

JULY 15, 2015

# THE WATCHTOWER

## ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



### STUDY ARTICLES

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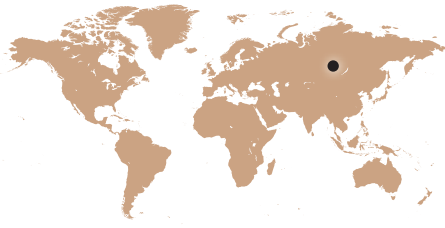
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**SEPTEMBER 21-27**

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## RUSSIA

**COVER:** A group takes a lunch break during field service activity while working the interior sections of the vast Siberian territory

POPULATION

143,930,000

PUBLISHERS

171,268

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## STUDY ARTICLES

### ■ Work to Enhance the Spiritual Paradise

Jehovah’s people enjoy a unique spiritual environment within the earthly part of God’s organization. How can we show our full appreciation for this provision from Jehovah, and what can we individually do to enhance it? This article will answer these questions.

### ■ “Your Deliverance Is Getting Near”!

This article will explain some of the exciting developments that lie ahead of us. It will also show us why God’s people can face the great tribulation with full confidence.

### ■ Maintain Your Loyalty to God’s Kingdom

In this world dominated by Satan, people’s loyalties are divided. Christians, however, have promised to be loyal to Jehovah. This article will examine why we do not take sides in worldly rivalries and how we can train our mind and conscience to maintain Christian neutrality.

### ■ This Is Our Place of Worship

Jehovah’s people meet for worship in tens of thousands of Kingdom Halls and other facilities worldwide. In this article, we will consider Scriptural principles that can help us see how such meeting places should be viewed, financed, and maintained—all to Jehovah’s glory.

THEY OFFERED  
THEMSELVES  
WILLINGLY



# in Russia



IN 1991, Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia were overjoyed when a long-standing ban on their activities was lifted and they gained official recognition. At that time, few could have imagined that the number of Witnesses there would increase tenfold to some 170,000 today! Among these hardworking Kingdom preachers are Witnesses from abroad who moved to Russia to help in the spiritual harvest. (Matt. 9:37, 38) Let us meet some of them.

## WILLING BROTHERS HELP TO STRENGTHEN THE CONGREGATIONS

The year that the ban was lifted in Russia, **Matthew** from **Great Britain** was 28 years old. During a convention that year, a talk highlighted that help was needed in the congregations in Eastern Europe. As an example, the speaker mentioned a congregation in St. Petersburg, Russia, that had only one ministerial servant and no elders. Still, the pub-

Matthew



lishers were conducting several hundred Bible studies! "After that talk," says Matthew, "I couldn't stop thinking about Russia, so I prayed to Jehovah specifically about my desire to move there." He saved some money, sold most of his possessions, and moved to Russia in 1992. How did things turn out for him?

"The language was a challenge," relates Matthew. "I was unable to have good spiritual discussions." Another challenge was that of finding lodging. "I lost count of the number of times I had to move from one apartment to another on short notice." Despite those initial obstacles, Matthew says: "Moving to Russia was the best decision I ever made." He explains: "By serving here I learned to rely much more on Jehovah and experienced his direction in many ways." Matthew was later appointed an elder and a special pioneer and now serves at the branch office near St. Petersburg.

In 1999, **Hiroo** graduated at age 25 from the Ministerial Training School in **Japan**, and one of the instructors encouraged him to serve in a foreign





Hiroo and Svetlana

field. Hiroo had heard of the great need in Russia and began learning Russian. He also took another practical step. “I went to Russia for six months,” he relates. “Since winters there are severe, I went in November to find out if I could handle the cold.” After getting through that winter, he returned to Japan where he lived a very simple life in order to save enough money to return to Russia—this time for good.

Hiroo has now lived in Russia for 12 years and has served in several congregations. At times, he was the only elder caring for over 100 publishers. In one congregation, each week he handled most of the Service Meeting parts, he conducted the Theocratic Ministry School, the *Watchtower* Study, and five different Congregation Book Studies. He also made many shepherding visits. Looking back on those years, Hiroo says: “It was a great joy to be able to help the brothers and sisters become stronger spiritually.” How did serving where the need is greater affect him? He says: “Before I went to Russia, I served as an elder and a pioneer, but I feel as if I have developed a completely new relationship with Jehovah after I came here. I have learned to trust in Jehovah more in all aspects of my life.” In 2005, Hiroo married **Svetlana**, and together they continue to serve as pioneers.

**Matthew**, aged 34, and his brother **Michael**, aged 28, are from **Canada**. Both visited Russia and were amazed to see how many interested ones attended the meetings but how few brothers were available to

conduct them. Says Matthew: “The congregation that I visited had 200 in attendance, but the meetings were all conducted by one elder of advanced age and one young ministerial servant. Seeing that situation made me want to move there to assist those brothers.” He moved to Russia in 2002.

Four years later, Michael moved to Russia and quickly found out that the need for brothers was still great. As a ministerial servant, he was assigned to care for the accounts, literature, and territory. He was also asked to do the work normally performed by the congregation secretary, to give public talks, and to help organize assemblies and construct Kingdom Halls. In fact, even today, much help is still needed in the congregations. Though taking care of numerous assignments is hard work, Michael, now serving as an elder, says: “Assisting the brothers gives me much satisfaction. It’s the best way to spend my life!”

Meanwhile, Matthew married **Marina**, and Michael married **Olga**. The two couples, along with many other willing workers, continue to assist the growing congregations.

## ZEALOUS SISTERS HELP IN THE HARVEST

In 1994, when **Tatyana** was 16 years of age, six special pioneers from the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia began serving in her congregation in **Ukraine**. She remembers them fondly, saying: “These were zealous pioneers who were accessible and kind, and they knew the Bible well.” She saw how Jehovah blessed their self-sacrificing spirit, and she thought, ‘I want to be like them.’

Encouraged by the pioneers’ example, Tatyana used her school vacations to travel with others to remote territories in Ukraine and Belarus where no Witnesses had preached before. She enjoyed those preaching trips so much that she made plans to expand her ministry by moving to Russia. First, she went there for a short stay to visit a sister who had moved there from abroad and to search for work that would support her pioneering. Later, in 2000, she moved to Russia. Was the change difficult?

Tatyana relates: “Since I could not afford my own apartment, I had to rent a room in the home of others. That was not an easy living arrangement. There were moments when I wanted to return home. But Jehovah always helped me to see that I would benefit from continuing my service.” Today, Tatyana serves as a missionary in Russia. She concludes: “All the years I spent away from my home country have given me priceless experiences and many friends. Most of all, these years have strengthened my faith.”

**Masako** from **Japan**, now in her early 50’s, had a lifelong desire to serve as a missionary, but health problems made it seem impossible for her to do so. Still, when her health improved somewhat, she decided to move to Russia to help with the harvest work. Though it was hard to find suitable accommodations and stable work, she managed to support her pioneering by teaching Japanese and doing cleaning work. What has helped her to continue in her ministry?

Looking back over 14 years of service in Russia, Masako says: “The joy I find in the ministry compensates for any hardships I encounter. Preaching in areas where there is a great need for Kingdom publishers makes for a dynamic and exciting life.” She adds: “To me, it has been a modern-day miracle to experience firsthand how Jehovah through the years provided me with food, clothing, and shelter.” Besides serving where the need is greater in Russia, Masako has also shared in the harvest work in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, she has been able to assist English-, Chinese-, and Uighur-language groups. Currently, she serves as a pioneer in St. Petersburg.

### FAMILIES GIVE SUPPORT AND RECEIVE BLESSINGS

Because of economic insecurity, families often move to other countries to improve their material circumstances. But like Abraham and Sarah of old, some families move abroad to pursue spiritual goals. (Gen. 12:1-9) Consider **Mikhail** and **Inga**, a

- 1 Michael and Olga with Marina and Matthew
- 2 Tatyana
- 3 Masako
- 4 Inga and Mikhail





Oksana, Aleksey, and Yury

married couple from **Ukraine** who moved to Russia in 2003. They soon found people who were looking for Bible truth.

