrongdoing. They use whatever avenues are open to them to make a public defense of the good news. (Philippians 1:7) But after they have done all they can within the law, they leave matters in Jehovah's hands. (Psalm 5:8-12; Proverbs 20:22) If need be, they, like the early Christians, are not afraid to suffer for the sake of righteousness.—1 Peter 3:14-17; 4:12-14, 16.

Put God's Glory First

¹⁴ When Jesus taught his followers to pray, the first thing he mentioned was the sanctification of Jehovah's name. (Matthew 6:9) In harmony with this, those living under theocracy seek God's glory, not their own. (Psalm 29:1, 2) The Bible reports that in the

13. How have Jehovah's Witnesses responded to persecution and slanderous campaigns against them?

14, 15. (a) What is foremost for those supporting the principle of theocracy? (b) On what occasion did Solomon set a fine example of humility in his position of oversight?



Solomon put God's glory ahead of his own

first century, this was a stumbling block for some who refused to follow Jesus because “they loved the glory of men,” they loved to be glorified by men. (John 12:42, 43) Indeed, it takes humility to put Jehovah ahead of one’s own self-importance.

¹⁵ Solomon showed a fine spirit in this regard. Compare his words at the dedication of the glorious temple that he had built with those of Nebuchadnezzar concerning his building exploits. With overweening pride, Nebuchadnezzar boasted: “Is not this Babylon the Great, that I myself have built for the royal house with the strength of my might and for the dignity of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30) In contrast, Solomon modestly downplayed his accomplishment, saying: “Will God truly dwell with mankind upon the earth? Look! Heaven, yes, the heaven of the heavens themselves, cannot contain you; how much less, then, this house that I have built?” (2 Chronicles 6:14, 15, 18; Psalm

127:1) Solomon did not exalt himself. He knew that he was merely a representative of Jehovah and wrote: “Has presumptuousness come? Then dishonor will come; but wisdom is with the modest ones.”—Proverbs 11:2.

¹⁶ Christian elders similarly exalt Jehovah, not themselves. They follow Peter’s counsel: “If anyone ministers, let him minister as dependent on the strength that God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 4:11) The apostle Paul described the “office of overseer,” not as an important position of prominence, but as “a fine work.” (1 Timothy 3:1) Elders are appointed to serve, not to rule. They are teachers and shepherds of God’s flock. (Acts 20:28; James 3:1) Humble, self-sacrificing elders are a true blessing to a congregation. (1 Peter 5:2, 3) “Keep holding men of that sort dear,”

16. How have elders proved to be a real blessing by not glorifying themselves?

and thank Jehovah that he has provided so many qualified elders to uphold theocracy in these “last days.”—Philippians 2:29; 2 Timothy 3:1.

“Become Imitators of God”

¹⁷ The apostle Paul urged: “Become imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1) Those subjecting themselves to theocracy try to be as much like God as is possible for imperfect humans. For example, the Bible says of Jehovah: “The Rock, perfect is his activity, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness, with whom there is no injustice; righteous and upright is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:3, 4) To imitate God in this regard, Christians seek faithfulness, righteousness, and a balanced sense of justice. (Micah 6:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 John 3:7) They avoid many things that have become acceptable in the world, such as immorality, covetousness, and greed. (Ephesians 5:5) Because Jehovah’s servants follow divine, not human, standards, his organization is theocratic, clean, and wholesome.

¹⁸ The preeminent quality of Jehovah God is love. “God is love,” the apostle John says. (1 John 4:8) Since theocracy means rule by God, it amounts to rule by love. Jesus said: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love among yourselves.” (John 13:35) The theocratic organization has shown outstanding love in these difficult last days. During the genocidal strife in Africa, Jehovah’s Witnesses displayed love toward all, no matter to which ethnic group they belonged. During the war in the former Yugoslavia, Jehovah’s Witnesses of all areas helped one another, while other religious groups shared in the so-called ethnic cleansing. On a personal level, Jehovah’s

17. In what ways do those under theocracy imitate God?

18. What is God’s preeminent quality, and how do Christians reflect this quality?

Witnesses strive to observe Paul’s counsel: “Let all malicious bitterness and anger and wrath and screaming and abusive speech be taken away from you along with all badness. But become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another just as God also by Christ freely forgave you.”—Ephesians 4:31, 32.

¹⁹ Those who submit to theocracy enjoy great blessings. They have peace with God and with fellow Christians. (Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17) They have a purpose in life. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) They have spiritual security and a sure hope for the future. (Psalm 59:9) Indeed, they enjoy a foretaste of what it will be like when all mankind is under theocratic rule. Then, the Bible says, “they will not do any harm or cause any ruin in all my holy mountain; because the earth will certainly be filled with the knowledge of Jehovah as the waters are covering the very sea.” (Isaiah 11:9) What a glorious time that will be! May we all make our place in that future Paradise sure by staying close now to the theocracy.