Relates Mikhail: “One time we preached in an area where no Witnesses had preached before. An elderly man opened the door and asked, ‘Are you preachers?’ When we said yes, he said: ‘I knew you would come someday. It’s not possible that Jesus’ words could go unfulfilled.’ Then the man quoted Matthew 24:14.” Mikhail adds: “In that area, we also found a group of about ten Baptist women, sincere people thirsting for the truth. They had the *Live Forever* book, and every weekend they used it to study the Bible. For many hours we answered their questions and sang Kingdom songs with them, and we had dinner together. That visit is one of the nicest memories I have.” Mikhail and Inga agree that serving in areas where there is a great need for Kingdom publishers has drawn them closer to Jehovah, deepened their love for people, and blessed them with a richly satisfying life. Today, they serve in the circuit work.

In 2007, **Yury** and **Oksana**, a married couple from **Ukraine**, now in their mid-30’s, and their son **Aleksey**, now aged 13, visited the branch office in Russia. There they saw a map of Russia with large areas of unassigned territory. “After seeing that

map,” says Oksana, “we realized more than ever that there is a great need for Kingdom preachers. It helped us to make up our minds to move to Russia.” What helped them further? Yury says: “Reading such articles in our publications as ‘Can You Serve in a Foreign Field?’ was helpful.\* We visited the area in Russia that the branch had suggested as a location for us to move to and looked for housing and employment.” In 2008, they moved to Russia.

Initially, finding work proved hard, and several times they had to move from one apartment to another. Says Yury: “We often prayed that we not get discouraged, and then we continued in the preaching work, trusting in Jehovah for support. We experienced how Jehovah cares for us when we put his Kingdom interests first. This service strengthened our family.” (Matt. 6:22, 33) And how has serving where the need is greater affected young Aleksey? “It has done him much good,” says Oksana. “He dedicated himself to Jehovah and got baptized at age nine. Seeing the great need for Kingdom preachers moves him to serve as an auxiliary pioneer during each school vacation. We feel great joy as we see his love and zeal for the ministry.” Today, Yury and Oksana serve as special pioneers.

### “MY ONLY REGRET”

As the expressions of these harvest workers make clear, moving to other locations to expand your ministry requires that you place full trust in Jehovah. Indeed, those serving where the need is greater encounter challenges in their new territory, but they also experience the deep joy that comes from sharing the good news with people who are responsive to the Kingdom message. Would you be able to help gather the harvest in an area where there is still a great need for Kingdom publishers? If you decide to do so, you may soon feel like Yury, who said about his decision to serve where the need is greater: “My only regret is that I did not do it earlier.”

\* See *The Watchtower*, October 15, 1999, pages 23-27.





# Work to Enhance the Spiritual Paradise

*“I will glorify the place for my feet.”—ISA. 60:13.*

JEHOVAH GOD has appropriately proclaimed: “The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” (Isa. 66:1) Regarding his “footstool,” he also stated: “I will glorify the place for my feet.” (Isa. 60:13) How does he do that? And what meaning does this have for us, since we live on God’s “footstool”?

<sup>2</sup> Besides referring to the earth, the term “footstool” is also employed figuratively in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe the ancient temple used by the Israelites. (1 Chron. 28:2; Ps. 132:7) Located on the earth, the temple served as the center of true worship. For that reason, it was truly beautiful in Jehovah’s eyes and its very existence glorified the place for Jehovah’s feet.

<sup>3</sup> Today the center of true worship is no longer a literal temple on earth. There is, however, a spiritual temple, which glorifies Jehovah far more than any building. This is an arrangement that makes reconciliation with God possible by means of the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It came into existence in 29 C.E. at Jesus’ baptism when Jesus was

- 1, 2. In the Hebrew Scriptures, to what can the term “footstool” refer?
3. What is God’s great spiritual temple, and when did it come into existence?

SONGS: 102, 75

## CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

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What is the earnest desire of Jehovah’s true worshippers?

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What is the “paradise” that the apostle Paul saw in vision?

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How can we enhance the spiritual paradise?

anointed as High Priest of Jehovah's great spiritual temple.—Heb. 9:11, 12.

<sup>4</sup> In appreciation of the spiritual temple arrangement, we praise Jehovah by making known his name and we exalt him for his merciful provision of the ransom. How thrilling to know that over eight million true Christians are today actively glorifying Jehovah! Unlike some religious people who mistakenly think that they will praise God once they have left the earth and gone to heaven, all of Jehovah's Witnesses realize the need to praise him *here and now* on the earth.

<sup>5</sup> We thereby follow the example of the faithful servants of Jehovah described at **Psalm 99:1-3, 5. (Read.)** As that psalm indicates, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel offered their full support to the arrangement for true worship in their day. (Ps. 99:6, 7) Today, before moving on to serve as priests with Jesus in heaven, the remaining ones of his anointed brothers faithfully serve in the earthly courtyard of the spiritual temple. Millions of “other sheep” loyally support them. (John 10:16) Although having different hopes, both groups unitedly worship Jehovah here at God's footstool. As *individuals*, however, we do well to ask ourselves, ‘Am I giving full support to Jehovah's arrangement for pure worship?’

#### IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO SERVE AT GOD'S SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

<sup>6</sup> Less than a century after the Christian congregation was established, a

**4, 5.** (a) How does Psalm 99 describe the earnest desire of Jehovah's true worshippers? (b) What question should we ask ourselves?

**6, 7.** What problem arose among the early Christians, and what became necessary centuries later?

foretold apostasy began to develop. (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4) Thereafter, it became increasingly difficult to identify who was truly serving God at his spiritual temple. Only centuries later did the time arrive for Jehovah to clarify matters by means of his newly enthroned King, Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> By 1919, those approved by Jehovah and serving at his spiritual temple were clearly identified. They had been spiritually refined in order to make their service to God even more acceptable to him. (Isa. 4:2, 3; Mal. 3:1-4) What the apostle Paul had foreseen centuries before in a vision began to be fulfilled in a limited way.

<sup>8</sup> We find Paul's vision described at **2 Corinthians 12:1-4. (Read.)** What Paul saw in a supernatural vision was referred to as a revelation. It involved a future event, not something that existed in his day. When Paul “was caught away to the third heaven,” what “paradise” did he see? The paradise that Paul spoke about would have a physical, a spiritual, and a heavenly fulfillment, all of which will coexist in the future. It can refer to the physical, earthly Paradise yet to come. (Luke 23:43) It can also refer to the spiritual paradise that will be experienced to the full in the new world. Additionally, it can refer to the blessed conditions in heaven in “the paradise of God.”—Rev. 2:7.

<sup>9</sup> Why, though, did Paul say that he had “heard words that cannot be spoken and that are not lawful for a man to say”? It was not the time for him to explain in detail the marvelous things that he had

**8, 9.** Explain the three aspects of the “paradise” that Paul saw in a vision.



seen in that vision. But today it is lawful to speak of the blessings that now exist among God's people!

<sup>10</sup> The expression "spiritual paradise" has become a part of our theocratic vocabulary. It describes our unique, spiritually rich environment, or condition, which allows us to enjoy peace with God and with our brothers. Of course, we should not conclude that the terms "spiritual paradise" and "spiritual temple" are the same. The spiritual temple is God's arrangement for true worship. The spiritual paradise serves to identify clearly those who have God's approval and who are today serving him at his spiritual temple.—Mal. 3:18.

<sup>11</sup> How exciting it is to know that since 1919, Jehovah has allowed imperfect humans to work with him in cultivating, strengthening, and expanding the spiritual paradise on earth! Do you see yourself playing a part in this marvelous work? Are you moved to continue working with Jehovah in glorifying 'the place for his feet'?

### JEHOVAH'S ORGANIZATION IS BEING MADE MORE BEAUTIFUL

<sup>12</sup> A marvelous work of transformation in connection with the earthly part of Jehovah's organization was foretold at **Isaiah 60:17. (Read.)** Those who are young or comparatively new in the truth have *read* about the evidences of this transformation or have *heard* about

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**10.** Why are the terms "spiritual paradise" and "spiritual temple" not the same?

**11.** What privilege do we have today in connection with the spiritual paradise?

**12.** What confidence do all of us have regarding the fulfillment of Isaiah 60:17? (See opening image.)

it from others. But how privileged the brothers and sisters are who have personally *experienced* it! No wonder they are convinced that by means of his enthroned King, Jehovah is guiding and directing His organization! They know that their confidence is well-founded, a confidence all of us share. Hearing their heartfelt expressions will fortify your faith and strengthen your trust in Jehovah.