19. What blessings come both now and in the future to those submitting themselves to theocracy?

Can You Explain?

- What is real theocracy and where is it found today?
- How do humans submit to theocratic rule in their lives?
- In what ways do all under theocracy seek God’s glory ahead of their own?
- What are some godly qualities imitated by those who support theocracy?



BE SURE TO PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST!

It is meeting night, but you have work to do. What will you put first?

YOU are a husband and father. As a long, hard day at work draws to a close, your thoughts turn to the congregation meeting scheduled for the evening. If you leave work immediately, you will have just enough time to shower, change your clothes, and have a quick meal before leaving for the meeting. Suddenly, your employer approaches and asks you to work overtime. He promises to pay you well. You need the money.

Or you are a wife and mother. As you are preparing the evening meal, your eyes fall on a pile of unironed clothes, some of which will be needed tomorrow. You ask yourself, 'If I attend the meeting tonight, when will I have time to do the ironing?' Having recently taken a full-time job, you are learning how difficult it is to care for household duties while earning a living.

Or you are a student. In your room, your desk is piled high with homework. Most of it was assigned some time ago, but you have procrastinated, and now several as-

signments are due at once. You are tempted to ask for your parents' permission to stay home from the meeting to finish your homework.

Which would *you* put first: the extra secular work, the ironing, the homework, or the congregation meeting? What does it mean, spiritually speaking, to put first things first? What is Jehovah's view?

What Should Come First?

Shortly after the Israelites received the Ten Commandments, a man was discovered gathering wood on the Sabbath. This was strictly forbidden in the Law. (Numbers 15:32-34; Deuteronomy 5:12-15) How would you have judged the case? Would you have excused the man, arguing that, after all, he was not working to maintain a luxurious lifestyle but to provide the necessities for his family? Would you have pointed out that there would be many occasions throughout the year to observe the Sabbath and that one missed opportunity, perhaps because of the

man's failure to plan ahead, could easily be *forgiven*?

Jehovah viewed the case more seriously. "In time," the Bible states, "Jehovah said to Moses: 'Without fail the man should be put to death.'" (Numbers 15:35) Why did Jehovah feel so strongly about what the man did?

The people had six days to gather wood as well as to handle their needs regarding food, clothing, and shelter. The seventh day was to be devoted to their spiritual needs. While it was not wrong to gather wood, it was wrong to use time that should have been set aside to worship Jehovah to do so. Although Christians are not under the Mosaic Law, does this incident not teach us a lesson in properly setting our priorities today?—Philippians 1:10.

After spending 40 years in the wilderness, the Israelites got ready to enter the Promised Land. Some had tired of eating the divinely provided manna in the wilderness and were no doubt looking forward to a change in diet. To help them keep the proper viewpoint as they entered the land "flowing with milk and honey," Jehovah reminded them: "Not by bread alone does man live but by every expression of Jehovah's mouth does man live."—Exodus 3:8; Deuteronomy 8:3.

The Israelites would have to work hard for their "milk and honey." There were armies to defeat, houses to build, fields to plant. Even so, Jehovah commanded the people to set aside time each day to meditate on spiritual matters. They were also to take time to teach God's ways to their children. Jehovah said: "You must also teach [my commandments] to your sons, so as to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up."—Deuteronomy 11:19.

Three times a year every male Israelite and proselyte in the land was commanded to appear before Jehovah. Realizing that

the entire family would benefit spiritually from such occasions, many family heads arranged for their wife and children to accompany them. But who would protect their homes and their fields from enemy attack while the family was away? Jehovah promised: "Nobody will desire your land while you are going up to see the face of Jehovah your God three times in the year." (Exodus 34:24) It took faith for the Israelites to believe that if they put spiritual interests first, they would not lose out materially. Did Jehovah prove true to his word? He certainly did!

Keep Seeking First the Kingdom

Jesus taught his followers to put spiritual values ahead of everything else. In the Sermon on the Mount, he advised his listeners: "Never be anxious and say, 'What are we to eat?' or, 'What are we to drink?' or, 'What are we to put on?' Keep on . . . seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [necessary material] things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:31, 33) Soon after Jesus' death, newly baptized Christians followed that advice. Many were Jews or Jewish proselytes who had traveled to Jerusalem for the celebration of the festival of Pentecost in 33 C.E. While there, something unexpected occurred. They heard and embraced the good news about Jesus Christ. Eager to learn more about their newfound faith, they remained in Jerusalem. They ran low on provisions, but material comforts were of secondary importance. They had found the Messiah! Their Christian brothers shared what material things they had so that all could continue "devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and . . . to prayers."—Acts 2:42.

In time, some Christians lost sight of the need for regular fellowship at meetings. (Hebrews 10:23-25) Perhaps they became materialistic, neglecting spiritual matters while

trying to ensure financial security for themselves and their families. After urging his brothers not to forsake the meetings, the apostle Paul wrote: "Let your manner of life be free of the love of money, while you are content with the present things. For he has said: 'I will by no means leave you nor by any means forsake you.'"—Hebrews 13:5.

Paul's advice turned out to be very timely. About five years after Paul wrote his letter to the Hebrews, the Roman army of Cestius Gallus surrounded Jerusalem. Faithful Christians remembered Jesus' warning: "When you catch sight of [this] . . . , let the man on the housetop not come down, nor go inside to take anything out of his house; and let the man in the field not return to the things behind to pick up his outer garment." (Mark 13:14-16) They knew that their survival depended, not upon the stability of their employment or the value of their material possessions, but upon their obedience to Jesus' instructions. Those who had responded to Paul's counsel and put spiritual interests first doubtless found it easier to leave behind home, job, clothes, and treasured personal effects and flee to the mountains than did any who had not broken free of the love of money.

How Some Put First Things First Today

Faithful Christians today cherish regular association with their brothers, and many make sacrifices so as to attend meetings. In certain localities, the only available employment involves shift work. One brother offers to replace his workmates on Saturday nights, which most people in his community prefer to use for recreation, if they in turn will work his shift on meeting nights. Other brothers who are shift workers attend the meetings of a nearby congregation if their work prevents them from attending

their own. In this way, they almost never miss a meeting. A newly interested person in Canada quickly realized the importance of the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting, but her schedule at work interfered with her attendance. Hence, she paid a fellow worker to cover her shift so that she could be free to attend these important meetings.

Many who suffer from chronic illness rarely miss a meeting. They listen to the program at home by means of a telephone hookup or a tape recording when they are unable to be present at the Kingdom Hall. They show commendable appreciation for Jehovah's spiritual provisions through his "faithful and discreet slave"! (Matthew 24:45) Christians serving as caregivers to their elderly parents truly appreciate it when a brother or a sister offers to stay with the parent so that the caregiver may attend a congregation meeting.

Plan Ahead!

Parents who are conscious of their own spiritual needs help their children to appreciate Christian meetings. As a general rule, they expect their children to do their homework as it is assigned rather than allow assignments to accumulate. On meeting nights the children do their homework as soon as they return home from school. Hobbies and other activities are not permitted to interfere with congregation meetings.

As a husband and father, do you give meeting attendance priority? As a wife and mother, do you try to plan your responsibilities to leave room for the meetings? As a teenager, do you schedule your homework around the meetings or the meetings around your homework?

A congregation meeting is a loving provision of Jehovah. Every effort should be made to share in that arrangement. Jehovah will richly bless you if you put first things first!

SOME cities become famous—or notorious—for events that take place within them. Bethel, however, is unusual in that it became known for both good and bad. The patriarch Jacob named the city Bethel, which means “House of God.” But a thousand years later, the prophet Hosea called the city the “House of Hurtfulness.” How did this city change from good to bad? And what can we learn from its history?

Bethel’s association with God’s people began in 1943 B.C.E. when Abraham was still alive. At that time, the city was known as Luz, its original Canaanite name. It was situated in the hill country, some 11 miles north of Jerusalem. Picture Abraham and his nephew Lot looking down on the fertile plains of the lower Jordan Valley from a vantage point high in the mountains around Bethel. Tactfully, Abraham brings to Lot’s attention the difficulty of assigning grazing areas for their large flocks: “Please, do not let any quarreling continue between me and you and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we men are brothers. Is not the whole land available to you? Please, separate from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; but if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.”—Genesis 13:3-11.

Abraham did not assert his right to choose first. Rather, he allowed the younger man to take the choice portion. We can imitate Abraham’s fine attitude. We can defuse contentious issues by taking the initiative in speaking calmly and acting unselfishly.—Romans 12:18.

Years later when Abraham’s grandson Jacob camped at Luz, he had an extraordinary dream. He saw “a ladder stationed upon the earth and its top reaching up to the heavens; and, look! there were God’s angels ascending and descending on it. And, look! there was Jehovah stationed above it.” (Genesis 28:11-19; compare John 1:51.) The dream had an important significance. The angels that Ja-

BETHEL A City of Good and Bad

cob saw would minister to him in fulfilling the promise God made to him regarding his seed. Jehovah’s elevated position above the ladder showed that he would direct the angels in this work.

This assurance of divine support moved Jacob deeply. Upon awakening from the dream, he called the place Bethel, meaning “House of God,” and vowed to Jehovah: “As for everything that you will give me I shall without fail give the tenth of it to you.”* (Genesis 28:20-22) Recognizing that everything he had came from God, he desired to give back a generous portion as a token of his gratitude.

Christians today also have angels ministering in their behalf. (Psalm 91:11; Hebrews 1:14) They too can show their appreciation for all their blessings by being “rich with many expressions of thanks to God.”—2 Corinthians 9:11, 12.