<sup>13</sup> Regardless of how long we have been in the truth, we must tell others about Jehovah's organization. The existence of a spiritual paradise in the midst of a wicked, corrupt, and loveless world is a modern-day miracle! The wonders about Jehovah's organization, or "Zion," and the truth about the spiritual paradise must be joyfully passed on "to future generations."—**Read Psalm 48:12-14.**

<sup>14</sup> Over the years, the older ones in our midst have personally experienced some of the organizational adjustments that have increased the beauty of the earthly part of Jehovah's organization. They remember when congregations had a congregation servant rather than a body of elders, when countries had a branch servant rather than a Branch Committee, and when direction was given by the president of the Watch Tower Society rather than by a clearly established Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although all these devoted brothers were supported by faithful assistants, one person was

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**13.** What obligation does Psalm 48:12-14 place on us?

**14, 15.** What organizational adjustments were made in the 1970's, and how have they proved beneficial?



Jehovah is providing people everywhere  
the guidance they need most  
(See paragraphs 16, 17)

basically responsible for making decisions in the congregations, at the branch offices, and at world headquarters. During the 1970's, adjustments were made to put the responsibility for oversight on groups of elders rather than on individuals.

<sup>15</sup> Have these adjustments proved beneficial? Yes, and logically so. Why? Because the adjustments were based on increased knowledge about the pattern set in the Scriptures. Instead of having the influence of one individual dominate, the composite good qualities of *all* the “gifts in men” whom Jehovah has provided benefit the organization.—Eph. 4:8; Prov. 24:6.

<sup>16</sup> Think, too, of more recent adjust-

**16, 17.** What recent adjustments have particularly impressed you, and why?

ments, such as the changes in appearance, contents, and methods of distribution of our publications. What a pleasure it is to offer practical, appealing, and attractive literature in the ministry! And when we use the latest technology to spread the truth, such as by means of the [jw.org](http://jw.org) website, we reflect Jehovah's interest in providing people everywhere with the guidance most of them lack but so desperately need.

<sup>17</sup> Not to be overlooked is the wisdom behind the adjustment that allowed us to have a Family Worship evening or more time for personal study. We also appreciate advances made in assembly and convention programs. We often say that they get better every year! And we certainly rejoice over the increased training being provided by our many theocratic schools. In all these adjustments, Jeho-



You can share in extending the borders  
of the spiritual paradise  
(See paragraphs 18, 19)

vah's hand is clearly seen. He progressively enhances the beauty of his organization and of the spiritual paradise that we enjoy even now!

#### **YOUR SHARE IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPIRITUAL PARADISE**

**18** It is an honor to be allowed by Jehovah to contribute to the beauty of our spiritual paradise. We do that by zealously preaching the Kingdom good news and making more disciples. Each time we help a person progress to Christian dedication, we have worked to extend the borders of the spiritual paradise.—Isa. 26:15; 54:2.

**19** We can also enhance the beauty of our spiritual paradise by steadily improving our own Christian personali-

ty. In that way, we make this paradise more appealing to onlookers. More than even Bible knowledge, it is often our chaste, peaceful conduct that initially draws people to the organization and in turn to God and to Christ.

**20** How pleased Jehovah and Jesus must be when they observe our beautiful spiritual paradise today! The enjoyment we have now in working to enhance its beauty is but a foretaste of the joy we will have later in working to make the earth a physical paradise. Let us keep in mind Proverbs 14:35, which states: “The king finds pleasure in a servant who acts with insight.” May we always act with insight as we work hard to contribute to the beauty of the spiritual paradise!

**18, 19.** How can we contribute to the beauty of the spiritual paradise?

**20.** In harmony with Proverbs 14:35, what should be our desire?



# Serving Jehovah in “the Calamitous Days”

“MY HEALTH problems get in my way more and more,” sighs Ernst, who is in his 70’s.\* Does this sound familiar? If you are getting older and feel that you are losing your health and strength, you may well relate to the description found in Ecclesiastes chapter 12. In verse 1, the days of old age are called “the days of distress,” or “the calamitous days,” ftn. Even so, you are not doomed to a life of misery. You can still lead a fulfilling life, serving Jehovah joyfully.

## MAINTAINING STRONG FAITH

You dear older brothers and sisters are not alone in your trials. Aged servants of Jehovah in Bible times faced similar challenges. For example, Isaac, Jacob, and Ahijah lost their eyesight. (Gen. 27:1; 48:10; 1 Ki. 14:4) Sarah felt “worn out.” (Gen. 18:11, 12) King David “could not get warm.” (1 Ki. 1:1) Wealthy Barzillai could no longer enjoy the taste of food or the sounds of music. (2 Sam. 19:32-35) Abraham and Naomi each had to cope with the loss of a marriage mate. —Gen. 23:1, 2; Ruth 1:3, 12.

What helped each of these to remain loyal to Jehovah and maintain joy? In his old age, believing in God’s promise, Abraham “became powerful by his faith.” (Rom. 4:19, 20) We too need strong faith. Such faith does not depend on our age, abilities, or circumstances. For example, even when he was weak, blind, and bedridden, the patriarch Jacob showed strong faith in God’s promises. (Gen. 48:1-4, 10; Heb. 11:21) Today, 93-year-old Ines suffers from a muscle weakness, but still she says: “Every day I feel richly rewarded by Jehovah. Every day I think about Par-

adise. That gives me hope.” What a fine, positive spirit!

We strengthen our faith by praying, examining God’s Word, and attending Christian meetings. The aged prophet Daniel regularly prayed three times a day and kept studying God’s Word. (Dan. 6:10; 9:2) The elderly widow Anna “was never missing from the temple.” (Luke 2:36, 37) When you attend meetings whenever possible and participate as much as you can, you refresh not only yourself but all in attendance. And Jehovah always delights in your prayers, even if you are limited in what you can do.—Prov. 15:8.

Many of you faithful ones would love to be able to see to read and to be strong enough to attend meetings, but you find it increasingly difficult, perhaps impossible. What then? Make good use of whatever is available to you. Many who cannot attend meetings enjoy listening in by telephone. Despite failing eyesight, 79-year-old Inge prepares for meetings using computer printouts with extra-large type provided for her by a brother in the congregation.

It may be that you have something that others would like to have—time. Why not use it to listen to recordings of the Bible and Bible literature, talks, and audio dramas? Also, you may want to take the initiative to telephone fellow believers to share a spiritual gift and enjoy “an interchange of encouragement.”—Rom. 1:11, 12.

## STAYING ACTIVE IN GOD’S SERVICE

“It is terrible to become less active than you once were,” bemoans Christa, who is in her mid-80’s. How, then, can elderly ones keep their joy? “By having a positive outlook,” says 75-year-

\* Some names have been changed.



Encourage one another



Preach the word



Be hospitable

old Peter, “not constantly thinking about what you can no longer do but enjoying what you can do.”

Can you think of avenues of witnessing still open to you? Heidi cannot go from door to door as she used to. Well into her 80’s, she learned to use a computer to write letters. Some older publishers start Bible discussions while sitting on a park bench or at a bus stop. Or if you now live in a nursing facility, could you possibly have your own “territory” with the medical personnel caring for you and with the other residents there?

In his later years, King David eagerly promoted pure worship. He donated funds and organized support for the construction of a temple. (1 Chron. 28:11–29:5) Similarly, you can take an active interest in what is going on in the Kingdom work worldwide. Why not support the pioneers or other zealous publishers in your congregation with encouraging words, a small gift, or some simple refreshments? In your prayers, you

might include the young ones and the families, the full-time servants, the sick ones, and those with heavy responsibilities.

You and your service are highly esteemed. Our heavenly Father will never discard you dear elderly ones. (Ps. 71:9) Jehovah loves and cherishes you. Soon, we will all keep advancing in age without any agonizing distress or calamity. Rather, full of energy and in perfect health, we will continue serving our loving God, Jehovah, for all eternity!



## “Your Deliverance Is Getting Near”!

*“Stand up straight and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is getting near.”—LUKE 21:28.*

SONGS: 133, 43

### HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What events similar to those in 66 C.E. will we soon face?

What time of testing will follow the destruction of “Babylon the Great”?

What gathering work is referred to at Matthew 24:31?

IMAGINE that you are a Christian living in Jerusalem in 66 C.E. A lot has been happening around you. First, the Roman procurator Florus seized 17 talents from the sacred temple treasury. Immediately, Jews rose in revolt, slaughtering the Roman forces in Jerusalem and asserting their independence from Rome. But Rome reacted swiftly. Within three months, 30,000 troops appeared on the scene, led by the Roman governor of Syria, Cestius Gallus. The soldiers quickly entered the suburbs of Jerusalem, and the Jewish rebels retreated to the safety of the temple fortress. Next, the Roman soldiers started to undermine the outer wall of the temple area! Panic is spreading throughout the city. How do you feel as you see all of this happening?

<sup>2</sup> No doubt you remember the words of Jesus as recorded by the Gospel writer Luke: “When you see Jerusalem sur-

1. What events took place in 66 C.E.? (See opening image.)
2. What action did Christians in 66 C.E. need to take, and how was this made possible?



rounded by encamped armies, then know that the desolating of her has drawn near.” (Luke 21:20) However, you may wonder, ‘How can I obey the instructions given along with that warning?’ Jesus also said: “Then let those in Judea begin fleeing to the mountains, let those in the midst of her leave, and let those in the countryside not enter into her.” (Luke 21:21) How can you possibly leave Jerusalem with so many troops surrounding it? Then, an amazing thing happens. Right before your very eyes, the Roman troops start to retreat! As foretold, their attack is being “cut short.” (Matt. 24:22) Now you have the opportunity to obey Jesus’ instructions. Immediately you flee to the mountains across the Jordan River, along with all the other faithful Christians in the city and its surroundings.\* Then, in 70 C.E., a new Roman army heads for Jerusalem and destroys the city. But your life is spared because you obeyed Jesus’ instructions.

<sup>3</sup> Soon, very soon, each of us will face a similar situation. Jesus not only warned Christians about the destruction of Jerusalem but also used those first-century events to parallel what will occur when the “great tribulation” suddenly breaks out. (Matt. 24:3, 21, 29) In fact, the good news is that “a great crowd” of people will survive this worldwide catastrophe. **(Read Revelation 7:9, 13, 14.)** What does the Bible tell us about these upcoming events? We should be keenly interested in the answer, for our very salvation is involved. Let us now examine in

detail how these future events will affect us personally.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

<sup>4</sup> How will the great tribulation begin? The book of Revelation answers by describing the destruction of “Babylon the Great.” (Rev. 17:5-7) How appropriate that all false religion is likened to a prostitute! The clergy have prostituted themselves with the leaders of this wicked world. Instead of loyally supporting Jesus and his Kingdom, they have given their support to human rulers and have compromised godly principles just to gain political influence. They stand in stark contrast with the clean, virginlike anointed ones of God. (2 Cor. 11:2; Jas. 1:27; Rev. 14:4) But who will destroy the harlotlike organization? Jehovah God will put “his thought” into the hearts of “the ten horns” of the “scarlet-colored wild beast.” These horns represent all the present political powers that give support to the United Nations, an organization pictured by the “scarlet-colored wild beast.”—**Read Revelation 17:3, 16-18.**

<sup>5</sup> Should we conclude, though, that the destruction of the religions of Babylon the Great results in the death of all the former members of those religions? Apparently not. The prophet Zechariah was inspired to write about that time. Speaking of someone who was previously part of false religion, the account states: “He will say, ‘I am no prophet. I am a man cultivating the soil, because a

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\* See *The Watchtower*, April 15, 2012, pages 25-26.

**3.** What similar situation will Christians soon face, and what will we consider in this article?

**4.** What will mark the start of the great tribulation, and how will this happen?

**5, 6.** Why do we conclude that the destruction of Babylon the Great does not mean the death of all religious people?

man bought me when I was young.’ And if someone asks him, ‘What are these wounds between your shoulders?’ he will answer, ‘Wounds I received in the house of my friends.’” (Zech. 13:4-6) So, apparently, even some of the clergy will abandon their religious course and deny that they were ever part of those false religions.

<sup>6</sup> How will God’s people fare at that time? Jesus explains: “In fact, unless those days were cut short, no flesh would be saved; but *on account of the chosen ones those days will be cut short.*” (Matt. 24:22) As we considered, in 66 C.E. the tribulation was “cut short.” This allowed “the chosen ones,” anointed Christians, to flee the city and its environs. Likewise, the initial part of the future great tribulation will be “cut short” because of “the chosen ones.” The political “ten horns” will not be allowed to annihilate God’s people. Rather, there will be a brief respite.

#### A TIME OF TESTING AND JUDGMENT

<sup>7</sup> What will happen after the destruction of false religious organizations? It will be a time to reveal what is really in our heart. The majority of mankind will seek refuge in human organizations that are likened to “the rocks of the mountains.” (Rev. 6:15-17) Figuratively speaking, however, God’s people will flee to the refuge that Jehovah provides. In the first century, the interval was not a time for a mass conversion of Jews to Christianity. It was a time for action and obedience on the part of those who were already Christians. Similarly, we cannot

**7, 8.** What opportunity will present itself after the destruction of false religious organizations, and how will God’s faithful people stand out as different at that time?

expect that the future interruption in the great tribulation will result in an influx of new believers. Rather, it will be an opportunity for all true believers to prove their love for Jehovah and give their support to Christ’s brothers.—Matt. 25:34-40.

<sup>8</sup> Although we do not fully understand all that will happen during that time of test, we can expect that it will involve some measure of sacrifice. In the first century, Christians had to leave behind their possessions and endure hardships in order to survive. (Mark 13:15-18) To remain faithful, will we be willing to experience material loss? Will we be ready to do whatever is required of us to prove our loyalty to Jehovah? Just think! At that time, we will be the only ones following the example of the ancient prophet Daniel by continuing to worship our God no matter what.—Dan. 6:10, 11.

<sup>9</sup> This will *not* be the time to preach the “good news of the Kingdom.” That time will have passed. The time for “the end” will have come! (Matt. 24:14) No doubt God’s people will proclaim a hard-hitting judgment message. This may well involve a declaration announcing that Satan’s wicked world is about to come to its complete end. The Bible likens this message to hailstones when it says: “Great hailstones, each about the weight of a talent, fell from heaven on the people, and the people blasphemed God because of the plague of hail, for the plague was unusually great.”—Rev. 16:21.

<sup>10</sup> None of this will go unnoticed by our enemies. Under inspiration, the prophet Ezekiel explains what Gog of

**9, 10.** (a) What message will God’s people deliver at that time? (b) How will the enemies of God’s people react?

Magog, a coalition of nations, will do: “This is what the Sovereign Lord Jehovah says: ‘In that day thoughts will come into your heart, and you will devise an evil plan. You will say: “I will invade the land of unprotected settlements. I will come against those living in security, without disturbance, all of them living in settlements unprotected by walls, bars, or gates.” It will be to take much spoil and plunder, to attack the devastated places that are now inhabited and a people regathered from the nations, who are accumulating wealth and property, those who are living in the center of the earth.’” (Ezek. 38:10-12) Spiritually speaking, God’s people will stand out as unique, “in the center of the earth,” as it were. This will be too much for the nations. Yes, they will be eager to attack Jehovah’s anointed ones as well as their associates.

<sup>11</sup> As we examine what happens next, we need to keep in mind that God’s Word does not reveal the exact time order of events. It seems likely that some events will overlap. Jesus states in his prophecy about the conclusion of this system of things: “There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the earth anguish of nations not knowing the way out because of the roaring of the sea and its agitation. People will become faint out of fear and expectation of the things coming upon the inhabited earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” (Luke 21:25-27; **read Mark**

**11.** (a) What do we need to remember with regard to the sequence of events during the great tribulation? (b) How will people react to the signs that will appear in heaven?

**13:24-26.**) Will the fulfillment of this prophecy include frightening signs and events in the literal heavens? We will have to wait and see. But whatever the case, the signs will cause terror and panic in the hearts of God’s enemies.