In time, Jacob’s descendants became a nation. Their leader Joshua defeated the pagan king of Bethel fairly early in the conquest of Canaan. (Joshua 12:16) During the time of the Judges, the prophetess Deborah lived near Bethel and related Jehovah’s word to the people. Samuel too visited Bethel regularly as he judged the nation of Israel.—Judges 4:4, 5; 1 Samuel 7:15, 16.

Bethel Becomes a Center of Apostasy

But Bethel’s association with pure worship ceased after the division of the King-

* Both Jacob and Abraham voluntarily offered tithes.



Ruins on the site of Bethel, where Jeroboam established a center for calf worship

dom in 997 B.C.E. King Jeroboam set up Bethel as a center for calf worship, the calf supposedly representing Jehovah. (1 Kings 12:25-29) That is why, when prophesying Bethel's destruction, Hosea referred to it as "Beth-aven," which means "House of Hurtfulness."—Hosea 10:5, 8.

Although Bethel had become a center of spiritual hurtfulness, events connected with it continued to provide important lessons. (Romans 15:4) One such lesson concerns an unnamed prophet who was sent from Judah to Bethel to foretell the destruction of its altars and priests. Jehovah also told him to return to Judah—just a few miles to the south—with eating or drinking. This prophet boldly uttered a prophecy before Jeroboam, king of Israel, calling down evil upon the altar of Bethel. But then he disobeyed God by eating at the house of an old prophet in Bethel. Why? The old prophet falsely claimed that an angel of Jehovah had ordered him to offer hospitality to a fellow prophet. The disobedience of the prophet from Judah led to his untimely death.—1 Kings 13:1-25.

If a fellow believer suggests that we do something that seems questionable, how should we react? Remember that even well-intentioned advice can be harmful if it is wrong. (Compare Matthew 16:21-23.) By seeking direction from Jehovah through prayer and study of his Word, we will avoid

the tragic mistake of the unnamed prophet.—Proverbs 19:21; 1 John 4:1.

Some 150 years later, the prophet Amos also made the trip north to prophesy against Bethel. Amos firmly denounced his hostile audience, including the priest Amaziah, who haughtily told Amos to 'run his way off to the land of Judah.' But Amos fearlessly told Amaziah of the calamities that would come upon the priest's own household. (Amos 5:4-6; 7:10-17) His example reminds us that Jehovah can embolden his humble ministers.—1 Corinthians 1:26, 27.

Eventually, faithful King Josiah of Judah pulled down 'the altar that was in Bethel, burned the high place, ground it to dust, and burned the sacred pole.' (2 Kings 23:15, 16) Elders today can imitate his fine example by zealously following through on God's instructions and by taking the lead in keeping the congregation clean.

These incidents in Bethel's history graphically portray the consequences of righteousness and wickedness, of obeying and disobeying Jehovah. Years earlier, Moses had put this choice before the nation of Israel: "I do put before you today life and good, and death and bad." (Deuteronomy 30:15, 16) Meditating on Bethel's history will encourage us to identify ourselves with the "House of God," a place of true worship, rather than with the "House of Hurtfulness."



I LEARNED TO RELY ON JEHOVAH

AS TOLD BY JÁN KORPA-ONDO

It was 1942, and I was being guarded by Hungarian soldiers near Kursk, Russia. We were prisoners of the Axis powers that were battling the Russians during World War II. My grave was dug, and I was given ten minutes to decide if I would sign a document that said I was no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Before I relate what happened next, let me tell you how I came to be there.

I WAS born in 1904 in the small village of Zahor, which now lies in eastern Slovakia. Following World War I, Zahor became part of the newly formed country of Czechoslovakia. Our village consisted of about 200 homes and two churches, one Greek Catholic and the other Calvinist.

Even though I went to the Calvinist Church, I led a life without any moral restraint. Not far from me lived a man who was quite different. One day he started a conversation with me and lent me a Bible. It was the first time I held that book in my hands. About this time, in 1926, I married Barbora, and we soon had two children, Barbora and Ján.

I started to read the Bible, but there were many things I did not understand. So I went to my pastor and asked him to help me. "The Bible is only for educated people," he said, "don't even try to understand it." Then he invited me for a game of cards.

After that I went to the man who had lent me the Bible. He was a Bible Student, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then called. He was happy to help me, and after some time my eyes began to open. I stopped excessive drinking and started to lead a moral life; I even began to talk to others about Jehovah. Bible truth had taken hold in Zahor in the early 1920's, and soon an active group of Bible Students was established.

Nevertheless, there was strong religious opposition. The local priest turned most of my family against me, claiming that I had gone insane. But my life started to have a purpose, and I resolutely decided to serve the true God, Jehovah. Thus, in 1930, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah and was baptized.

Beginning of Severe Tests

In 1938, our region came under rule by Hungary, which sided with Germany during World War II. By then we had about 50 Witnesses in our village of less than a thousand people. We continued to preach even though doing so put our lives and freedom in jeopardy.

In 1940, I was drafted into the Hungarian army. What would I do? Well, I had read the Bible prophecies about people beating their weapons of war into implements of peace, and I knew that, in time, God would eliminate all wars from the earth. (Psalm 46:9; Isaiah 2:4) Thus, I had come to hate war, and I decided not to join the army, regardless of the consequences.

I was sentenced to 14 months in prison and served my sentence in Pécs, Hungary. Five other Witnesses were in the same prison, and we appreciated being able to associate. For a time, however, I was in solitary confinement with chains on my feet. When we refused to do work connected with the war effort, we were beaten. Also, we were forced to stand at attention all day long, except for two hours at noon. This ordeal went on for months. Yet we were happy because we had a clean conscience before our God.

The Question of Compromise

One day a group of 15 Catholic priests came to try to convince us that it was important that we support the war effort by joining the army. During the discussion we said: "If you can prove from the Bible that the soul is immortal and that we will go to heaven if we die in the war, we will join the army." Of course, they could not prove that, and they did not want to continue the discussion.

In 1941 my prison sentence ended, and I was looking forward to rejoining my family. Instead, I was taken in chains to an army base in Sárospatak, Hungary. When we arrived, an opportunity was provided for me

The Kingdom Hall in Zahor



to be released. "All you need to do," I was told, "is sign this promise that you will pay 200 pengő when you return home." "How is that possible?" I asked. "What do you want the money for?" "In return for the money," I was told, "you will receive certification that you did

*I appreciate the privilege
of commenting at the
Watchtower Study*

not pass the medical examination for the army."

This posed a difficult decision for me. For more than a year, I had suffered inhuman treatment; I was getting tired. Now, by agreeing to pay some money, I could be free. "I will think about it," I murmured.

What decision would I make? I had my wife and children to think about. Well, about that time I received a letter from a fellow Christian in which he provided encouragement. He quoted Hebrews 10:38, where the apostle Paul quotes Jehovah's words: "My righteous one will live by reason of faith," and, "if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." Shortly thereafter, two Hungarian officers at the barracks spoke with me, one remarking: "You don't know how much we respect you for upholding Bible principles so firmly! Do not give up!"

The next day I went to those who offered me my freedom for 200 pengő and said: "Since Jehovah God allowed me to be imprisoned, he will also take care of my release. I will not buy myself out." So I was sentenced to ten years in prison. But that was not the end of the attempts to get me to compromise. The court offered to pardon me if I would agree to serve in the army for only two months, and I would not even have to carry a weapon! I turned down that offer too, and my prison sentence began.



The Persecution Increases

I was again taken to the prison in Pécs. This time the torture was even more severe. My hands were tied behind my back, and I was hung by them for about two hours. As a result, both my shoulders were dislocated. Such torture was repeated over a period of about six months. I can thank only Jehovah that I did not give up.

In 1942 a group of us—political prisoners, Jews, and 26 of Jehovah's Witnesses—were taken to the city of Kursk in an area occupied by German troops. We were handed over to the Germans, and they put the prisoners to work carrying food, arms, and clothing to soldiers at the front. We Witnesses refused the work because it violated our Christian neutrality. As a result, we were returned to the Hungarians.

Eventually, we were put in the local prison in Kursk. For several days we were beaten three times a day with rubber clubs.

I received a blow to my temple and was knocked to my knees. As I was being hit, I thought, 'Dying is not so difficult.' My whole body became numb, so I could not feel a thing. For three days we were given absolutely nothing to eat. Then we were taken to court, and six were sentenced to death. When the sentence was carried out, 20 of us remained.

The tests of faith experienced during those days in Kursk in October of 1942 were the greatest I have ever faced. Our sentiments were well expressed by King Jehoshaphat of old when his people faced overwhelming odds: "In us there is no power before this large crowd that is coming against us; and we ourselves do not know what we ought to do, but our eyes are toward you."—2 Chronicles 20:12.

The 20 of us were taken out to dig our common grave, being guarded by 18 Hungarian soldiers. When we finished digging, we were told that we had ten minutes to sign a document, which read in part: "The teaching of Jehovah's Witnesses is wrong. I will no longer believe it or support it. I will fight for the Hungarian homeland . . . I confirm with my signature that I am joining the Roman Catholic Church."

After the ten minutes came the order: "Right turn! March to the grave!" Then, the command: "First and third prisoners get into the hole!" These two were given another ten minutes to decide to sign the document. One of the soldiers pleaded: "Give up your faith and come out of the grave!" Nobody said a word. Then the officer in charge shot them both.

"What about the rest of them?" a soldier asked the officer in charge.

"Tie them up," he answered. "We will torture them some more and shoot them at six o'clock in the morning."

Suddenly I became afraid, not that I would die, but that I would not be able to endure the torture and would compromise. So I stepped forward and said: "Sir, we have transgressed the same as our brothers whom you have just shot. Why don't you shoot us too?"