<sup>12</sup> What will happen when Jesus comes “with power and great glory”? This will be a time for rewarding those who are faithful and for punishing those who are not. (Matt. 24:46, 47, 50, 51; 25:19, 28-30) According to Matthew, Jesus finished giving the composite sign with the parable of the sheep and the goats, saying: “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit down on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will put the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on his left.” (Matt. 25:31-33) What judgment will the sheep and the goats hear pronounced on them? The parable finishes with the words: “These [the goats] will depart into everlasting cutting-off, but the righteous ones into everlasting life.”—Matt. 25:46.

<sup>13</sup> How will the goats react when they realize that “everlasting cutting-off” awaits them? They “will beat themselves in grief.” (Matt. 24:30) But how will Christ’s brothers and their faithful companions react at that time? With full faith in Jehovah God and his Son, Jesus Christ, they will heed Jesus’ command: “As these things start to occur, stand up straight and lift up your heads, because your deliverance is getting near.” (Luke

**12, 13.** (a) What will happen when Jesus comes “with power and great glory”? (b) How will God’s servants react at that time?





We will have a positive attitude, confident of deliverance!

(See paragraphs 12, 13)

21:28) Yes, we will have a positive attitude, confident of deliverance.

#### SHINING BRIGHTLY IN THE KINGDOM

**14** What will happen after Gog of Magog starts the attack on God's people? Both Matthew and Mark record the same event: "[The Son of man] will send out the angels and will gather his chosen ones together from the four winds, from earth's extremity to heaven's extremity." (Mark 13:27; Matt. 24:31) This gathering work does not refer to the initial ingathering of anointed ones; nor does it refer to the final sealing of the remaining anointed ones. (Matt. 13:37, 38) That sealing happens before the outbreak of the great tribulation. (Rev. 7:1-4) So,

**14, 15.** What gathering work will occur after the start of the attack by Gog of Magog, and what does this gathering work involve?

what is this gathering work that Jesus mentions? It is the time when the remaining ones of the 144,000 will receive their heavenly reward. (1 Thess. 4:15-17; Rev. 14:1) This event will take place at some point after the beginning of the attack by Gog of Magog. (Ezek. 38:11) Then these words of Jesus will be fulfilled: "At that time the righteous ones will shine as brightly as the sun *in the Kingdom of their Father*."—Matt. 13:43.\*

**15** Does this mean that there will be a "rapture" of the anointed ones? Many in Christendom believe, according to this teaching, that Christians will be bodily caught up from the earth. Then, they expect that Jesus will visibly return to rule the earth. However, the Bible clearly shows that "the sign of the Son of man"

\* See *The Watchtower*, July 15, 2013, pages 13-14.

will appear in heaven and that Jesus will come “on the clouds of heaven.” (Matt. 24:30) Both of these expressions imply invisibility. Additionally, “flesh and blood cannot inherit God’s Kingdom.” So those who will be taken to heaven will first need to be “changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, during the last trumpet.”\* **(Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53.)** Therefore, while we do not use the term “rapture” here because of its wrong connotation, the remaining faithful anointed will be gathered together in an instant of time.

<sup>16</sup> Once all the 144,000 are in heaven, the final preparations for the marriage of the Lamb can begin. (Rev. 19:9) But something else will happen before that joyous event. Remember, shortly before the remaining ones of the 144,000 are taken to heaven, Gog will attack God’s people. (Ezek. 38:16) What reaction does this provoke? On earth, God’s people will appear to be defenseless. They will obey the instructions given in the days of King Jehoshaphat: “You will not need to fight this battle. Take your position, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah in your behalf. O Judah and Jerusalem, do not be afraid or be terrified.” (2 Chron. 20:17) In heaven, however, there is a different reaction. Referring to the time when all the anointed are in heaven, Revelation 17:14 tells us this about the enemies of God’s people: “These will battle with the Lamb, but because he is Lord of lords and King of kings, the Lamb will conquer

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\* The fleshly bodies of the anointed alive at that time will not be taken to heaven. (1 Cor. 15:48, 49) Their bodies will likely be disposed of in the same manner that Jesus’ body was removed.

**16, 17.** What must happen before the marriage of the Lamb can take place in heaven?

them. Also, *those with him who are called and chosen and faithful will do so.*” Together with his 144,000 corulers in heaven, Jesus will come to the rescue of God’s people here on earth.

<sup>17</sup> The resulting war of Armageddon will lead to the magnifying of Jehovah’s holy name. (Rev. 16:16) At that time, all goatlike ones “will depart into everlasting cutting-off.” The earth will finally be cleansed of all wickedness, and the great crowd will pass through the final part of the great tribulation. With all preparations completed, the climax of the book of Revelation, the marriage of the Lamb, can take place. (Rev. 21:1-4)\* All those surviving on the earth will bask in God’s favor and experience bounteous expressions of his love. What a marriage feast that will be! Do we not look forward to that day with eager expectation?—**Read 2 Peter 3:13.**

<sup>18</sup> With these exciting events ahead of us, what should each of us now be doing? The apostle Peter was inspired to write: “Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, consider what sort of people you ought to be in holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion, as you await and keep close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah . . . Therefore, beloved ones, since you are awaiting these things, do your utmost to be found finally by him spotless and unblemished and in peace.” (2 Pet. 3:11, 12, 14) Let us, then, be resolved to remain spiritually clean, supporting the King of Peace.

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\* Psalm 45 also gives an indication of the sequence of events. First the King fights the war, and then the marriage takes place.

**18.** With the foretold exciting events just ahead of us, what should be our resolve?

# Does It Matter Who Notices Your Work?

BEZALEL and Oholiab were no strangers to construction. As slaves in Egypt, they had likely made more bricks than they cared to remember. But those years were behind them. Now they would become artisans of the highest order when they were assigned to take the lead in the construction of the tabernacle. (Ex. 31:1-11) Even so, few would ever see some of the stunning works they produced. Would the lack of recognition frustrate them? Did it really matter who noticed their work? Does it matter who notices yours?

## EXQUISITE WORKS SEEN ONLY BY A FEW

Some of the tabernacle furnishings were veritable masterpieces. Consider, for example, the golden cherubs that were atop the ark of the covenant. The apostle Paul described them as “glorious.” (Heb. 9:5) Imagine the awesome beauty of those figures made of hammered gold!—Ex. 37:7-9.

If found today, the items that Bezalel and Oholiab made would be worthy of display in the

finest museums, where they could be appreciated by the masses. But at the time they were fashioned, how many really saw their splendor? The cherubs were located in the Most Holy; thus, they would be seen only by the high priest when he entered just once a year, on Atonement Day. (Heb. 9:6, 7) Consequently, very few humans ever saw them.

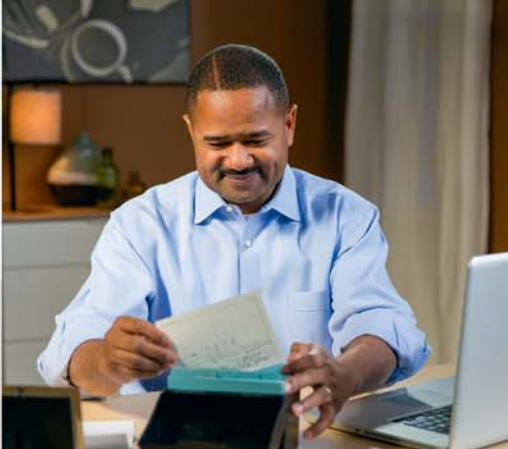
## FINDING CONTENTMENT WITHOUT POPULAR ACCLAIM

If you had been Bezalel or Oholiab and had toiled to produce such fabulous works of art, how would you have felt knowing that so few saw them? Today, people feel a sense of accomplishment when they receive praise and admiration from their peers. It is a barometer to measure the worthiness of their labors. But Jehovah’s servants are different. Like Bezalel and Oholiab, we find contentment in doing Jehovah’s will and having his approval.

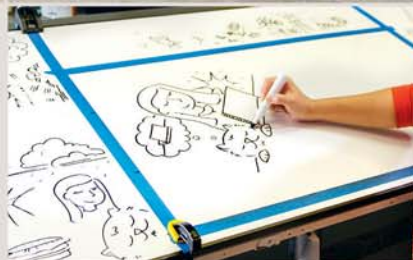
In Jesus’ day, it was common for religious leaders to offer prayers that would impress oth-







Even if no human sees your humble and willing service, **Jehovah does!**



ers. However, Jesus recommended another approach: Pray sincerely and without any desire to be praised by onlookers. The result? “Your Father who looks on in secret will repay you.” (Matt. 6:5, 6) Clearly, the important thing is, not what others think about our prayers, but what *Jehovah* thinks. *His* opinion makes our prayers truly valuable. The same is true of anything that we accomplish in our sacred service. It is not validated by popular acclaim; rather, it pleases Jehovah, “who looks on in secret.”

When the tabernacle was completed, a cloud “began to cover the tent of meeting, and Jehovah’s glory filled the tabernacle.” (Ex. 40:34) What a clear indication of Jehovah’s approval! How do you think Bezalel and Oholiab felt at that moment? Although their names were not engraved on their handiwork, they must have felt satisfaction in knowing that God’s blessing was on all their efforts. (Prov. 10:22) In the years that followed, it surely warmed their hearts to see that their handiwork continued to be used in Jehovah’s service. When they come back to life in

the new world, Bezalel and Oholiab will no doubt be thrilled to learn that the tabernacle was used in true worship for some 500 years!

In Jehovah’s organization today, the animators, artists, musicians, photographers, translators, and writers all work anonymously. In that sense, no one “sees” what they do. The same could be said of much of the work being done in the more than 110,000 congregations worldwide. Who sees the accounts servant fill out needed paperwork at the end of the month? Who looks on when the secretary prepares the congregation field service report? Who observes the brother or sister who makes a necessary repair at the Kingdom Hall?

At the end of their life, Bezalel and Oholiab had no trophies, medals, or plaques to show for their brilliant designs and quality construction. But they had obtained something far more valuable—Jehovah’s approval. We can be sure that Jehovah noticed their work. May we imitate their example of humble and willing service.





## Maintain Your Loyalty to God's Kingdom

*"They are no part of the world."*—JOHN 17:16.

SONGS: 63, 129

### CAN YOU ANSWER?

Why did Jesus not take sides in any controversy of this world?

About what issue must Christians express a clear preference?

How can you train yourself to be loyal to Jehovah and to his Kingdom?

LOYALTY and neutrality are always issues for true Christians, not just in times of war. Why? Because all who are dedicated to Jehovah have promised him their love, loyalty, and obedience. (1 John 5:3) We want to abide by God's righteous standards wherever we live and whatever our background, nationality, or culture. Loyalty to Jehovah and to his Kingdom transcends any other attachment we may have. (Matt. 6:33) Such loyalty requires that Christians remain separate from all conflicts and controversies of this world.—Isa. 2:4; **read John 17:11, 15, 16.**

<sup>2</sup> People who do not share our faith may feel a special loyalty to their country, tribe, or culture or even to their national sports team. Challenges to such loyalties have resulted in competition and rivalry and, in extreme cases, bloodshed and genocide. The way that people resolve these issues, for better or for worse, might touch us or our families personal-

**1, 2.** (a) Why is loyalty to God important to Christians, and how does this relate to neutrality? (See opening image.) (b) What loyalties do many people display, but in what might that result?

ly because we are inescapably a part of human society. Since God made man with an innate sense of justice, the decisions that human governments make may offend our sense of what is right and fair. (Gen. 1:27; Deut. 32:4) How do we react under such circumstances? It would be all too easy to take sides in worldly issues and be drawn into controversy.

<sup>3</sup> The institutions that govern human society may pressure citizens to take sides in conflicts that arise. True Christians cannot do so. We do not participate in the political controversies of this world; nor do we take up arms. (Matt. 26:52) We are not swayed by efforts to involve us in exalting any portion of Satan's world over another. (2 Cor. 2:11) Being no part of the world, we rise above worldly rivalries.—**Read John 15:18, 19.**

<sup>4</sup> Because we are imperfect, though, some of us may be struggling to eliminate divisive attitudes characteristic of our former way of thinking. (Jer. 17:9; Eph. 4:22-24) Hence, this article will consider some principles that can help us overcome such tendencies. We will also examine how we can train our mind and conscience to be loyal to God's Kingdom.

### WHY WE DO NOT TAKE SIDES IN THIS WORLD'S ISSUES

<sup>5</sup> If you are ever in doubt as to how you ought to behave in any given situation, it would be wise to ask yourself,

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**3, 4.** (a) Why do Christians remain neutral in the controversies of this world? (b) What will this article address?

**5, 6.** How did Jesus react to diversity in the nation in which he lived, and why?

'What would Jesus have done?' The nation in which Jesus lived was made up of people from various regions—Judea, Galilee, Samaria, and others. Bible accounts reveal that there were tensions between people of these different areas. (John 4:9) Tensions also existed between Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6-9), between the people and the tax collectors (Matt. 9:11), and between those who had received a Rabbinic education and those who had not. (John 7:49) In the first century, Israel was ruled by the Romans, whose presence was deeply resented by the local people. While Jesus championed religious truth and acknowledged that salvation originated with the Jews, he never encouraged his disciples to foster rivalries. (John 4:22) On the contrary, he urged them to love all men as their neighbor.—Luke 10:27.

<sup>6</sup> Why did Jesus not endorse common Jewish prejudices? Because neither he nor his Father takes sides in this world's controversies. When Jehovah through his Son created man and woman, his intent was that they fill the whole earth. (Gen. 1:27, 28) God designed humans in such a way that they could produce different races. Neither Jehovah nor Jesus exalts one race, nationality, or language above another. (Acts 10:34, 35; Rev. 7:9, 13, 14) We must follow their perfect example.—Matt. 5:43-48.

<sup>7</sup> On one issue, however, we must take sides—in supporting Jehovah's universal sovereignty. Controversy first arose in this regard in Eden when Satan

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**7, 8.** (a) On what issue must Christians take sides? (b) What must Christians recognize when it comes to resolving social and political problems?

challenged Jehovah's rule. Now, all must decide whether they believe that God's way of doing things is superior to Satan's or vice versa. In all sincerity, do you take Jehovah's side by choosing to obey his laws and standards instead of doing things your own way? Do you see his Kingdom as the only answer to mankind's woes? Or do you believe that man is capable of governing himself?—Gen. 3:4, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Your answers to these questions will determine how you respond when people ask your opinion on controversial matters. Politicians, activists, and reformers have long struggled to find solutions to divisive issues. Their efforts may be sincere and well-motivated. Yet, Christians recognize that only God's Kingdom can solve mankind's problems and guarantee true justice. We must leave the matter in Jehovah's hands. After all, if each Christian advocated the solution he thought best, would not our congregations soon become divided?

<sup>9</sup> Note how some first-century Christians reacted to one divisive issue that arose within the congregation. Individuals in Corinth were saying: "I belong to Paul," "But I to Apollos," "But I to Cephas," "But I to Christ." Whatever the underlying issue, the apostle Paul was indignant about its effect. "Is the Christ divided?" he asked. What was the solution to such disruptive thinking? Paul exhorted the Christians: "Now I urge you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you should all speak in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but

**9.** What problem existed in the first-century congregation in Corinth, but what solution did the apostle Paul recommend?

that you may be completely united in the same mind and in the same line of thought." Neither should there be divisions of any kind in the Christian congregation today.—1 Cor. 1:10-13; **read Romans 16:17, 18.**

<sup>10</sup> Paul urged anointed Christians to focus on their heavenly citizenship rather than on earthly things. (Phil. 3:17-20)\* They were to act as ambassadors substituting for Christ. Ambassadors do not meddle in the affairs of the nations to which they are assigned. Their loyalties lie elsewhere. (2 Cor. 5:20) Christians with an earthly hope are also subjects of God's Kingdom, so it is inappropriate for them to take sides in this world's disputes.

### TRAIN YOURSELF TO BE LOYAL TO JEHOVAH

<sup>11</sup> In most parts of the world, communities are close-knit. They are united by a common history, culture, and language in which the local people take great pride. In such settings, Christians have to train their mind and conscience to respond appropriately when neutrality-related issues arise. How can they do this?