But they did not. We were tied up with our hands behind our backs. Then we were hung by our hands. When we lost consciousness, they would throw water over us. The pain was terrible because the weight of the body dislocated our shoulders. This torture continued for about three hours. Then, suddenly, an order came not to shoot any more of Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Move to the East —Then Escape

Three weeks later we were marched in formation for a few days until we reached the banks of the Don River. We were told by those in charge that we were not to be brought back alive. During the day, we were given purposeless work, digging trenches and then filling them up. In the evening, we had a certain amount of freedom to move around.

As I looked at it, there were two possibilities. We could die right there, or we could escape from the Germans and surrender to

In Our Next Issue

Are You Awake to Our Times?

Times and Seasons in
Jehovah's Hands

Is God Real to You?

the Russians. Only three of us decided to try to escape across the frozen Don River. On December 12, 1942, we prayed to Jehovah and took off. We reached the Russian front and were immediately put in a prison camp with about 35,000 prisoners. By spring, only about 2,300 prisoners were still alive. The rest had died of starvation.

Freedom but Further Tragedy

I survived the rest of the war, including several months after it ended, as a Russian prisoner. Finally, in November 1945, I made it home to Zahor. Our farm was in bad shape, so I had to start all over again. My wife and children had worked the farm during the war, but in October 1944, as the Russians approached, they were evacuated to the east. Everything we owned had been looted.

Worst of all, when I returned home, my wife was very sick. In February 1946, she died. She was only 38 years old. We had so little time in which to enjoy our reunion after more than five long, difficult years of separation.

I found comfort among my spiritual brothers, attending the meetings and sharing in the house-to-house ministry. In 1947, I was able to borrow some money to travel to Brno, a trip of about 250 miles, to attend a convention. There among my Christian brothers, including Nathan H. Knorr, then president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, I received much consolation and encouragement.

We did not enjoy our postwar freedom for long. In 1948 the Communists began to oppress us. Many of the brothers taking the lead in the work of Jehovah's Witnesses in Czechoslovakia were arrested in 1952, and I was given the responsibility to care for

the congregations. In 1954, I too was apprehended, and I was sentenced to four years in prison. My son, Ján, and his son Juraj were also imprisoned for maintaining their Christian neutrality. I spent two years in the Pankrác state penitentiary in Prague. An amnesty was declared in 1956, and I was released.

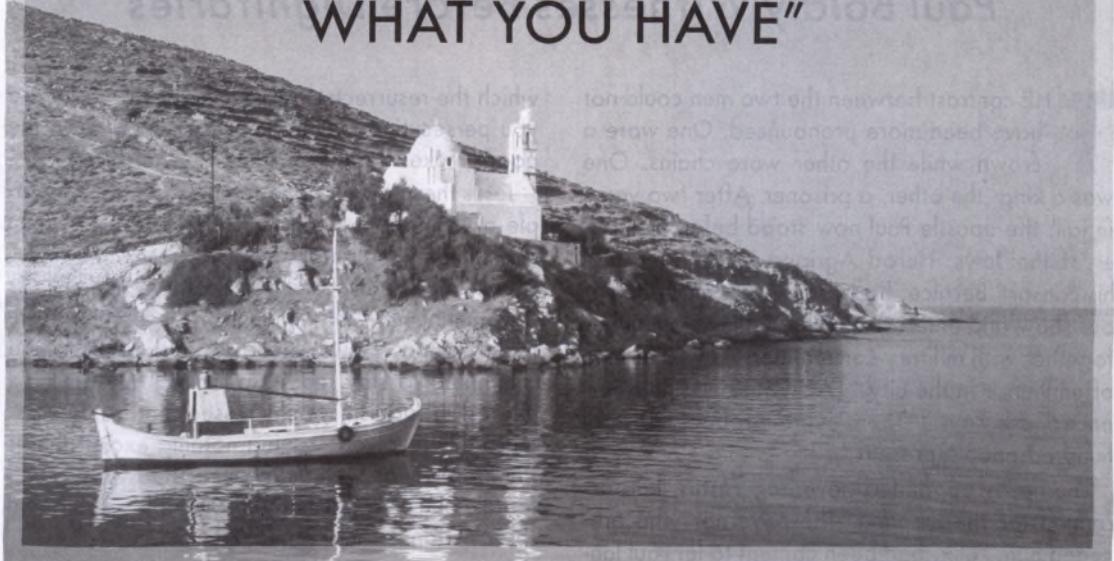
Freedom at Last!

Finally, in 1989, Communism lost its grip on Czechoslovakia, and the work of Jehovah's Witnesses was legally registered. Thus, we were free to meet together and to preach openly. By that time Zahor had nearly a hundred Witnesses, which meant that about 1 out of every 10 persons in the village was a Witness. A few years ago, we built a beautiful, spacious Kingdom Hall in Zahor, with a seating capacity of about 200.

My health is no longer very good, so the brothers drive me to the Kingdom Hall. I find pleasure in being there and enjoy giving comments at the *Watchtower* Study. I am especially happy to see representatives of three generations of my family serving Jehovah, including several of the grandchildren. One of these served as a traveling overseer of Jehovah's Witnesses in Czechoslovakia until his family responsibilities prevented him from meeting the schedule.

I am thankful to Jehovah for strengthening me during my many times of test. Keeping my attention focused on him—"as seeing the One who is invisible"—is what has sustained me. (Hebrews 11:27) Yes, I have felt his mighty hand of deliverance. That is why, even now, I continue to try to be present at congregation meetings and to share in declaring his name in the public ministry to the extent that I am able.

**"HOLD ON TO
WHAT YOU HAVE"**



▲ group of Witnesses were preaching on or

A group of Witnesses were preaching on one of about 30 islands making up the Cyclades Islands of Greece. As two of them made their way down the street, they met a policeman who told them to follow him to the police station. Shortly after they arrived at the police station, the telephone rang. It was the village priest. "I heard that there are Jehovah's Witnesses in the village," he said. "Yes, I have two here," the policeman replied. "I'll be right down." From the tone of the conversation, the brothers became somewhat apprehensive.

them that he was acquainted with many Witnesses in Syros and that he had been reading the Watchtower and Awake! magazines for many years. In fact, on a number of occasions he has taken a Watchtower magazine, hidden it in a folder, and used it to give his sermon in church. He remarked: "I

Upon his arrival, however, the priest smiled, shook their hands, and sat down on the chair next to the policeman. As the discussion proceeded, the policeman became contentious while the priest remained reasonable and courteous. He told the policeman not to belittle the Witnesses, and he added: "They can answer any question because they receive training in the Theocratic Ministry School. It would be easier to shake the world off its foundation than to change the faith of one of Jehovah's Witnesses."

While preaching the following morning, the brothers encountered the priest again and asked: "Why were you so friendly to us during the discussion at the police station?" The priest told

them that he was acquainted with many Witnesses in Syros and that he had been reading the Watchtower and Awake! magazines for many years. In fact, on a number of occasions he has taken a Watchtower magazine, hidden it in a folder, and used it to give his sermon in church. He remarked: "I don't think life would be worth living if I didn't have your literature. That is what keeps me going."

Later, the priest told the Witnesses: "I must tell you one thing. Hold on to what you have. Don't make a mistake and leave it. What I am telling you now is the best sermon I've ever given, and I am not just saying it with my mouth; I mean it with all my heart." *et in*

Paul Boldly Witnesses Before Dignitaries

THE contrast between the two men could not have been more pronounced. One wore a crown while the other wore chains. One was a king; the other, a prisoner. After two years in jail, the apostle Paul now stood before the ruler of the Jews, Herod Agrippa II. The king and his consort, Bernice, had come "with much pompous show and entered into the audience chamber together with military commanders as well as men of eminence in the city." (Acts 25:23) One reference work says: "There were probably several hundred people present."

The newly appointed governor, Festus, had arranged for the meeting. The governor who preceded him, Felix, had been content to let Paul languish in prison. But Festus questioned the validity of the charges against Paul. Why, Paul was so insistent on his innocence that he had demanded to present his case to Caesar! Paul's case stirred King Agrippa's curiosity. "I myself would also like to hear the man," he said. Festus quickly made arrangements, likely wondering what the king would think of this unique prisoner.—Acts 24:27-25:22.

The next day, Paul found himself standing before a large crowd of dignitaries. "I count myself happy that it is before you I am to make my defense this day," he said to Agrippa, "especially as you are expert on all the customs as well as the controversies among Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently."—Acts 26:2, 3.

Paul's Bold Defense

First, Paul told Agrippa about his past as a persecutor of Christians. "I tried to force them to make a recantation," he said. "I went so far as to persecuting them even in outside cities." Paul went on to relate how he received a striking vision in

which the resurrected Jesus asked him: "Why are you persecuting me? To keep kicking against the goads makes it hard for you."*—Acts 26:4-14.

Jesus then commissioned Saul to witness to people of all nations "both of things you have seen and things I shall make you see respecting me." Paul related that he diligently strove to fulfill his assignment. Yet, "on account of these things," he told Agrippa, "Jews seized me in the temple and attempted to slay me." Appealing to Agrippa's interest in Judaism, Paul stressed that his witnessing really involved "saying nothing except things the Prophets as well as Moses stated were going to take place" regarding the Messiah's death and resurrection.—Acts 26:15-23.

Festus interrupted. "Great learning is driving you into madness!" he exclaimed. Paul replied: "I am not going mad, Your Excellency Festus, but I am uttering sayings of truth and of soundness of mind." Paul then said of Agrippa: "The king to whom I am speaking with freedom of speech well knows about these things; for I am persuaded that not one of these things escapes his notice, for this thing has not been done in a corner."—Acts 26:24-26.