<sup>12</sup> Take, for example, Mirjeta<sup>#</sup> from a

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\* Philippi was a Roman colony. Some members of the congregation there may have had a form of Roman citizenship, which would have afforded them certain privileges above those of their brothers.

<sup>#</sup> Some names have been changed.

**10.** How did the apostle Paul illustrate a Christian's need to remain neutral in this world's disputes?

**11, 12.** (a) What kind of environment can make it challenging for a Christian to maintain loyalty to God's Kingdom? (b) What issue did one Christian face, and how did she deal with it?

region of the former Yugoslavia. She was raised to hate Serbians. On learning that Jehovah is impartial and that Satan is responsible for inciting ethnic problems, she strove to rid herself of nationalistic sentiments. Yet, when ethnic violence broke out in her area, old hatreds began to resurface in her, causing Mirjeta to find it difficult to preach to Serbs. She realized, though, that she could not just sit back and hope that such unwholesome feelings would go away. She begged Jehovah for help not only to overcome this challenge but also to increase her service and qualify to become a pioneer. “I have found that focusing on the ministry is the best help ever,” she says. “In the ministry, I try to imitate Jehovah’s loving personality, and I have seen my negative feelings melt away.”

<sup>13</sup> Consider another example, that of Zoila. Originally from Mexico, she now attends a congregation in Europe. She noted that in the congregation, some brothers who were from certain parts of Latin America made tactless and disparaging remarks about her homeland, its customs, and even its music. How would you have reacted? Understandably, such comments made Zoila uncomfortable. But commendably, she sought Jehovah’s help to quash any negative reaction that arose in her heart. We have to admit that some among us are still struggling to deal with similar issues. Never would we want to say or do anything that could foment divisions or promote inappropriate loyalties among our brothers—or among anyone else for that matter.—Rom. 14:19; 2 Cor. 6:3.

**13.** (a) What situation made one Witness uncomfortable, but how did she react? (b) What lesson can we learn from Zoila’s experience?

<sup>14</sup> Has your upbringing or environment exposed you to national or regional loyalties? Do any such feelings still linger in your heart? Christians should not allow nationalistic fervor to taint their view of others. But what if you realize that you *do* have negative thoughts toward people of other nations, cultures, languages, or races? Then it would certainly be profitable to meditate on how Jehovah views nationalism and prejudice. Researching these and related topics may prove to be a worthwhile project for personal study or family worship. Then petition Jehovah for help to embrace his point of view on these matters.—**Read Romans 12:2.**

<sup>15</sup> Sooner or later, all of Jehovah’s servants will find themselves in situations in which their conscience obliges them to stand out as different from those around them—whether colleagues, classmates, neighbors, relatives, or others. (1 Pet. 2:19) Yet, stand out we must! We should not be surprised if the world hates us for our stand; Jesus warned us that it would. Most opposers do not appreciate the importance of the issues involved in Christian neutrality. For us, though, these are matters of utmost importance.

<sup>16</sup> Loyalty to Jehovah requires that we be steadfast in the face of threats. (Dan. 3:16-18) Fear of man can affect people of all ages, but young people may find it especially difficult to go against the flow, so to speak. If your children are

**14.** How can Christians train their mind and conscience regarding questions of loyalty?

**15, 16.** (a) How should we expect others to react to our remaining loyal to God? (b) How can parents help their children to meet the challenge of Christian loyalty?



facing such issues as the flag salute or nationalistic celebrations, do not hesitate to assist them. Use Family Worship sessions to help your children understand the issues involved so that they can meet those challenges courageously. Help them to express their personal convictions clearly and respectfully. (Rom. 1:16) To back up your children, take the initiative to speak with their teachers about these matters if necessary.

### APPRECIATE ALL OF JEHOVAH'S CREATION!

<sup>17</sup> It is understandable that we might feel some affection for the land, the culture, the language, and the food of the country we were raised in. However, we must avoid the “mine is best” attitude. For our pleasure, Jehovah has created great variety in all things. (Ps. 104:24;

17. What attitude should we avoid, and why?

Rev. 4:11) So why insist that one way of doing things is superior to another?

<sup>18</sup> God wants people of all sorts to come to an accurate knowledge of truth and to enjoy everlasting life. (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4) Open-mindedness toward a diversity of acceptable ideas enriches us and protects our Christian unity. As we maintain our loyalty to Jehovah, we must avoid involvement in the world's controversies. Partisan allegiances have no place among us. How thankful we are to Jehovah for freeing us from the divisive, prideful, competitive practices that dominate Satan's world! May it be our determination to cultivate a peaceful attitude like that expressed by the psalmist: “Look! How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!”—Ps. 133:1.

18. How will adopting Jehovah's view result in blessings?

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Loyalty to Jehovah requires that we be steadfast in the face of threats

(See paragraphs 15, 16)





# This Is Our Place of Worship

*“The zeal for your house will consume me.”—JOHN 2:17.*

FROM early times, God’s servants have had their established places for pure worship. Abel may have used an altar when he made his offerings to God. (Gen. 4:3, 4) Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses all erected altars. (Gen. 8:20; 12:7; 26:25; 35:1; Ex. 17:15) At Jehovah’s direction, the Israelites built the tabernacle. (Ex. 25:8) Later, they constructed a temple for the worship of Jehovah. (1 Ki. 8:27, 29) After returning from exile in Babylon, the Jews regularly gathered in synagogues. (Mark 6:2; John 18:20; Acts 15:21) Early Christians met in the homes of members of the congregation. (Acts 12:12; 1 Cor. 16:19) Today, Jehovah’s people meet for education and worship in tens of thousands of Kingdom Halls worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> So great was Jesus’ love and appreciation for Jehovah’s temple in Jerusalem that a Gospel writer attributed to him the prophetic sentiment: “Zeal for your house has consumed me.” (Ps. 69:9; John 2:17) No Kingdom Hall can rightly be called “the house of Jehovah” in the same sense that these words applied to the temple in Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 5:13; 33:4)

**1, 2.** (a) What places of worship have Jehovah’s servants used in times past? (b) How did Jesus feel about God’s temple in Jerusalem? (c) What is the purpose of this article?

**SONGS: 127, 118**

## HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How can we manifest proper respect for Christian meetings?

How is the need for new Kingdom Halls being met?

Why is regular cleaning and maintenance of our Kingdom Halls important?

Even so, the Bible contains principles that show us how our modern-day places of worship should be used and respected. The purpose of this article is to review some of these principles and to consider how they apply to the way that our Kingdom Halls should be viewed, financed, and maintained.\*

### SHOWING RESPECT FOR PURE WORSHIP

<sup>3</sup> A Kingdom Hall is the center of pure worship for the local community. Among the provisions that Jehovah makes for our spiritual nourishment are the weekly meetings at the Kingdom Hall. It is here that we receive vital spiritual refreshment and direction through his organization. All those who attend meetings do so, in effect, at the invitation of Jehovah and his Son. Even though we have a standing invitation to eat at “the table of Jehovah,” we must never take that invitation for granted.—1 Cor. 10:21.

<sup>4</sup> Jehovah considers such occasions for worship and mutual encouragement so important that he inspired the apostle Paul to urge us not to forsake our meeting together. **(Read Hebrews 10:24, 25.)** Would we be showing respect for Jehovah if we missed Christian meetings for unnecessary reasons? Indeed, we can show how much we appreciate Jehovah and his provisions by preparing for and wholeheartedly participating in these meetings.—Ps. 22:22.

<sup>5</sup> Our attitude toward the Kingdom

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\* While this article refers mainly to Kingdom Halls, the same principles apply to Assembly Halls and other facilities that are used for pure worship.

**3-5.** What is the function of a Kingdom Hall, and how should this affect the way we view our meetings there?

Hall—both the physical structure and the spiritual activities taking place there—should denote proper respect. Is it not true that our attitude in this regard is closely related to the way we feel about God’s name, which usually appears on the Kingdom Hall sign?—Compare 1 Kings 8:17.

<sup>6</sup> The respect we show for our places of worship is often noticed by non-Witnesses. For example, a man in Turkey said: “The cleanliness and orderliness that I observed at the Kingdom Hall impressed me. The people there were well-dressed, had smiles on their faces, and greeted me warmly. This impressed me greatly.” The man began to attend meetings regularly, and soon thereafter he got baptized. In one city in Indonesia, a congregation invited local government officials and neighbors to an open house prior to the dedication of a new Kingdom Hall. The mayor attended. He was impressed by the quality of the building, its functionality, and its beautiful garden. “The cleanliness of this hall reflects your true faith,” he commented.