Then Paul addressed Agrippa directly. "Do you, King Agrippa, believe the Prophets?" The question undoubtedly made Agrippa uncomfortable. After all, he had an image to maintain, and to agree with Paul would be siding with what Festus called "madness." Perhaps sensing Agrippa's hesitancy, Paul answered his own question. "I know you believe," he said. Agrippa now spoke, but he kept his words noncommittal. "In a short time,"

* The expression "kicking against the goads" describes the action of a bull that injures itself while kicking the sharp rod that is designed to drive and guide the animal. Similarly, by persecuting Christians, Saul would only bring harm to himself, as he was fighting a people who had God's support.



he said to Paul, "you would persuade me to become a Christian."—Acts 26:27, 28.

Paul skillfully used Agrippa's evasive statement to make a powerful point. "I could wish to God," he said, "that whether in a short time or in a long time not only you but also all those who hear me today would become men such as I also am, with the exception of these bonds."—Acts 26:29.

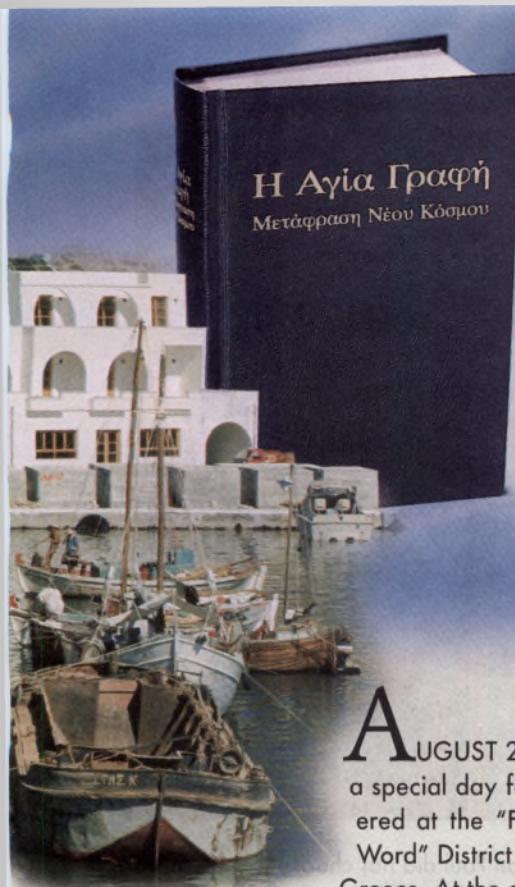
Agrippa and Festus saw nothing in Paul deserving of death or imprisonment. Still, his request to present his case to Caesar could not be rescinded. That is why Agrippa said to Festus: "This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar."—Acts 26:30-32.

Lesson for Us

Paul's method of witnessing before dignitaries provides an outstanding example for us. In speaking to King Agrippa, Paul used discretion. He was no doubt aware of the scandal surrounding Agrippa and Bernice. Theirs was an incestuous relationship, for Bernice was actually Agrippa's sister. But

on this occasion Paul did not choose to lecture on morality. Instead, he emphasized points that he and Agrippa held in common. Furthermore, although Paul was instructed by the learned Pharisee Gamaliel, he acknowledged that Agrippa was an expert in Jewish customs. (Acts 22:3) Despite Agrippa's personal ethics, Paul spoke to him with respect because Agrippa held a position of authority.—Romans 13:7.

While we boldly witness about our beliefs, it is not our goal to expose or condemn the unclean practices of our listeners. Rather, in order to make it easier for them to accept the truth, we should stress the positive aspects of the good news, emphasizing hopes we hold in common. When speaking to those who are older or who are in authority, we should acknowledge their position. (Leviticus 19:32) In this way, we can imitate Paul, who said: "I have become all things to people of all sorts, that I might by all means save some."—1 Corinthians 9:22.



A NEW BIBLE IN MODERN GREEK

AUGUST 23, 1997, was a special day for those gathered at the "Faith in God's Word" District Convention in Greece. At the close of the afternoon session, a new Bible was released—the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures in modern Greek. The surprised audience responded at once with tears of joy and a lengthy standing ovation!

Since 1905, Jehovah's Witnesses had been using a 19th-century Bible translation that was produced by a Greek Orthodox clergyman. This Bible served them well for many years. For some time, though, Jehovah's Witnesses felt the need for a Bible translation that was more accurate and easier to understand. In 1993, they were happy to receive a Greek version of the New World Translation of the Christian Greek Scriptures. Now, however, they were overjoyed to have the entire Bible in modern Greek.

One appreciative Witness called the New World Translation "a poem, a soft breeze car-

rying Jehovah's voice, which for the first time, we can understand clearly in our own language." Some began reading their new Bible as soon as they got home. One excited conventioner did not put down his Bible until one o'clock in the morning, when he had finished reading the entire book of Job!

The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures in Greek is the result of some seven years of painstaking work. One letter that was received said: "You can rest assured that the New World Translation is going to assist us greatly in helping sincere people to learn about Jehovah."