<sup>7</sup> Our respect for the God who invites us to Christian meetings should be manifested in our decorum, dress, and grooming. Respect also requires that we avoid extremes. It has been observed that while some appear to be overly strict as to what is proper behavior while attending congregation meetings, others may be too casual at the Kingdom Hall. Of course, Jehovah wants his servants and other guests to feel comfortable there. At the

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**6.** How have some expressed themselves about our Kingdom Halls and those who attend meetings there? (See opening image.)

**7, 8.** What important matters should those who attend Christian meetings bear in mind?



same time, those in attendance would not want to detract from the meetings by being overly casual in their dress, by texting or talking during the meetings, by eating and drinking, and so on. Parents should train their children to understand that the Kingdom Hall is not the place for running or playing.—Eccl. 3:1.

<sup>8</sup> Filled with indignation, Jesus threw out of God’s temple those who were introducing commercial activities. (John 2:13-17) Our Kingdom Halls too are places for pure worship and spiritual education. So any business activities that have nothing to do with spiritual pursuits ought to be taken care of elsewhere.—Compare Nehemiah 13:7, 8.

### PROVIDING AND FINANCING KINGDOM HALLS

<sup>9</sup> Jehovah’s organization goes to tremendous lengths to provide and help finance modest Kingdom Halls. The work of designing, building, and remodeling them is handled by unpaid volunteers. What has been the result? Since November 1, 1999, more than 28,000 beautiful new centers of pure worship have been provided for congregations worldwide. That means that during the last 15 years, on average, five new Kingdom Halls have been provided every day of the year.

<sup>10</sup> Efforts are being made to support the construction of Kingdom Halls wherever they are needed. This loving provision is based on the Scriptural principle that the surplus of some might offset the deficiency of others, in order that “there

**9, 10.** (a) How are new Kingdom Halls provided and financed, and with what results? (b) What loving provision has been a great help for congregations that lacked the financial resources to build a Kingdom Hall?



Our conduct could show disrespect for God  
(See paragraphs 7, 8)

may be an equalizing.” (**Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-15.**) As a result, beautiful new centers of pure worship have been provided for congregations that would otherwise never have had the financial resources to build a Kingdom Hall for themselves.

<sup>11</sup> A congregation in Costa Rica that benefited from this provision wrote the following: “When we stand in front of the Kingdom Hall, we feel that we must be dreaming! We cannot believe it. Our beautiful hall was finished down to the last detail in only eight days! It was made possible by Jehovah’s blessing, the arrangements made by his organization, and the support of our dear brothers. This place of worship is indeed a precious gift, a gem that Jehovah has given us. We feel extremely joyful about it.” Does it

**11.** What do some brothers say about their new Kingdom Hall, and how does this make you feel?



Kingdom Hall cleaning and maintenance must not be neglected  
(See paragraphs 16, 18)



not warm your heart to hear such expressions of gratitude for new Kingdom Halls and to know that similar joy is being experienced by our brothers in thousands of locations worldwide? This is Jehovah's work, for just as soon as new Kingdom Halls are completed, they are very often filled with honesthearted people who desire to know more about our loving Creator.—Ps. 127:1.

<sup>12</sup> Many brothers and sisters have experienced great joy in being able to participate in Kingdom Hall construction. Whether we can help out on a building site or not, all of us can have the privilege of supporting such projects through our donations. Zeal for pure worship helped finance theocratic projects in Bible times, and the same

is true today—to Jehovah's glory.—Ex. 25:2; 2 Cor. 9:7.

### KINGDOM HALL CLEANING

<sup>13</sup> Once a new Kingdom Hall is built, it needs to be kept clean and tidy to reflect the qualities and personality of the God whom we worship—a God of order. **(Read 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40.)** The Bible associates holiness and spiritual cleanness with physical cleanliness. (Rev. 19:8) Thus, if people desire to be acceptable to Jehovah, they must also practice good hygiene.

<sup>14</sup> In harmony with these principles, we should always feel comfortable inviting interested people to our meetings, confident that the condition of the hall will complement the good news we share with

**12.** How can you play a part in Kingdom Hall construction?

**13, 14.** What Scriptural principles apply to keeping our Kingdom Hall clean and tidy?

them. They will see that we worship a God who is holy and who will soon transform the earth into an uncontaminated paradise.—Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 11:18.

<sup>15</sup> Some people may give more importance to cleaning than others do. Their perception of how much they need to clean is influenced by their upbringing and by such factors as mud, dust, the condition of the roads, and the availability of an adequate supply of water and cleaning products. Whatever the local attitude or situation, our Kingdom Hall should be exemplary when it comes to being well-kept, since it bears the name of Jehovah and is a place of pure worship.—Deut. 23:14.

<sup>16</sup> Kingdom Hall cleaning cannot be left to chance. Each body of elders will need to make sure that a schedule is drawn up and that adequate supplies and equipment are made available for keeping the congregation's place of worship in optimal condition. Because some cleaning jobs need attention after every meeting and others can be addressed less frequently, good coordination and oversight are required to make sure that nothing gets overlooked. All members of the congregation have the privilege of cooperating in these efforts.

#### MAINTAINING OUR PLACE OF WORSHIP

<sup>17</sup> Jehovah's servants also make diligent efforts to keep their places of wor-

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**15, 16.** (a) Why might it be a challenge to keep the Kingdom Hall clean, but why is it necessary? (b) What are the arrangements locally for cleaning the hall, and what privilege does each of us have?

**17, 18.** (a) What Scriptural precedents exist for the maintenance of places of pure worship? (b) Why must Kingdom Halls be kept in good condition?

ship in good repair. King Jehoash of Judah ordered the priests to use contributions that had been made to the house of Jehovah "to repair the house, wherever any damage [was] found." (2 Ki. 12:4, 5) Over 200 years later, King Josiah also used temple contributions to finance necessary repairs.—**Read 2 Chronicles 34:9-11.**

<sup>18</sup> Branch offices report that in some countries, people do not generally give priority to the maintenance of buildings or equipment. Perhaps few in such lands have the know-how or the resources to do the work. Clearly, though, if Kingdom Hall maintenance were neglected, such neglect would result in the premature deterioration of the building and would not be a good witness to the local community. On the other hand, when congregation members do all they can to keep the Kingdom Hall in good condition, this brings praise to Jehovah and saves funds donated by fellow believers.

<sup>19</sup> A Kingdom Hall is a building dedicated to Jehovah. Therefore, it cannot rightly be said to belong to any individual or congregation, whatever its legal title may indicate. Christian principles dictate that we cooperate fully to make sure that this building measures up to the purpose for which it was built. All in the congregation can contribute to that end by showing appropriate respect for our places of worship, by making donations for new construction, and by volunteering their time and energy to keep existing Kingdom Halls properly cleaned and maintained. By supporting these efforts, we show our zeal for Jehovah's place of pure worship, as Jesus did.—John 2:17.

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**19.** What is your resolve concerning the buildings that we use for pure worship?



## Was ancient Israel as forested as the Bible seems to indicate?

THE Bible states that certain areas of the Promised Land were forested and that trees were “plentiful.” (1 Ki. 10:27; Josh. 17:15, 18) Yet, on seeing the deforested condition of large portions of the land today, skeptics may wonder if that could ever have been the case.

The book *Life in Biblical Israel* explains that “forests in ancient Israel were much more extensive than they are today.” The natural cover of the highlands consisted mainly of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*), evergreen oak (*Quercus calliprinos*), and terebinth (*Pistacia palaestina*). In the Shephelah,

an area that includes the foothills between the central mountain range and the Mediterranean Coast, the sycamore fig (*Ficus sycomorus*) was also abundant.

The book *Plants of the Bible* states that some localities in Israel are now entirely devoid of trees. What contributed to this? Explaining that it was a gradual process, the book says: “Man has persistently interfered with the natural vegetation, mainly in order to expand his farming and pasture area, but also to obtain building materials and fuel for his fire.”



A large cluster of sycamore figs

The Biriya Forest in Galilee (below)

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